

10.2.1**Lesson 13****Introduction**

In this lesson, students read and analyze the poem “Freedom” by Rabindranath Tagore in dialogue with Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Students explore how Tagore begins to develop a central idea through specific textual details, in particular the images that he develops in relation to freedom. Additionally, students use Tagore’s poem to reflect upon the way in which King develops similar ideas in his letter. Students engage in an evidence-based discussion before completing a Quick Write on the following prompt: How do King and Tagore use imagery to develop the idea of freedom in relation to their individual circumstances?

For homework, students preview the reading from 10.2.1 Lesson 14, paragraphs 26–33 of “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” boxing unfamiliar words and looking up definitions.

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.
L.9-10.5	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
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.

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.

- How do King and Tagore use imagery to develop the idea of freedom in relation to their individual circumstances?

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Demonstrate how each author uses imagery to develop the idea of freedom in ways specific to their individual circumstances (e.g., Tagore uses imagery to develop the idea that fear is preventing his country from being free. He describes his Motherland first as a person, weighed down by “the burden of ages, bending your head, breaking your back, blinding your eyes” in line 2. Then, his Motherland becomes a prisoner, tied down by the “shackles of slumber” (line 3). Finally, his Motherland becomes less than human in line 5, as it is compared to a puppet. In contrast, fear becomes more controlling, changing from a “burden” in line 2 to a puppet master in line 5. In this way, Tagore uses imagery to develop the idea that fear is an obstacle to freedom. King develops a similar idea in “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” when he describes African Americans “waiting” for freedom as thalidomide: a drug that seems comforting but is in fact harmful (par. 11). He uses this image to develop the idea that freedom must be fought for and that remaining passive will not lead to change).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- Motherland (n.) – one’s native land
- shackles (n.) – two rings or bands that are placed around a person’s wrists or ankles and that are connected by a chain
- slumber (n.) – a period of sleep, especially light sleep
- anarchy (n.) – a state of society without government or law; confusion and disorder
- yielded (v.) – given up or over
- helm (n.) – a wheel or tiller by which a ship is steered
- dwelling (v.) – living or continuing in a given condition or state
- mimicry (n.) – the activity or art of copying the behavior or speech of other people

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

- None.

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: RL.9-10.2, L.9-10.5, RL.9-10.6 Text: “Freedom” by Rabindranath Tagore (http://tagoreweb.in/) 	
Learning Sequence: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Lesson Agenda Homework Accountability Masterful Reading Reading and Discussion Group Discussion Quick Write Closing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5% 10% 5% 35% 25% 15% 5%

Materials

- Copies of “Freedom” by Rabindranath Tagore (with lines numbered 1–5)
 - Student copies of the Short Response Rubric and Checklist (refer to 10.2.1 Lesson 1)
- ① Consider numbering the lines of “Freedom” before the lesson.
- ① To locate “Freedom” from the homepage (<http://tagoreweb.in/>) go to the “Verses” tab, click “Collected Poems and Plays,” and then click the “Freedom” link.

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.
①	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

5%

Begin by reviewing the agenda and assessed standards for this lesson: RL.9-10.2 and L.9-10.5. In this lesson, students explore how Tagore begins to develop a central idea in “Freedom” and reflect on how he and King develop a common idea through the use of imagery. Students engage in evidence-based discussion and complete a Quick Write to close the lesson.

- ▶ Students look at the agenda.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

10%

Instruct students to share and compare the facts they found about Rabindranath Tagore and their ideas about how these facts might influence his writing.

💬 Student responses may include:

- Rabindranath Tagore was an Indian poet who lived from 1861 to 1941. At that time, India was ruled by the British Empire, and Indians were discriminated against, so he might have been influenced by experiences of bigotry and prejudice.
- Tagore participated in the Indian Nationalist movement and was a friend of Mahatma Gandhi, the political father of modern India. He was also knighted by the British government in 1915 but returned the honor a few years later as a protest against British policy in India. He may then have written about India’s struggle for independence.
- Tagore received great recognition outside of India, notably in the West: he was the first Indian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 and was knighted in 1915. He also translated many of his own poems (including “Freedom”) from the original Bengali into English, which was not his first language. This may have influenced his writing by placing him in between two cultures.
- Although Tagore was primarily a poet, he wrote in many genres and also created drawings, paintings, and songs for which he wrote the music himself. This may have influenced his writing, causing him to incorporate elements of musicality or visual images into his writing.

- ① Inform students that through their work on Tagore, they are applying standard RL.9-10.6, which requires that students analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States.

Instruct student pairs to share and discuss the vocabulary words they identified and defined in the previous lesson’s homework.

- Students may identify the following words: *Motherland, shackles, slumber, anarchy, yielded, helm, dwelling, mimicry.*

① Definitions are provided in the Vocabulary box in this lesson.

Activity 3: Masterful Reading

5%

Have students listen to a Masterful Reading of “Freedom” by Rabindranath Tagore. Instruct students to listen for a central idea in the poem.

- Students follow along, reading silently.

Activity 4: Reading and Discussion

35%

Instruct students to form pairs. Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss before sharing out with the class.

What word does the speaker use at the beginning of each line? How does Tagore draw attention to this word throughout the poem?

- Student responses should include:
 - Tagore uses the word “freedom” at the beginning of each line.
 - He draws attention to it through its placement at the beginning of each line and by capitalizing it.
 - He also uses alliteration, for example “Freedom from fear” (line 1), to draw attention to this word.

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student pairs to reread the first line of the poem (“Freedom from fear is the freedom I claim for you, my Motherland! – fear, the phantom demon, shaped by your own distorted dreams”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

What kind of freedom does the speaker claim for his *Motherland* in line 1?

- He claims “Freedom from fear” (line 1).

How does the poet imagine and describe fear in the first line of the poem?

- Student responses should include:

- He imagines fear as a “phantom demon” (line 1).
- He describes fear as something shaped by nightmares: “distorted dreams” (line 1).

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student pairs to reread the second line of the poem (“Freedom from the burden of ages, bending your head, breaking your back, blinding your eyes to the beckoning call of the future”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

To whom does the possessive adjective “your” refer?

- “Your” refers to Tagore’s Motherland.

① Consider providing students with the following definition: *Motherland* means “native land.”

How does the poet use imagery to describe his Motherland in line 2?

- The poet shows his Motherland as a person: he imagines his country as having a head, a back, and eyes.

Inform students that this is a kind of imagery known as *personification*. *Personification* is a type of figurative language that describes giving human qualities or characteristics to a nonliving object or idea. For example, the expression “love is blind” personifies love.

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student pairs to reread the third line of the poem (“Freedom from shackles of slumber wherewith you fasten yourself to night’s stillness, mistrusting the star that speaks of truth’s adventurous path”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

To what do the “shackles of slumber” fasten the Motherland?

- The shackles fasten the Motherland “to night’s stillness” (line 3).

Based on your reply to the previous question and the definitions you found for homework, to what do you think the “shackles of slumber” might refer?

- The “shackles of slumber” (line 3) refer to inactivity or apathy.

How does the reference to shackles develop a new image of the Motherland in line 3?

- Student responses may include:

- The reference to shackles develops the image of the Motherland as a prisoner or slave.
- Some students may note that by imagining the Motherland as a prisoner, Tagore is again personifying his country.

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student pairs to reread the fourth line of the poem (“Freedom from the anarchy of destiny, whose sails are weakly yielded to blind uncertain winds, and the helm to a hand ever rigid and cold as Death”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

What image does the speaker use to describe his Motherland’s destiny in line 4? Which words does he use to create this image?

- 💬 The speaker of the poem uses the image of a ship. He creates this image through the use of the words “sails” and “helm” (line 4).

How does this image in line 4 develop the relationship between the Motherland and its destiny?

- 💬 The poem refers to “the anarchy of destiny,” implying that there is no one guiding the ship’s destiny; then he describes the winds to which the sails are given up as “blind” and “uncertain”; the helm is also “yielded” to “a hand ever rigid and cold as Death” (line 4). The impact is to create a sense that the poet’s Motherland does not control its own destiny.

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

Who is controlling the ship? Cite evidence to support your response.

- 💬 No one: the poem refers to the “anarchy” of destiny (line 4).

Who controls the sails?

- 💬 “Blind uncertain winds” control the sails (line 4).

How does the poet describe the hand at the helm?

- 💬 The hand is “ever rigid and cold as Death” (line 4).

① Consider using the image of “a hand ever rigid and cold as Death” to teach or review *simile*. If students are unfamiliar with the term, consider defining *simile* as “a figure of speech that expresses the resemblance of one thing to another of a different category, usually introduced by *as* or *like*.”

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses.

Instruct student pairs to reread the fifth and final line of the poem (from “Freedom from the insult of dwelling in a puppet’s world” to “stirred into a moment’s mimicry of life”) and answer the following question before sharing out with the class.

What image does the poet use to describe his country’s situation in line 5?

- The poet compares his country’s situation to that of a puppet controlled by a puppet master: “dwelling in a puppet’s world . . . where figures wait with patient obedience for a master of show” (line 5).
- ① Some students may note that the reference to “a moment’s mimicry of life” implies death and recalls the simile of “a hand ever rigid and cold as Death” in line 4, suggesting that Tagore sees the situation of his Motherland as a living death. If so, consider reviewing the definition of *simile* as a figure of speech in which two unlike things are compared (e.g., “She is like a rose”).

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses.

Activity 5: Group Discussion

25%

Direct students to form small groups. Instruct students to have their notes and annotated text from 10.2.1 Lesson 5 available. Remind students that they should be taking notes during the discussion in preparation for the Quick Write. Post or project the following questions for students to answer in groups.

What image does Tagore use to describe fear at the beginning of the poem?

- At the beginning of the poem fear is imagined as a “phantom demon,” shaped by “distorted dreams” (line 1).

How does the imagery used to describe fear change over the course of the poem?

- Over the course of the poem, the images become more controlling: fear is seen as a burden, which makes action hard; as shackles, which limit movement; and eventually it is personified as a puppet master, who controls all movement.

How does the imagery used to describe the Motherland change over the course of the poem?

- In contrast, the poet’s Motherland becomes less free over the course of the poem: from the use of personification in line 2, where it is imagined as struggling under a burden, it becomes a shackled prisoner in line 3, and finally, it is imagined as a puppet, a “mimicry of life” (line 5).

How does Tagore use imagery to develop the relationship between fear and freedom in the poem?

- As the images of fear become more controlling, the Motherland becomes less free during the poem: fear is imagined as “shackles” limiting movement in line 3 and as a puppet master controlling movement in line 5. Fear is imagined as preventing the Motherland becoming free, as limiting freedom.

Instruct students to take out their work from 10.2.1 Lesson 5 and review their notes and annotations on paragraph 11 of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

How do King and his affiliates in the civil rights movement differ from Tagore's motherland in response to oppression?

- Unlike Tagore's "motherland" who is still in "shackles of slumber" (Tagore, line 3), King and his affiliates in the civil rights movement are "fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodyness"" and "are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice" (par. 11). They are standing up for their rights.

What image does King use to describe the impact of the word *wait* in paragraph 11?

- King uses the image of a harmful drug, stating that: “[the word ‘wait’] has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration” (par. 11).

How does this image develop a central idea in paragraph 11?

- The image of thalidomide develops a central idea by suggesting that to wait for freedom rather than actively demanding it is harmful, and will produce only “an ill-formed infant of frustration” (par. 11).

What is the impact of King’s use of imagery to express why he and his affiliates “find it difficult to wait” (par. 11)?

- King compares the “endurance” of the African American community to a “cup” that “runs over,” meaning that he and his affiliates have endured all they can of the “abyss of injustice” and the “bleakness of corroding despair” (par. 11). Through the images of an overflowing cup, a pit of injustice, and crumbling despair, King illustrates the immediate need for the oppressed to take action rather than wait for freedom.

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses. Then ask students to do a Think-Pair-Share on the following question:

To whom do King and Tagore address their texts? Analyze the similarities and differences between their addressees. Support your response with evidence from both texts.

🗨️ Student responses may include:

- Tagore addresses his poem “Freedom” to his Motherland. We know this because he opens the poem by addressing his Motherland as “you”: “Freedom from fear is the freedom I claim for you, my Motherland” (Tagore, line 1).
- King is writing to other ministers and church leaders, whom he refers to as “fellow clergymen” (King, greeting).
- The clergymen to whom King is writing have been critical of his activities in Birmingham, which, as he notes in the opening paragraph, they have called “unwise and untimely” (King, par. 1).
- Whereas Tagore is addressing an oppressed party whom he hopes will liberate themselves, King is addressing a group of people who have participated in, or at least failed to condemn, oppression.
- Both Tagore and King are critical of their addressees: Tagore refers to his Motherland’s part in its own enslavement, speaking of “your own distorted dreams” (Tagore, line 1) and “the shackles of slumber wherewith you fasten yourselves to night’s stillness” (Tagore, line 3).
- King criticizes the clergymen to whom he writes for their lack of support of the nonviolent, direct action movement. He writes, “I am sorry that your statement did not express a similar concern for the conditions that brought the demonstrations into being” (King, par. 5) and “I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist” (King, par. 22).

Activity 6: Quick Write

15%

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

How do King and Tagore use imagery to develop the idea of freedom in relation to their individual circumstances?

Instruct students to look at their annotations to find evidence. Ask students to use this lesson’s vocabulary wherever possible in their written responses. 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 7: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to read paragraphs 26–33 of “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Direct students to box any unfamiliar words and look up their definitions. Instruct them to choose the definition that makes the most sense in the context, and write a brief definition above or near the word in the text.

- ▶ Students follow along.

Homework

Preview paragraphs 26–33 of “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” boxing unfamiliar words and looking them up. Choose the definition that makes the most sense in the context and write a brief definition above or near the word in the text.