

### from Letter from Birmingham Jail

Letter by Martin Luther King Jr.

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML11-1202A



**READING 7** Analyze the meaning of biblical allusions in words, phrases, passages, and literary works. **9B** Analyze the elements of deductively reasoned texts and the ways conclusions are supported.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Martin Luther King Jr. . . .

- enrolled in college when he was 15 years old.
- was the first African American to be named *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year."
- won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.
- was arrested 30 times for his activism.

#### Meet the Author

### Martin Luther King Jr. 1929–1968

An eloquent orator, a shrewd tactician, and a visionary leader, Martin Luther King Jr. became the catalyst for some of the most far-reaching social changes in U.S. history. Under his skillful leadership, the civil rights movement spurred passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, laws that legally abolished racial segregation and voting discrimination. A tireless advocate for justice, King wrote five books, delivered about 2,500 speeches, and traveled more than 6 million miles in an effort to make his dream of equality a reality.

**Boycott in Montgomery** It was in Alabama that King first emerged as a civil rights leader to be reckoned with. In 1955, when Rosa Parks was arrested for breaking Montgomery's bus segregation laws, local civil rights advocates banded together to form a protest organization. They chose King, then pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, to lead the new group. King mobilized African Americans to boycott city buses. The 381-day boycott tested the endurance of the entire black community, especially King, who was subjected to threats and bomb attacks. The steadfast boycotters ultimately triumphed, and the U.S. Supreme Court

struck down the city's bus segregation laws. The success of the boycott launched the charismatic young leader onto the national stage, where he promoted his bold strategy: using nonviolent, direct action to achieve social change.

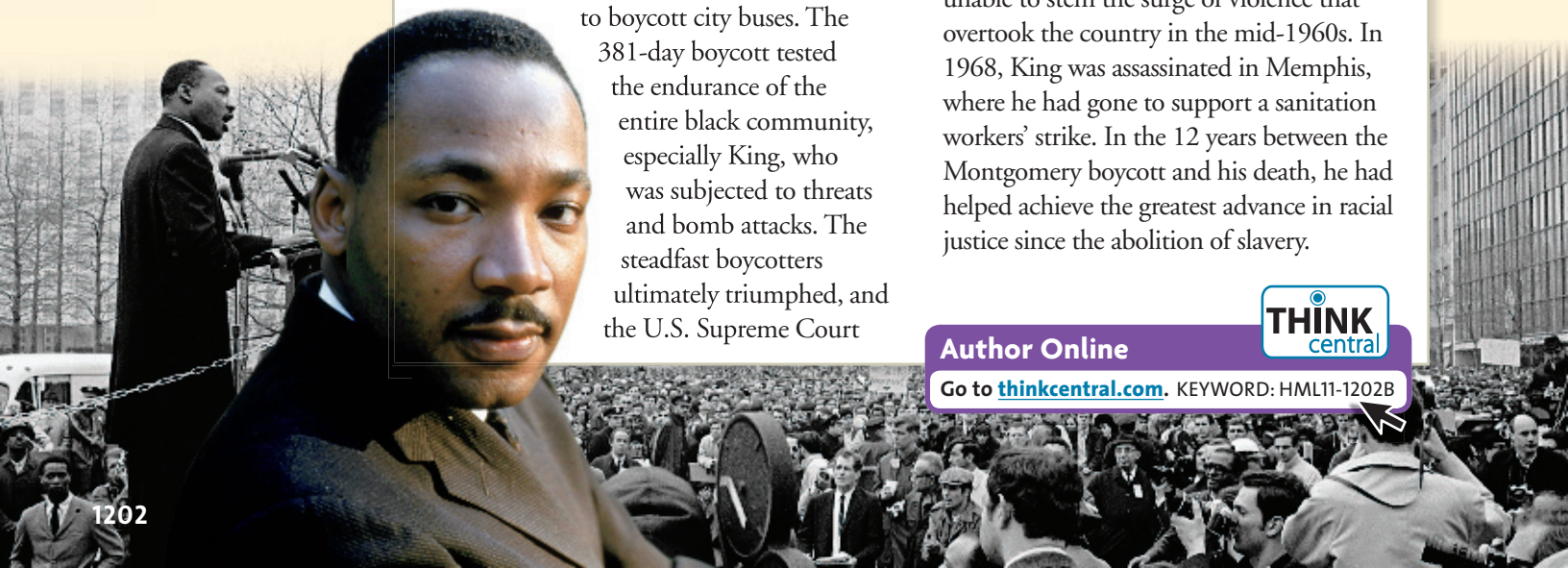
**Expanding Influence** King cautiously expanded the civil rights struggle throughout the South. He was particularly effective at organizing interracial coalitions to put pressure on lawmakers. One shining moment came at the 1963 March on Washington, a gathering of about 250,000 peaceful demonstrators supporting civil rights legislation. King's impassioned "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, is considered one of the greatest speeches in U.S. history.

**Warrior for Peace** King never wavered in his commitment to nonviolence and tried to extend his campaign to fight poverty and end the Vietnam War. Ultimately, he was unable to stem the surge of violence that overtook the country in the mid-1960s. In 1968, King was assassinated in Memphis, where he had gone to support a sanitation workers' strike. In the 12 years between the Montgomery boycott and his death, he had helped achieve the greatest advance in racial justice since the abolition of slavery.

Author Online



Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com). KEYWORD: HML11-1202B



## LITERARY ANALYSIS: ALLUSION

An **allusion** is a reference within a work to historical, literary, or cultural details from outside the work. Writers choose allusions that are familiar to their target audience. In this case, because King is writing to fellow clergymen, he uses references to the Bible and to religious scholars to make his points.

*I would agree with St. Augustine that “an unjust law is no law at all.”*

King’s allusions help connect current events with respected historical and religious figures. As you read, use the footnotes to help you understand King’s allusions.

## READING SKILL: ELEMENTS OF AN ARGUMENT

King’s letter is a beautifully written **argument** defending his activism. In it, King uses **deductive reasoning** to respond to public criticism. Deductive reasoning occurs when a writer arrives at a conclusion by applying a general principle to a specific situation. As you read, use King’s restatements to infer what the opposing positions are and record them in a chart like the one below. Then, record the general principle King gives as a counterargument and the reasons and evidence he uses to support them.

<i>Position of Opponents</i>	<i>General Principles</i>	<i>Reasons and Evidence</i>
<i>King doesn't belong in Birmingham.</i>	<i>"I am here because I have organizational ties here."</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>• leads the SCLC</i></li><li><i>• invited by affiliated organization</i></li></ul>

## VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

King uses the following words to argue his views. Test yourself by replacing each boldfaced term with one vocabulary word.

<b>WORD LIST</b>	affiliated	moratorium	scintillating
	cognizant	paradoxical	substantive
	estrangement	rabid	
	latent	retaliating	

1. **aware** of the difficulties involved
2. **hidden** emotions called up by the encounter
3. **contradictory** views seemed to say two things at once
4. **temporary stoppage** on further discussions



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

# When does **ACTION** speak louder than words?

When you’re trying to confront a difficult issue, words are your first option. But once you’ve explained your position, presented your demands, and tried unsuccessfully to convince others to make a change, you’re at the point when words give way to action. Martin Luther King Jr. explains how civil rights activists in Birmingham, Alabama, faced their own decisive moment in 1963.

**DISCUSS** When do you respond with words and when do you turn to action? Working with a small group, brainstorm situations that call for each type of response. What guidelines did you use to classify your examples?



# Letter from Birmingham Jail

Martin Luther King Jr.

**BACKGROUND** In the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), targeted Birmingham, Alabama, with a series of peaceful demonstrations aimed at ending segregation. The police reacted violently with attack dogs and high-pressure fire hoses. Hundreds of protesters, including King, were jailed. At first, King was criticized for taking on Birmingham; eight white clergymen published a letter calling his actions “unwise and untimely.” But he responded with his own letter citing philosophers, religious scholars, and biblical figures to justify his actions.

April 16, 1963

**My Dear Fellow Clergymen:**

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities “unwise and untimely.” Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

10 I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against “outsiders coming in.” I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every Southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five **affiliated** organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Frequently we share staff, educational, and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago the affiliate here in Birmingham asked us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct-action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came, we lived up to our promise. So I, along with  
20 several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here. **A**

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their “thus saith the Lord” far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the

## Analyze Visuals ►

Look at this photograph of King in his jail cell in Birmingham. Based on the photo, what impressions do you have of his state of mind while in jail?

**affiliated** (ə-fīl'ē-ā'tīd)  
*adj.* joined in close association **affiliate** *v.*

### **A** ELEMENTS OF AN ARGUMENT

Reread lines 10–21. Which sentence refers to the position that King is arguing against?

King in his jail cell in Birmingham



far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own hometown. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.<sup>1</sup> **B**

Moreover, I am **cognizant** of the interrelatedness of all communities and  
30 states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens  
in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are  
caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.  
Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to  
live with the narrow, provincial “outside agitator” idea. Anyone who lives inside  
the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.

You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your  
statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions  
that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want  
40 to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely  
with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that  
demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate  
that the city’s white power structure left the Negro community with no  
alternative.

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to  
determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self-purification; and direct action.  
We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying  
the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the  
most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality  
is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts.  
50 There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in  
Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts  
of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate  
with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good-faith  
negotiations. **C**

Then, last September, came the opportunity to talk with leaders of  
Birmingham’s economic community. In the course of the negotiations, certain  
promises were made by the merchants— for example, to remove the stores’  
humiliating racial signs.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of these promises, the Reverend Fred  
Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human  
60 Rights agreed to a **moratorium** on all demonstrations. As the weeks and months  
went by, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. A few signs,  
briefly removed, returned; the others remained.

As in so many past experiences, our hopes had been blasted, and the shadow of  
deep disappointment settled upon us. We had no alternative except to prepare for  
direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our  
case before the conscience of the local and the national community. Mindful of  
the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of self-purification.

## **B ALLUSION**

Explain why King’s allusions in lines 22–28 are appropriate for his audience. What shared beliefs does King appeal to?

**cognizant** (kŏg’ní-zənt)  
*adj.* aware

## **C ELEMENTS OF AN ARGUMENT**

Reread lines 46–54. What **reasons** and **evidence** does King use to support his **claim** that there is racial injustice in Birmingham?

**moratorium**  
(mŏr’ə-tŏr’ē-əm) *n.*  
a temporary stoppage  
or waiting period

1. **Macedonian** (măś’ī-dŏ’nē-ən) **call for aid:** According to the Bible (Acts 16), the apostle Paul received a vision calling him to preach in Macedonia, an area north of Greece.

2. **racial signs:** signs marking segregated buildings and other facilities.

We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: “Are you able to accept blows without **retaliating?**” “Are you able to  
70 endure the ordeal of jail?” We decided to schedule our direct-action program for the Easter season, realizing that except for Christmas, this is the main shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic-withdrawal program<sup>3</sup> would be the by-product of direct action, we felt that this would be the best time to bring pressure to bear on the merchants for the needed change.

Then it occurred to us that Birmingham’s mayoral election was coming up in March, and we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that the Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene “Bull” Connor, had piled up enough votes to be in the runoff, we decided again to postpone action until the day after the runoff so that the demonstrations could not be used to  
80 cloud the issues. Like many others, we waited to see Mr. Connor defeated, and to this end we endured postponement after postponement. Having aided in this community need, we felt that our direct-action program could be delayed no longer.

You may well ask: “Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, and so forth? Isn’t negotiation a better path?” You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of  
90 the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word “tension.” I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates<sup>4</sup> felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.

The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-  
100 packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue.

One of the basic points in your statement is that the action that I and my associates have taken in Birmingham is untimely. Some have asked: “Why didn’t you give the new city administration time to act?” The only answer that I can give to this query is that the new Birmingham administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one, before it will act. . . . My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is a historical fact that privileged groups

**retaliating** (rĭ-tăl’ē-ă-tĭng) *n.*  
taking revenge **retaliate** *v.*

### Language Coach

#### Figurative Language

*Cloud* in line 80 means “confuse or make unclear” and is an example of figurative language, language that communicates meaning beyond the literal meaning of the words. How might a boycott or economic-withdrawal program cloud the issues during an election?

3. **economic-withdrawal program:** boycott.

4. **Socrates** (sŏk’rə-tēz’): Greek philosopher (470–399 B.C.) who was a major influence in the development of Western thought.

110 seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr<sup>5</sup> has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was “well-timed” in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This “Wait” has almost always meant “Never.” We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.”

120 We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, “Wait.” But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech  
130 stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can’t go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: “Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?”; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging  
140 signs reading “white” and “colored”; when your first name becomes “nigger,” your middle name becomes “boy” (however old you are) and your last name becomes “John,” and your wife and mother are never given the respected title “Mrs.”; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness”—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience. ◊

150 You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the

◊ **GRAMMAR AND STYLE**

Reread lines 124–147. Note how King establishes **parallelism** by starting each subordinate clause with the words *when you*.

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5. **Reinhold Niebuhr** (nē’bōōr’): American theologian (1892–1971) whose writings deal mainly with moral and social problems.

Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools,<sup>6</sup> at first glance it may seem rather **paradoxical** for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine<sup>7</sup> that "an unjust law is no law at all."

**paradoxical**  
(pär'ə-dök'sī-kəl) *adj.* self-contradictory

160 Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas:<sup>8</sup> An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. Segregation, to use the terminology of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber,<sup>9</sup> substitutes an "I-it" relationship for an "I-thou" relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. Hence  
170 segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich<sup>10</sup> has said that sin is separation. Is not segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, his awful **estrangement**, his terrible sinfulness? Thus it is that I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, for it is morally right; and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances, for they are morally wrong. **E**

**estrangement**  
(ī-strānj'mənt) *n.*  
separation; alienation

Let us consider a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is *difference* made legal. By the  
180 same token, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself. This is *sameness* made legal.

**E ELEMENTS OF AN ARGUMENT**

Reread lines 160–176. How does King use deductive reasoning to support his conclusion that people should disobey segregation laws?

Let me give another explanation. A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up that state's segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout Alabama all sorts of devious methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties in which, even though Negroes constitute a majority of the population, not a single Negro is registered. Can any law enacted under such circumstances be considered democratically structured?

6. **Supreme Court decision . . . public schools:** the United States Supreme Court's decision in the case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

7. **St. Augustine** (ō'gə-stēn'): North African bishop (A.D. 354–430) regarded as a founding father of Christianity.

8. **St. Thomas Aquinas** (ə-kwī'nəs): noted philosopher and theologian (1225–1274).

9. **Martin Buber** (bōō'bər): influential philosopher (1878–1965) with great impact on Jewish and Christian theology.

10. **Paul Tillich** (tīl'īk): German-born American theologian (1886–1965).





High school students jailed in Birmingham protests of 1963

190 Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and protest.

I hope you are able to see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the **rabid** segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the  
200 penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.

**rabid** (răb'īd) *adj.*  
unreasonably extreme;  
fanatical

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar,<sup>11</sup> on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience. In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party<sup>12</sup> represented a massive act of civil disobedience. **F**

**F ALLUSION**

Reread lines 202–209. What message about civil disobedience does King send with his choice of allusions?

11. **the refusal . . . Nebuchadnezzar** (něb'ə-kəd-něz'ər): In the Bible (Daniel 3), Shadrach (shăd'răk), Meshach (mē'shăch), and Abednego (ə-běd'nī-gō') are three Hebrews condemned to death for refusing to worship an idol set up by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. However, they were miraculously protected from the flames in the furnace into which they were thrown.

12. **Boston Tea Party**: In 1773, American rebels dumped 15,000 pounds of tea into Boston Harbor to protest the British Tea Act.

210 We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was “legal” and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters<sup>13</sup> did in Hungary was “illegal.” It was “illegal” to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler’s Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country’s antireligious laws.

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that 220 the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner,<sup>14</sup> but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action”; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a “more convenient season.” Shallow understanding from people of goodwill is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more 230 bewildering than outright rejection.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose, they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a **substantive** and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is 240 already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

In your statement you assert that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But is this a logical assertion? Isn’t this like condemning a robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? Isn’t this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical inquiries precipitated the act by 250 the misguided populace in which they made him drink hemlock? Isn’t this like

## Language Coach

### Word Definitions

*Stumbling block* (line 220) means “obstacle to advancement; something that gets in the way.” (Picture a person tripping over a large piece of wood while walking.) Who or what does King say the stumbling block is?

**substantive** (süb’stän-tĭv)  
*adj.* significant; with a strong basis

13. **Hungarian freedom fighters:** Hungarians who participated in an unsuccessful 1956 rebellion against the Communist government of their homeland. The rebellion was crushed by Soviet troops.

14. **the White . . . Klanner:** members of white supremacist groups.

condemning Jesus because his unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to God's will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see that, as the federal courts have consistently affirmed, it is wrong to urge an individual to cease his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest may precipitate violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber. . . .

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, 260 he has been caught up by the *Zeitgeist*,<sup>15</sup> and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. If one recognizes this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand why public demonstrations are taking place. The Negro has many pent-up resentments and **latent** frustrations, and he must release them. So let him march; let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; let him go on freedom rides—and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. So I have not 270 said to my people: “Get rid of your discontent.” Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist.

But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter, I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” Was not Amos<sup>16</sup> an extremist for justice: “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: “I bear in my body the marks 280 of the Lord Jesus.” Was not Martin Luther<sup>17</sup> an extremist: “Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God.” And John Bunyan:<sup>18</sup> “I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience.” And Abraham Lincoln: “This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.” And Thomas Jefferson: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. . . .” So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill<sup>19</sup> three men were crucified. We must never forget that all

**latent** (lāt'nt) *adj.* existing in a hidden form

### Language Coach

**Connotation** A word's **connotations** are the connected images or feelings that add a finer shade of meaning to the word. What connotations do you think *extremist* has? Contrast those connotations with *activist*. How do the connotations differ?

15. **Zeitgeist** (tsīt'gīst') *German*: the spirit of the time; that is, the beliefs and attitudes shared by most people living in a particular period.

16. **Amos**: Hebrew prophet whose words are recorded in the Old Testament book bearing his name.

17. **Martin Luther**: German monk (1483–1546) who launched the Protestant Reformation.

18. **John Bunyan**: English preacher and author (1628–1688) who was twice imprisoned for unlicensed preaching.

19. **Calvary's hill**: the site of Jesus' crucifixion.

three were crucified for the same crime—the crime of extremism. Two were  
290 extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other,  
Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth, and goodness, and thereby rose  
above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire  
need of creative extremists. . . . **G**

I wish you had commended the Negro sit-inners and demonstrators of  
Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer, and their  
amazing discipline in the midst of great provocation. One day the South will  
recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths,<sup>20</sup> with the noble  
sense of purpose that enables them to face jeering and hostile mobs, and with  
the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be  
300 old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two-year-old  
woman in Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and  
with her people decided not to ride segregated buses, and who responded with  
ungrammatical profundity to one who inquired about her weariness: “My feet  
is tired, but my soul is at rest.” They will be the young high school and college  
students, the young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders, courageously  
and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for  
conscience’ sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited  
children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up  
for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our  
310 Judaeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells  
of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation  
of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Never before have I written so long a letter. I’m afraid it is much too long to  
take your precious time. I can assure you that it would have been much shorter if  
I had been writing from a comfortable desk, but what else can one do when he is  
alone in a narrow jail cell, other than write long letters, think long thoughts, and  
pray long prayers?

If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an  
unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that  
320 understates the truth and indicates my having a patience that allows me to settle  
for anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances  
will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or  
a civil-rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all  
hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep  
fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and  
in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will  
shine over our great nation with all their **scintillating** beauty.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,

330 **Martin Luther King Jr.**

**G ALLUSION**

Reread lines 275–293.  
Consider the usual  
connotations of the word  
*extremist*. How do King’s  
allusions prompt the  
reader to think differently  
about this idea?

**scintillating** (sɪnˈtɪl-āˈtɪŋg)  
*adj.* sparkling **scintillate** *v.*

20. **James Merediths:** people like James Meredith, who endured violent opposition from whites to become the first African American to attend the University of Mississippi.

# Ballad of Birmingham

Dudley Randall

“Mother dear, may I go downtown  
instead of out to play,  
and march the streets of Birmingham  
in a freedom march today?”

5 “No, baby, no, you may not go,  
for the dogs are fierce and wild,  
and clubs and hoses, guns and jails  
ain’t good for a little child.”

“But, mother, I won’t be alone.  
10 Other children will go with me,  
and march the streets of Birmingham  
to make our country free.”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,  
for I fear those guns will fire.  
15 But you may go to church instead,  
and sing in the children’s choir.”

She has combed and brushed her nightdark hair,  
and bathed rose petal sweet,  
and drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,  
20 and white shoes on her feet.

The mother smiled to know her child  
was in the sacred place,  
but that smile was the last smile  
to come upon her face.

25 For when she heard the explosion,  
her eyes grew wet and wild.  
She raced through the streets of Birmingham  
calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,  
30 then lifted out a shoe.  
“O, here’s the shoe my baby wore,  
but, baby, where are you?”





**READING 7** Analyze the meaning of biblical allusions in words, phrases, passages, and literary works. **9B** Analyze the elements of deductively reasoned texts and the ways conclusions are supported.

## Comprehension

- 1. Summarize** What led to the decision to start the protests in Birmingham?
- 2. Recall** What are the four steps involved in King’s nonviolent campaigns?
- 3. Clarify** What exactly does King mean by “nonviolent direct action”?
- 4. Summarize** In King’s view, what is the difference between defying the law and breaking an “unjust” law?

## Literary Analysis

- 5. Examine Elements of an Argument** Review the chart you created as you read. Which of King’s **arguments** did you find most persuasive? Consider both his position, or claim, and his reasons and evidence in your answer.
- 6. Understand Analogy** An analogy is an extended, point-by-point comparison of two different things, often using a familiar example to explain a complex or abstract idea. Analyze King’s analogy in lines 241–244 and discuss the persuasive appeal the analogy lends to King’s argument in this letter.
- 7. Interpret Allusions** Allusions can refer to people, places, events, or literary works. Choose four of King’s allusions. Using the footnotes, interpret each allusion, and tell why you think King included them. Record your answers in a chart like the one shown.
- 8. Analyze Persuasive Techniques** King’s writings and speeches are filled with allusions that reveal his rhetorical mastery and breadth of knowledge. In what ways, if any, do his allusions also help him achieve the following possible purposes? Cite specific allusions that support your answers.
  - appealing to his readers’ sense of right and wrong
  - establishing his credibility
  - making his ideas accessible to a wider audience
- 9. Compare Texts** Compare the “Ballad of Birmingham” (page 1214) with King’s letter. How is Randall’s poem also an argument for acting against injustice?

<i>Allusion</i>	<i>Possible Meaning</i>	<i>Why Included</i>

## Literary Criticism

- 10. Author’s Style** King is a master of the **aphorism**, a short statement of principle or truth. Here’s a memorable one: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (line 31). Find two more aphorisms and explain their effects.

*When does **ACTION** speak louder than words?*

Taking a stand requires action as well as words. On what issues have you been outspoken? What actions have you taken to back up your words?

# Vocabulary in Context

## ▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Show your understanding of the vocabulary words by answering these questions.

1. If I am **cognizant** of your plans, do I know about them or have I forgotten them?
2. Would a **paradoxical** statement be easy or difficult to make sense of?
3. Would a **substantive** contribution be minimal or significant?
4. Would a **rabid** response involve shouting furiously or agreeing silently?
5. If my company is **affiliated** with yours, are they competitors or partners?
6. Which might cause a **moratorium** in road building, a bad storm or potholes?
7. Is a diamond or gold more accurately described as **scintillating**?
8. Which is a **latent** ailment, a toothache or a broken arm?
9. Would an argument cause **estrangement** or a meeting with a stranger?
10. Which might be a cause for **retaliating**, losing a game or taking a taxi?

### WORD LIST

affiliated  
cognizant  
estrangement  
latent  
moratorium  
paradoxical  
rabid  
retaliating  
scintillating  
substantive

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

• complex • economic • establish • ethnic • evolve

Reread King’s letter, looking for specific examples of his tone. Then, in a small group discuss what kind of tone King **establishes** in his letter and what his tone says about nonviolent protest and King as a leader. Use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your discussion.

## VOCABULARY STRATEGY: WORDS AND ANALOGIES

An **analogy** compares two items or word meanings that are alike in one or more ways. Analyzing an analogy is one way of determining the meaning of unfamiliar words in context. Word analogy statements show the relationship by comparing one set of words to another set of words. For example, the following pairs are opposites, or antonyms.

*rabid : calm and affiliated : unrelated*

Word analogies can include relationships such as *synonyms, antonyms, part and whole, cause and effect, and location*.

**PRACTICE** For each word pair, create another word pair to express the same relationship. Then, identify the type of relationship.

1. architect : building ::
2. systematic : chaotic ::
3. book : page ::
4. obligatory : necessary ::
5. war : death ::



**READING 1C** Infer word meaning through the identification and analysis of analogies and other word relationships.

Interactive Vocabulary **THINK** central  
Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com).  
KEYWORD: HML11-1216

## Conventions in Writing

### ◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Use Rhetorical Devices

Review the Grammar and Style note on page 1208. In his letter, King uses **parallelism**—the repetition of grammatical structures—to create emphasis and to show comparisons, as in the following example:

*Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their “thus saith the Lord” far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own hometown. (lines 22–27)*

Notice how King uses parallel adverb clauses beginning with “just as” to set up a comparison between himself and the biblical figures he cites. What is the impact of this comparison?

**PRACTICE** Identify the parallel adjective clauses in the following passage from King. Then write a paragraph of your own using similar parallel elements.

[T]he Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action”; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a “more convenient season.”

### READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Expand your understanding of Martin Luther King Jr.’s letter by responding to this prompt. Then, use the **revising tips** to improve your argument.

#### WRITING PROMPT

**WRITE A PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT** Civil disobedience has been controversial ever since Henry David Thoreau first advocated it in 1847. Opposition to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s brand of nonviolent resistance came from some black activists as well as white segregationists. People still argue over the issue today.

Write a **four- to six-paragraph persuasive argument** explaining your position on the issue of nonviolent civil disobedience. Model your argument on King’s, using counterarguments to anticipate objections to your view.

#### REVISING TIPS

- Present a clear thesis statement that states your main point.
- Use logical reasoning based on facts, expert opinions, and quotation from valid sources.
- Honestly and accurately present opposing views.
- Use persuasive language and rhetorical devices such as appeals to logic.



**WRITING 16** Write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. **ORAL AND WRITTEN CONVENTIONS 17** Understand the function of and use the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing. **17A** Use and understand the function of different types of clauses and phrases.

Interactive  
Revision

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KEYWORD: HML11-1217