

10.2.1

Lesson 8

Introduction

In this lesson, students read and analyze paragraphs 16–18 of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (from “These are just a few examples of unjust and just laws” to “I believe I would openly advocate disobeying these anti-religious laws”) in which King defines unjust laws and demonstrates the importance of civil disobedience. In this lesson, students analyze these paragraphs through the lens of rhetoric, determining King’s purpose and analyzing his use of rhetoric to further that purpose.

The lesson ends with a Quick Write on the following prompt: Determine King’s purpose in paragraphs 16–18 and analyze how he uses rhetoric to advance that purpose. For homework, students read paragraphs 19–21, box unfamiliar words, and look up their definitions. Students also review their Argument Delineation Tools to identify the central claims in paragraphs 1–18.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RI.9-10.6	Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.
Addressed Standard(s)	
L.9-10.1.a	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. a. Use parallel structure.
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)
<p>Student learning is assessed via a Quick Write at the end of the lesson. Students answer the following prompt, citing textual evidence to support analysis and inferences drawn from the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine King’s purpose in paragraphs 16–18 and analyze how he uses rhetoric to advance that purpose.
High Performance Response(s)
<p>A High Performance Response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify King’s purpose (e.g., King’s purpose is to convince his addressees of the importance of disobeying unjust laws). Cite specific examples of King’s rhetoric and explain how each example advances his purpose (e.g., King uses biblical and historical references to show his addressees that people they admire also disobeyed unjust laws: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . . early Christians . . . Hungarian freedom fighters” all disobeyed the unjust laws of their rulers (par. 17 and 18)).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None.
Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sublimely (adv.) – supremely or outstandingly excruciating (adj.) – extremely painful; causing intense suffering; unbearably distressing; torturing

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
<p>Standards & Text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: RI.9-10.6, L.9-10.1.a, L.9-10.4.a Text: “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr., paragraphs 16–18 	

Learning Sequence:	
1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda	1. 5%
2. Homework Accountability	2. 15%
3. Masterful Reading	3. 5%
4. Reading and Discussion	4. 55%
5. Quick Write	5. 15%
6. Closing	6. 5%

Materials

- Student copies of the Rhetorical Impact Tracking Tool (refer to 10.2.1 Lesson 4)—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)

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 the assessed standard for this lesson: RI.9-10.6. In this lesson, students identify King’s purpose in paragraphs 16–18 and analyze how he uses rhetorical devices to further his purpose. Students engage in evidence-based discussion as well as complete a Quick Write Assessment to close the lesson.

- Students follow along.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

15%

Instruct students to talk in pairs about how they applied their focus standards to their Accountable Independent Reading 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 from the previous lesson's homework.

Instruct students to take out the Rhetorical Impact Tracking Tool from Lesson 7's homework assignment (Reread paragraphs 12–15 and identify and annotate any rhetorical devices King uses) and form small groups to discuss their findings.

💬 Student responses should include:

- Rhetorical questions: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?"
- Repetition: "Let us turn to a more concrete example . . . Let me give another example."
- Parallel structure: "So I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court because it is morally right, and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong."

① Remind students of their work with L.9-10.1.a and the use of parallel structure in 10.2.1 Lesson 7.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of the rhetoric in paragraphs 12–15. Ask students to discuss how King is appealing to his addressees in these paragraphs. If necessary, explain that King is appealing to his addressees' sense of logic or reasoning. Inform students that this rhetorical device is called *logos* or appeal to logic and reason. Allow time for students to record examples of logos in paragraphs 12–15 on their Rhetorical Impact Tracking Tools.

Activity 3: Masterful Reading

5%

Have students listen to a Masterful Reading of paragraphs 16–18 of "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Instruct students to follow along and listen for King's central claim in these paragraphs.

- ▶ Students follow along and read silently.

Activity 4: Reading and Discussion

55%

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

Instruct student groups to reread paragraphs 16–17 (from “These are just a few examples of unjust and just laws” to “academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

What is King’s purpose in paragraph 16?

- King’s purpose is to provide an example of how a law can seem just, yet be “unjust in its application” (par. 16).

How does King’s reference to his arrest further his purpose?

- It provides a specific example of how a law can seem just yet be “unjust in its application” by showing how a law about parades was “used to preserve segregation and to deny citizens the[ir] First Amendment privilege[s]” (par. 16).

What words could replace the word “sublimely” in this context?

- Superbly or perfectly.

What imagery helps you understand the meaning of *excruciating*?

- The chopping block is where limbs were cut off, so *excruciating* must be an adjective that describes an extreme amount of pain.
 - Students write the definitions of *sublimely* and *excruciating* on their copy of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- ① If necessary, remind students of their work with imagery in 10.1, reminding them that imagery is the use of figurative or sensory language to create a mental picture.
- 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.

How does King use figurative language in paragraph 17? How does it further his purpose?

- He uses figurative language to describe the suffering that early Christians were willing to endure to disobey unjust laws. This furthers his purpose by providing evidence that “there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience” (par. 17).

In paragraph 17, how does King use the examples of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, the early Christians, and Socrates to further his purpose? What is the impact of these specific references considering King’s addressees?

- Student responses may include:

- He uses these examples to create a historical and moral precedent for “this kind of civil disobedience” (par. 17).
- By using biblical and historical references, King compares himself and his fellow civil rights activists to people likely valued by the addressees. This makes King and his fellow activists seem like heroes.
- Some students may note that by implication, this means the addressees are opposing people who are like their own biblical and historical heroes.

① If students struggle, consider informing them that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s disobedience is a biblical reference and that Socrates was an ancient Greek philosopher.

Once students have responded to the question above, explain to them that what King is doing in these lines is setting himself and his fellow activists on a “higher moral ground” than his addressees. Explain that by comparing civil rights activists to the addressees’ own heroes, King is demonstrating that the civil rights activists are more moral—“on higher moral ground”—and anyone who opposes them is less moral.

To what does King refer when he writes “this kind of civil disobedience”?

- King refers to nonviolent direct action.

What does King imply in the last sentence of paragraph 17? How does this implication develop his purpose?

- King implies that without “civil disobedience,” we would not have positive things today like “academic freedom” (par. 17). This develops his purpose by showing how important “civil disobedience” is for creating positive change.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses. Then instruct students to use their Rhetorical Impact Tracking Tool to track and analyze King’s use of rhetoric in paragraphs 16–17.

Instruct student groups to reread paragraph 18 (from “We can never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was ‘legal’” to “I believe I would openly advocate disobeying these anti-religious laws”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

What can be inferred about the “Hungarian freedom fighters” from the text?

- That they fought against Hitler and his unjust laws, even though it was technically illegal.

How does the example of the legality of “everything Hitler did in Germany” further King’s purpose?

- Student responses may include:
 - The example furthers his purpose by showing how evil unjust laws can be.

- It compares segregation in America to Nazi Germany.

How does King’s statement that he would “advocate disobeying these anti-religious laws” if he lived in a Communist country further his purpose?

- The example highlights the duty one has to disobey unjust laws.

How does King’s reference to the suppression of “principles dear to the Christian faith” in a Communist country further his purpose? Consider King’s addressees.

- King focuses on the suppression of “principles dear to the Christian faith” because he and his audience are Christian leaders (par. 18). This furthers his purpose by including a scenario where his addressees might also disobey certain laws.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses. Then instruct students to use their Rhetorical Impact Tracking Tool to track and analyze King’s use of rhetoric in paragraph 18.

Activity 5: Quick Write

15%

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

Determine King’s purpose in paragraphs 16–18 and analyze how he uses rhetoric to advance that purpose.

Instruct students to use at least one example of parallel structure in their response, and 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.

- ▶ Students listen and read the Quick Write prompt.

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

Transition to the independent Quick Write.

- ▶ 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 read paragraphs 19–21, 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.

Also, students should review their Argument Delineation Tools to identify the central claims King makes in paragraphs 1–18.

- ▶ Students follow along.

Homework

Read paragraphs 19–21, box unfamiliar words, and look up their definitions. Choose the definition that makes the most sense in the context, and write a brief definition above or near the word in the text.

Also, review your Argument Delineation Tools to identify the central claims King makes in paragraphs 1–18.

Model Rhetorical Impact Tracking 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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RI.9-10.6: Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

Rhetorical device and definition	Examples of the rhetorical device in the text (with paragraph or page reference)	Impact of the rhetorical device on point of view or purpose
Rhetorical question	“How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?” (par. 12)	This rhetorical question lays out King’s purpose in paragraphs 12–18.
Rhetorical question	<p>“Now what is the difference between the two? How does one determine when a law is just or unjust?” (par. 13)</p> <p>“Isn’t segregation an existential expression of man’s tragic separation, an expression of his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness?” (par. 13)</p>	The rhetorical questions serve to illustrate King’s point of view that it is right to disobey segregation laws and they serve his purpose of communicating their unjustness to his addressees.

Rhetorical device and definition	Examples of the rhetorical device in the text (with paragraph or page reference)	Impact of the rhetorical device on point of view or purpose
Parallel structure (using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas are equally important)	"So I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court because it is morally right, and I urge them to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong." (par. 13)	It provides clarity to why King believes he can urge people to disobey segregation laws, which deepens his addressees' understanding of his purpose.
Repetition	"Let us turn to a more concrete example . . . Let me give another example." (par. 14 and 15)	Repetition makes clear that his purpose is to provide examples of how segregation laws are unjust.
Logos: appeal to logic or reason	<p>"The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: there are just laws, and there are unjust laws." (par. 12)</p> <p>"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." (par. 13)</p> <p>"Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." (par. 13)</p> <p>"An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself." (par. 14)</p>	<p>Here King appeals to his addressees' sense of reason or logic by explaining that he and his affiliates can disobey some laws and not others because some laws are unjust.</p> <p>Here King explains how one can determine which laws are unjust. He gives logical reasons for finding some laws unjust: they degrade some people's personalities.</p> <p>King logically presents another reason a law can be unjust: it is imposed on a minority by a majority.</p>

Rhetorical device and definition	Examples of the rhetorical device in the text (with paragraph or page reference)	Impact of the rhetorical device on point of view or purpose
Alliteration	“Now, there is nothing wrong with an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade, but when the ordinance is used to preserve segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and peaceful protest, then it becomes unjust.” (par. 16)	The repetition of words that begin with “p” creates a rhythm that makes his writing compelling and more convincing, which serves his purpose of showing his addressees how segregation laws are unjust.
Figurative language	“It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of the chopping block before submitting to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire.” (par. 17)	The figurative language depicts the early Christians heroically, and further helps show how heroic African Americans are in their disobedience to segregation laws, which serves King’s purpose of showing why it is okay to disobey segregation laws.
Parallel structure	“But I am sure that if I had lived in Germany during that time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers even though it was illegal. If I lived in a Communist country today where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I believe I would openly advocate disobeying anti-religious laws.” (par. 18)	Parallel structure creates a relationship between two situations where King feels it would be right to disobey morally wrong laws, thus helping him develop his purpose of showing why it is right to disobey segregation.