

10.2.1

Lesson 7

Introduction

In this lesson, students read and analyze paragraphs 12–15 of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (from “You express a great deal of anxiety” to “Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured?”), in which King defends his central claim that segregation laws are unjust. In this lesson, students delineate King’s argument and assess the validity of his reasoning by engaging in a thorough reading and discussion of the text.

The lesson ends with a Quick Write on the following prompt: Delineate King’s argument in paragraphs 12–15. Assess the validity of his reasoning. For homework, students reread paragraphs 12–15 and use their Rhetorical Impact Tool to analyze King’s use of rhetoric in these paragraphs. Also, students continue to read their AIR text and prepare for a brief discussion on how they applied their chosen focus standard to their text.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RI.9-10.8	Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.
Addressed Standard(s)	
L.9-10.4.a	Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 9–10 reading and content</i> , choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

Assessment

Assessment(s)
Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson. Students respond to the following prompt, citing textual evidence to support analysis and inferences drawn from the text.

- Delineate King’s argument in paragraphs 12–15. Assess the validity of his reasoning.

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Identify King’s central claim (e.g., segregation is unjust and morally wrong).
- Cite specific claims King makes to support his central claim (e.g., “So segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful” (par. 13) or “An unjust law is a code inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part enacting or creating because it did not have the unhampered right to vote” (par. 15)).
- Include specific examples of King’s reasoning (e.g., if segregation reduces someone’s personhood to that of an object, then it is “morally wrong and sinful” (par. 13)).
- Assess the validity of his reasoning. (e.g., King’s reasoning is valid because it draws connections between supporting claims and his evidence to support his central claim that segregation is “morally wrong” (par. 13)).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- paradoxical (adj.) – seeming to say two opposite things though both those things may be true
- relegating (v.) – sending to an inferior position, place, or condition
- existential (n.) – of or pertaining to existence (human life)

Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)

- conniving (adj.) – secretly cooperating; having a secret understanding

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards: RI.9-10.8, L.9-10.4.a • Text: “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr., paragraphs 12–15 	
Learning Sequence: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda 2. Homework Accountability 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5% 2. 10%

3. Masterful Reading	3. 5%
4. Reading and Discussion	4. 60%
5. Quick Write	5. 15%
6. Closing	6. 5%

Materials

- Student copies of the Argument Delineation Tool (refer to 10.2.1 Lesson 5)—Students may need blank copies of the tool if they have run out of space on their original tool.
- Student copies of the Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 10.2.1 Lesson 1)
- Student copies of the Rhetorical Impact Tool (refer to 10.2.1 Lesson 4)—For this lesson’s homework, students may need blank copies of the tool if they have run out of space on their original tool.

Learning Sequence

How to Use the Learning Sequence	
Symbol	Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol
10%	Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take.
no symbol	Plain text indicates teacher action.
	Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
►	Indicates student action(s).
💬	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
❗	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

5%

Begin by reviewing the agenda and assessed standard for this lesson: RI.9-10.8. In this lesson, students read paragraphs 12–15 to delineate King’s argument and assess the validity of his reasoning. Students engage in evidence-based discussion as well as complete a brief writing assignment to close the lesson.

- Students look at the agenda.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

10%

Instruct student to talk in pairs about how they applied their focus standard to their text. Lead a brief share out on the previous lesson's AIR homework assignment. Select several students (or student pairs) to explain how they applied their focus standard to their AIR text.

- ▶ Students (or student pairs) discuss and share how they applied their focus standard to their AIR text.

Activity 3: Masterful Reading

5%

Have students listen to a Masterful Reading of paragraphs 12–15 of “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Instruct students to follow along and listen for King’s central claim in these paragraphs.

- ▶ Students follow along, reading silently.

Activity 4: Reading and Discussion

60%

Instruct students to form small groups. Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss.

Provide students with the following definitions: *paradoxical* means “seeming to say two opposite things though both those things may be true,” *relegating* means “sending to an inferior position, place, or condition,” and *existential* means “of or pertaining to existence (human life).”

- ▶ Students write the definition of *paradoxical*, *relegating*, and *existential* on their copy of the text or in their vocabulary journal.

Instruct student groups to reread paragraphs 12 and 13 (from “You express a great deal of anxiety” to “I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

What does King identify as “paradoxical”?

- ☞ King and his affiliates’ insistence on the enforcement of “the Supreme Court’s decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools” and their intentionally breaking laws in protest.

What can you infer from the clergymen’s “anxiety over [King and his affiliates’] willingness to break laws”?

- ☞ They find King and his affiliates’ disobedience illegal and wrong.

In paragraph 13, how does King define unjust laws? Cite his three specific definitions.

Student responses should include:

- Laws that are “out of harmony with the moral law or the law of God” are unjust (par. 13).
- Laws that are not “rooted in eternal and natural law” are unjust (par. 13).
- “Any law that degrades the human personality” is unjust (par. 13).

In the first two definitions, what is the impact of King’s specific word choices?

King uses the words “moral” and “law of God” and “eternal law” to show the connection between just laws and morality or religious values (par. 13).

① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle with this question, consider asking the following scaffolding questions.

What are the similarities in the first two definitions King provides of unjust laws?

Both of the definitions use religious words and phrases.

How do religious references strengthen King’s argument? Consider his audience.

King’s addressees are clergymen, so they are likely to be moved by religious words and phrases.

In paragraphs 12 and 13, what are King’s central claims?

Student responses may include:

- There are just and unjust laws.
- An unjust law is not lawful.

① Remind students that a central claim is an author’s main point about an issue in an argument.

How do the sentences “To use the words of Martin Buber . . . relegating persons to the status of things,” refine and develop the sentence that precedes them: “It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority”?

Student responses may include:

- These sentences clarify “the segregator’s false sense of superiority” by comparing the segregator’s relationship with segregated persons to their relationship with objects (par. 13).
- Because segregation reduces the segregated to the “status of objects,” these sentences strengthen the segregator’s false sense of superiority (par. 13).

How does Buber’s concept relate to King’s supporting claim that “any law that degrades human personality” is unjust?

- Segregation “degrades human personality” by “relegating [African Americans] to the status of things” and is by King’s definition an unjust law (par. 13).

How does King use Buber’s quote to develop his central claim in paragraph 13?

- He uses Buber’s quote to establish that segregation is “not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful,” (par. 13).

How does King’s reasoning for why he can “urge men to disobey segregation ordinances” contribute to his claims?

- It expands his claims by stating that not only is segregation unjust, but it is right to disobey it because it is “morally wrong” (par. 13).
- ① If students struggle with this question, consider reminding them that *reasoning* means “the logical relationships among ideas, including relationships among claims and relationships across evidence.”

What do you notice about the structure of the last sentence in paragraph 13?

- Student responses may include:
 - The sentence is a compound sentence.
 - The sentence has two independent clauses joined by a comma and a conjunction.
 - King repeats “I can urge” and a form of “obey” at the beginning of each independent clause and “morally right/wrong” at the end of each clause (par. 13).

What is the impact of this structure on the last sentence of paragraph 13?

- The repetitive structure emphasizes the differences between the two laws that King is advocating for and against, respectively.

Explain to students that this repetitive structure is a rhetorical device called *parallel structure*. Define *parallel structure* as “using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas are equally important.”

- ① It is important that students learn parallel structure as it is a significant part of tonight’s homework.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses. Instruct students to use the Argument Delineation Tool to trace King’s claims, evidence, and reasoning discussed in paragraphs 12 and 13.

Have student groups read paragraphs 14–15 (from “Let us turn to a more concrete example of just and unjust laws” to “Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured?”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

Identify King's supporting claim in paragraph 14. How would you paraphrase this supporting claim?

- King's supporting claim is "[a]n unjust law is a code that the majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself" (par. 14). It could be paraphrased as, "an unjust law is a rule that the majority makes the minority follow, even though the majority does not have to obey this rule."

① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider asking the following questions:

What words could replace *inflicts* in this sentence?

- Forces* or *imposes*, could replace *inflicts*.

What can you infer "not binding on itself" means in this context?

- It means "does not have to follow" or "does not have to obey" (par. 14).

What is King's purpose in this sentence?

- King's purpose is to provide a "more concrete example" of an unjust law (par. 14).

How does King's supporting claim in paragraph 14 relate to his central claims in paragraphs 12 and 13?

- It relates to King's central claims by providing "a more concrete example" of an unjust law (par. 14).

In paragraph 14, how does King reason that segregation is unjust? How does this reasoning support his claims?

- King reasons that segregation is unjust by defining an unjust law as one the majority enforces for a minority but not for itself, that segregation is "difference made legal" (par. 14).

Identify King's supporting claim in paragraph 15. How does it relate to his central claim?

- "Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application." It relates to King's central claim by showing how laws used to support segregation "in [their] application" are unjust (par. 15).

What words or phrases can you use to replace the word *conniving*?

- Conniving* could be replaced with *secret* or *excluding*.

① Consider drawing students' attention to their application of standard L.9-10.4.a through the process of using context to determine the meaning of a word.

Identify King's evidence in paragraph 15. How does the word *conniving* impact your understanding of King's evidence in paragraph 15?

- *Conniving* clarifies that King’s purpose in paragraph 15 is to provide evidence concerning how and why Alabama’s voter fraud has led to the creation of unjust segregation laws.

Given the context of paragraph 15, what can you infer King means by “democratically structured”?

- King means “fairly or equally supported” (par. 15).

① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider asking the following questions.

Given the context of paragraph 15, what can you infer about the definition of *democratically*?

- That it refers to votes and voting on laws.

With what words or phrases could you replace “structured”?

- “Organized,” “assembled,” or “put together.”

How does King’s reasoning for why segregation cannot be “considered democratically structured” contribute to his claims?

- Student responses may include:
 - It expands his claims by stating that “conniving methods” of voter fraud make segregation laws unable to be “considered democratically structure,” so segregation is unjust (par. 15).
 - Because African Americans “had no part in enacting or creating” the laws, but the laws apply to them, then the laws are unjust (par. 15).

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses. Instruct students to use the Argument Delineation Tool to trace King’s claims, evidence, and reasoning discussed in paragraphs 14 and 15.

Activity 5: Quick Write

15%

Instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

Delineate King’s argument in paragraphs 12–15. Assess the validity of his reasoning.

Instruct students to look at their annotations and tools to find evidence. Ask students to use this lesson’s vocabulary wherever possible in their written responses and to maintain a formal style and objective tone. Remind students to use the Short Response Rubric and Checklist to guide their written responses.

① **Display the prompt for students to see, or provide the prompt in hard copy.**

- ▶ Students independently answer the prompt, using evidence from the text.
- See the High Performance Response at the beginning of this lesson.

Activity 6: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework. For homework, instruct students to reread paragraphs 12–15 and use their Rhetorical Impact Tracking Tool to analyze King’s use of rhetoric in these paragraphs.

In addition, students should continue to read their AIR text through the lens of a focus standard of their choice and prepare for a 3–5 minute discussion of their text based on that standard.

- ▶ Students follow along.

Homework

Reread paragraphs 12–15 and use your Rhetorical Impact Tool to analyze King’s use of rhetoric in these paragraphs.

Also, continue to read your AIR text through the lens of a focus standard of your choice and prepare for a 3–5 minute discussion of your text based on that standard.

Model Argument Delineation Tool

Name:		Class:		Date:	
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Directions: Identify and record each of the following elements of the author's argument in the text (or portion of text): central claim, supporting claims, evidence, and reasoning. Remember that evidence supports claims and reasoning connects evidence to a claim. Reasoning also may explain the relationship among claims or across evidence.

Text:	"Letter from Birmingham Jail"				
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Central Claim: Segregation is unjust and morally wrong.

Supporting Claim:		
"So segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful" (par. 13).		
Evidence:	Explain how the evidence is relevant:	Explain whether the evidence is sufficient:
A reference to Martin Buber indicating that segregation "relegates persons to the status of things" (par. 13).	The evidence relates directly how and why.	The evidence is sufficient because it provides specific and meaningful support to the supporting claim.
Reasoning:		Explain whether the reasoning is valid:
If segregation reduces someone's personhood to that of an object, then it is "morally wrong and sinful" (par. 13).		The reasoning is valid because it draws on and connects both the supporting claim and the evidence.
Supporting Claim:		
"An unjust law is a code inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part enacting or creating because it did not have the unhampered right to vote" (par. 15).		

Evidence:	Explain how the evidence is relevant:	Explain whether the evidence is sufficient:
Alabama uses “all types of conniving methods” to keep African Americans from registering to vote, so they cannot win even where they are the majority (par. 15).	The evidence is relevant because it shows how African Americans “did not have the unhampered right to vote” (par. 15).	The evidence is sufficient because it provides enough examples and explanations of voter fraud to validate the supporting claim.
Reasoning:		Explain whether the reasoning is valid:
If voter fraud exists and if segregation laws were created from the voter fraud, then they are unjust laws because they were not “democratically structured” (par. 15).		The reasoning is valid because it draws on and connects both the supporting claim and the evidence.