

## 10.2.1

## Lesson 6

## Introduction

In this lesson, students read and analyze the poem “In This Blind Alley” by Ahmad Shamlu in dialogue with Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” In his poem, Shamlu investigates the human cost of living in a violently oppressive society, globalizing for the students issues that King discusses in his letter. Students analyze this poem to understand its central idea and to explore how Shamlu uses figurative language and connotations of words. In small groups, students engage in a class reading and discussion of the text.

The lesson ends with a Quick Write on the following prompt: Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices, including figurative language and connotations, on the development of a central idea present in both “In This Blind Alley” and “Letter From Birmingham Jail.” For homework, 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)	
RL.9-10.2	Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
RL.9-10.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
Addressed Standard(s)	
RL.9-10.6	Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
L.9-10.5	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

## Assessment

Assessment(s)
<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices, including figurative language and connotations, on the development of a central idea present in both “In This Blind Alley” and “Letter From Birmingham Jail.”</li> </ul>
High Performance Response(s)
<p>A High Performance Response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify a central idea present in “In This Blind Alley” and “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” (e.g., the agony of living in a violent, unjust society).</li> <li>Cite specific examples of figurative language and connotations (e.g., “they chop smiles off lips” and “has come to kill the light. / Let’s hide light in the larder” (Shamlu, stanza 4) etc.).</li> <li>Connect specific word choices to the development of a central idea (e.g., The violent verbs “flog” and “chop” (Shamlu, stanzas 2 and 6) and “lynch” and “kick” (King, par. 11) develop the central idea of the agony of living in an oppressive and unjust society by vividly describing the behavior of the oppressors in each text).</li> </ul>

## Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>flog (v.) – to beat with a whip, stick, etc., especially as punishment; whip; scourge</li> <li>larder (n.) – a room or place where food is kept; pantry</li> </ul>
Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None.</li> </ul>

## Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
<p><b>Standards &amp; Text:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standards: RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.6, L.9-10.5</li> <li>Text: “In This Blind Alley” by Ahmad Shamlu</li> </ul>	

<a href="http://makeacrane.wordpress.com/2013/05/30/the-blind-alley-by-ahmad-shamlu/">(http://makeacrane.wordpress.com/2013/05/30/the-blind-alley-by-ahmad-shamlu/)</a> , “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr., paragraphs 1–11	
<b>Learning Sequence:</b>	
1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda	1. 10%
2. Homework Accountability	2. 15%
3. Masterful Reading	3. 5%
4. Paraphrase Activity	4. 20%
5. Reading and Discussion	5. 30%
6. Quick Write	6. 15%
7. Closing	7. 5%

## Materials

- Student copies of the 10.2 Core Curriculum Learning Standards Tool (refer to 10.2.1 Lesson 3)
- Student copies of the Central Ideas Tracking Tool (refer to 10.2.1 Lesson 5)
- Copies of “In This Blind Alley” by Ahmad Shamlu (with stanzas numbered 1–8)
- Student copies of the Short Response Checklist and Rubric (refer to 10.2.1 Lesson 1)

① Consider numbering the stanzas of “In This Blind Alley” before the lesson.

## 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.
	<b>Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.</b>
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
►	Indicates student action(s).
💬	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
①	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

## Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

**10%**

Begin by reviewing the agenda and assessed standards for this lesson: RL.9-10.2 and RL.9-10.4. In this lesson, students read Ahmad Shamlu's poem "In This Blind Alley" in order to analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on the development of a central idea present in both "In This Blind Alley" and "Letter From Birmingham Jail." Students engage in an evidence-based discussion as well as complete a brief writing assignment at the lesson's end.

- ▶ Students look at the agenda.

Distribute or ask students to take out their copies of the 10.2 Common Core Learning Standards Tool. Inform students that in this lesson they begin to work with a new standard: RL.9-10.6. Ask students to individually read this standard on their tools and assess their familiarity with and mastery of it.

- ▶ Students read and assess their familiarity with standard RL.9-10.6.

Instruct students to talk in pairs about what they think the standard means. Lead a brief discussion about this standard.

💬 Student responses should include:

- Students analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience from outside the U.S.
- Students read a wide range of world literature.

① If necessary, remind students of their work with RL.9-10.4 in Module 10.1 and their work with "cumulative impact" of word choices with RL.9-10.4 in 10.2.1 Lesson 1.

## Activity 2: Homework Accountability

**15%**

Instruct students to form pairs and share their Central Ideas Tracking Tools from 10.2.1 Lesson 5's homework assignment.

- 💬 See the Model Central Ideas Tracking Tool at the end of this lesson for sample student responses.

Instruct students to do a Turn-and-Talk in pairs about the homework assignment from 10.2.1 Lesson 5 (Research Ahmad Shamlu and the context in which he lived. Choose three facts about Shamlu and explain how these facts might contribute to his perspective as a writer.).

💬 Student responses may include:

- He was Iranian (Iran's most famous poet) and lived under Iran's oppressive regime, which likely gave him many topics for his poetry.

- He spoke out against violent social oppression in his country and may have used his poetry to do so.
- He was imprisoned multiple times for his beliefs, which means he was unafraid to speak his mind and his heart.

① This homework supports students' engagement with RL.9-10.6, which addresses the students' ability to "Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature."

Explain to students that they review their work with the Central Ideas Tracking Tool with paragraphs 1–11 of "Letter from Birmingham Jail" later on in the lesson.

### Activity 3: Masterful Reading

**5%**

Have students listen to a Masterful Reading of "In This Blind Alley" by Ahmad Shamlu. Distribute a copy of "In This Blind Alley" to each student. Instruct students to follow along and listen for any ideas that sound similar to "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

- ▶ Students follow along, reading silently.

### Activity 4: Paraphrase Activity

**20%**

Inform students that they are to work in pairs to prepare a paraphrase of one of the stanzas of the poem.

Provide students the following definitions: *flog* means "to beat with a hip, stick, etc., especially as punishment" and *larder* means "a room or place where food is kept; pantry."

- ▶ Students listen and write the definitions of *flog* and *larder* on their text or in a vocabulary notebook.

Instruct students to form pairs. Assign each pair one stanza of the poem (from stanzas 1–8) and ask pairs to write a one to three sentence paraphrase of their assigned stanza.

- ① If necessary, consider explaining that to paraphrase means to rephrase or restate in one's own words.
- ① Note that stanzas 7 and 8 are particularly complex. Students may require additional support to paraphrase these stanzas.

💬 For stanza 1, student responses may include:

- "They" are invasive and hateful.
- Things are not how they are supposed to be, the times are "strange".

- 🗣 For stanza 2, student responses may include:
  - “They” are violent.
  - Love is something that must be hidden and protected.
- 🗣 For stanza 3, student responses may include:
  - “They” censor art and free speech.
  - “They” are so dangerous it is a risk to even think freely.
- 🗣 For stanza 4, student responses may include:
  - A man comes to enforce curfew.
  - “Light” is something that must be hidden and protected.
- 🗣 For stanza 5, student responses may include:
  - Their presence and readiness for violence threatens everyone.
  - They have already committed grave acts of violence.
- 🗣 For stanza 6, student responses may include:
  - They erode happiness with their violence and oppression.
  - Joy is something that must be protected and hidden.
- 🗣 For stanza 7, student responses may include:
  - Things of beauty are being destroyed.
- 🗣 For stanza 8, student responses may include:
  - Satan is winning because of everything that happens in the poem.
  - Because Satan is winning, God is not safe.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of the paraphrases in order to support students’ comprehension of the poem as a whole.

### Activity 5: Reading and Discussion

**30%**

Instruct students to form small groups and take turns reading the poem aloud to support comprehension and fluency. Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss.

① Consider having each student read one or two stanzas each to their group members.

- ▶ Students read aloud.

Instruct student groups to answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

**Based on your paraphrases, what can you infer about the speaker’s relationship to “they” in the poem?**

- 🗨 Student responses may include:
  - The speaker is scared of them.
  - “They” oppress the speaker.
  - “They” threaten the speaker.

**What is a central idea in the poem?**

- 🗨 Student responses may include:
  - A central idea in the poem is the emotional difficulty the speaker and his addressee have living under the people he calls “they” in “these . . . strange times” (stanza 1).
  - A central idea in the poem is about the important parts of the speaker and his addressee’s lives that must be “hid[den] in the larder” (stanza 2) from the oppressive violence of “they.”

**How does the speaker’s relationship to “they” impact your understand of a central idea in the poem?**

- 🗨 It clarifies that a central idea in the poem has to do with the poem’s speaker and addressee suffering under “their” oppression.

**How does Shamlu alter the connotations of the word *light* in stanza 4?**

- 🗨 Student responses may include:
  - By using the phrases “kill the light” and “Let’s hide light in the larder,” Shamlu suggests *light* has multiple meanings (stanza 4).
  - *Light* is not only *light* but represents things associated with *light*: hope, goodness, safety, etc.

① If students struggle here, remind them of the work they did in 10.2.1 Lesson 5 with standard L.9-10.5 and how King changed the connotations of the word *tension*.

**How does the figurative language in stanza 3 influence your understanding of stanza 7?**

- 🗨 Student responses may include:
  - Canaries are songbirds that like the “logs of song” (stanza 7) are burned in stanza 3.
  - Canaries, lilies, and jasmines are all beautiful things, just like “song and poetry” (stanza 3).
  - “They” are destroying what is beautiful with their oppression.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Have students take out their homework from Lesson 5 and share findings on central ideas in their groups. Instruct student groups to answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

**What are the similarities between the speaker's relationship to "They" in "In This Blind Alley" and African Americans' relationship with the "white power structure" as expressed in paragraphs 10–11 in "Letter from Birmingham Jail"?**

- The speaker and African Americans are both treated unjustly and brutalized by "They" and the "white power structure" (King, par. 5), respectively.

**How does King's description of the "vicious mobs" and "hate-filled policemen" in paragraph 11 relate to Shamlu's descriptive language in this poem?**

- Student responses may include:
  - They both describe oppressive and violent behavior.
  - They both use violent verbs like "flog," (Shamlu, stanza 2) "chop," (Shamlu, stanza 5) "lynch," and "kick," (King, par. 11).

**What connections can you draw between a central idea from "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and a central idea present in "In This Blind Alley"?**

- A central idea present in both texts is suffering endured by those living in an oppressive, unjust, and violent society.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

## Activity 6: Quick Write

**15%**

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

**Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices, including figurative language and connotation, on the development of a central idea present in both "In This Blind Alley" and "Letter From Birmingham Jail."**

Instruct students to look at their annotations to find evidence. Instruct students to use this lesson's vocabulary wherever possible in their written responses and to practice specific language and domain-specific vocabulary. Remind students of 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 7: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to 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

Continue reading 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 Central Ideas Tracking Tool

<b>Name:</b>		<b>Class:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
--------------	--	---------------	--	--------------	--

**Directions:** Identify the central ideas that you encounter throughout the text. Trace the development of those ideas by noting how the author introduces, develops, or refines these ideas in the texts. Cite textual evidence to support your work.

<b>Text:</b>	"Letter from Birmingham Jail"
--------------	-------------------------------

Paragraph #	Central Ideas	Notes and Connections
1, 7–11	Time / Timeliness	<p>King introduces this idea by quoting the clergymen's statement that calls his "present activities 'unwise and untimely'" (par. 1).</p> <p>He further develops this idea and refutes the clergymen's criticism when he writes about choosing "the best time to bring pressure on the merchants" who are discriminating against African Americans (par. 7).</p> <p>King confirms the connection between the clergymen's criticism and his defense when he states, "This reveals that we did not move irresponsibly into direct action" and "we felt that direct action could be delayed no longer" (par. 8). This shows that direct action is not only timely but also urgent.</p> <p>He repeats this idea that the time is now when he writes, "Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in the tragic attempt to live in monologue rather than dialogue" (par. 9).</p> <p>In paragraph 10, King repeats the clergymen's accusation from paragraph 1: "One of the basic points of your statement is that our acts are untimely" (par. 10).</p> <p>King explains that he "didn't give the new administration time to act" because "the new administration must be prodded" to give justice to African Americans (par. 10).</p> <p>In paragraph 11, King vividly describes why the time for</p>

		direct action is urgent, even overdue by listing the harsh treatment of African Americans. He concludes the paragraph: “There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over and . . . I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience” (par. 11).
3, 6	Justice / Injustice	King introduces this idea stating that he is in Birmingham because “injustice is here” (par. 3).  King develops this idea by introducing specific examples of crimes against African Americans committed by society. (par. 6)
4, 5	Call to Action / Mutuality	King introduces the clergymen’s need to act rightly in his use of imagery in paragraph 4: “inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”  He further develops this idea with the sentence: “I am sorry that your statement did not express a similar concern for the conditions that brought the demonstrations into being” (par. 4).
6, 11	Oppression/Suffering	King introduces the painful injustices experienced by African Americans everyday in Birmingham, like “ugly police brutality,” and “church bombings” (par. 6).  King develops this idea further by providing even more specific detail about the emotional pain of dealing with segregation. For example: “you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she cannot go to the public amusement park” (par. 11).