

10.2.1

Lesson 9

Introduction

In this lesson, students read and analyze paragraphs 19–21 of “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (from “I must make two honest confessions” to “time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation”), in which King claims that the white moderate is the main reason injustice against African Americans has not yet ended. Students explore how King develops this claim by criticizing the white moderate. Students also analyze how this section of the text initiates a shift in King’s argument.

The class culminates with a Quick Write on the following prompt: How does King’s new claim in paragraphs 19–21 refine his central claim in paragraphs 1–18? For homework, students reread paragraphs 1–21, reviewing their annotations, making new ones as necessary, and adding to their Rhetorical Impact Tracking Tool in preparation for the Mid-Unit Assessment.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
RI.9-10.5	Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).
Addressed 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.
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. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 answer the following prompt, citing textual evidence to support analysis and inferences drawn from the text.

- How does King's new claim in paragraphs 19–21 refine his central claim in paragraphs 1–18?

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Identify King's central claim in paragraphs 1–18 (e.g., Direct action must be taken to end injustice).
- Identify King's claim in paragraphs 19–21 (e.g., The white moderate is "the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom" (par. 19)).
- Demonstrate how King uses this claim to refine his central claim in paragraphs 1–18 (e.g., King shifts from providing a defensive response to his addressees in paragraphs 1–18, to an offensive criticism of the white moderate's lack of action to end injustice in paragraphs 19–21. By showing that the white moderate has not "reject[ed] the myth of time," which makes them unwilling to engage in "the tireless efforts and persistent work," King demonstrates that action is needed from not only African Americans, but also the white moderate, to end injustice).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- paternalistically (adv.) – managing or governing individuals, businesses, nations, etc. in the manner of a father dealing benevolently and often intrusively with his children
- asserted (v.) – stated with assurance, confidence, or force
- condemned (v.) – expressed unfavorable or adverse judgment on; indicated strong disapproval
- precipitate (v.) – to bring about prematurely, hastily, or suddenly
- assertion (n.) – a positive statement or declaration, often without support or reason
- hemlock (n.) – a poisonous plant; a poisonous drink made from this plant
- affirmed (v.) – decided that the judgment of another court was correct
- misconception (n.) – a mistaken notion
- irrational (adj.) – not in accordance with reason; utterly illogical
- repent (v.) – to feel such sorrow for sin or fault as to be disposed to change one's life for the better
- vitriolic (adj.) – with harsh and angry words
- appalling (adj.) – causing dismay or horror
- persistent (adj.) – continuing to do something or to try to do something even though it is difficult or other people want you to stop
- stagnation (n.) – a failure to develop, progress, or advance

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

- moderate (n.) – a person who is moderate in opinion or opposed to extreme views and actions, especially in politics or religion

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards: RI.9-10.5, RI.9-10.8, L.9-10.4.a • Text: “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr., paragraphs 19–21 	
Learning Sequence: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda 2. Homework Accountability 3. Masterful Reading 4. Reading and Discussion 5. Quick Write 6. Closing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5% 2. 15% 3. 15% 4. 45% 5. 15% 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 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.9-10.5. In this lesson, students engage in evidence-based discussion exploring how King develops his new, central claim in this section of the text. Students also analyze how this section of the text initiates a shift in King's argument. Students demonstrate their learning at the end of the lesson by completing a Quick Write.

- ▶ Students follow along.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

15%

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: *paternalistically, asserted, condemned, precipitate, assertion, hemlock, affirmed, misconception, irrational, repent, vitriolic, appalling, persistent, and stagnation.*

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

Instruct students to take out their Argument Delineation Tools to discuss in pairs the central and supporting claims they identified in paragraphs 1–18.

- 💬 See the Model Argument Delineation Tools at the end of each of the following: 10.2.1 Lessons 3, 5, 7, and 8.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses to ensure that students understand the central and supporting claims in paragraphs 1–18.

Activity 3: Masterful Reading

15%

Have students listen to a Masterful Reading of paragraphs 19–21 of “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Instruct students to follow along and listen for ideas they encountered earlier in the text.

- ▶ Students follow along, reading silently.

Instruct students to form small groups and reread paragraph 19 (from “I must make two honest confessions” to “Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection”). Ask students to annotate with exclamation points to note areas that remind them of earlier parts of the text.

- 💬 Student responses may include exclamation points near the following parts of the text:
 - “more devoted to order than to justice” (par. 19)

- “who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension” (par. 19)
- ““but I can’t agree with your methods of direct action”” (par. 19)
- “who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom” (par. 19)
- “who lives by the myth of time” (par. 19)
- “who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a ‘more convenient season’” (par. 19)

Instruct students to form pairs to share and compare their annotations.

Activity 4: Reading and Discussion

45%

Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss. Lead a whole-class discussion of the following questions, giving support as needed.

What tone does King establish in paragraph 19? How does King’s specific word choice create this tone?

- 🗨️ King establishes a critical tone through words and phrases with negative connotations such as:
 - King is “gravely disappointed” (par. 19).
 - The white moderate is the “great stumbling block,” implying that they are even worse than the White Citizens Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner (par. 19).
 - The white moderate “prefers a negative peace” (par. 19).
 - King describes the white moderate as acting “paternalistically” (par. 19).
 - King says the white moderate lives by a “myth” (par. 19).
 - The white moderate’s “shallow understanding” is “frustrating” (par. 19).
 - The white moderate’s acceptance of the African American’s struggle to end injustice is “lukewarm” (par. 19).

① Consider reminding students that *tone* is the attitude a writer has towards the subject about which he/she is writing.

Explain to students that *paternalism* is a belief system in which a group of people in power treats those who are not in power as if they are children. Many white slave owners used paternalism to justify slavery in America. Believing that they were more advanced and developed than their slaves, white slave owners thought that they were taking care of their slaves and doing the morally right thing by treating them like children and ruling over all aspects of their lives as some fathers rule over their children. Although slavery in America had ended, some people in King’s time still believed in paternalism.

How does King use the word *paternalistically*? What is the impact of King’s usage of the word?

- 🗨️ Student responses may include:

- King uses the word *paternalistically* to describe how the white moderate “feels that he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom” (par. 19). The word intensifies King’s criticism of the white moderate for treating African Americans like children.
- Because paternalism was used to justify slavery, King’s use of “paternalistically” shows that paternalism has still not ended, and white moderates are like slave owners as “the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom” (par. 19). This comparison makes King’s criticism of the white moderates even harsher.
- King links current white moderates with slave owners who had the power to “set the timetable for another man’s freedom” and never would grant that freedom. With the word “paternalistically,” King echoes and emphasizes his earlier claim that “‘wait’ has almost always meant ‘never’” (par. 11). This has the effect of intensifying his criticism of the white moderate.

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

How is setting “a timetable for another man’s freedom” acting *paternalistically* or like a father?

- 💬 Deciding when someone can be free is like treating someone like a child and acting like a controlling father who decides everything for his children.

What connection does King make between the past and the present by using the word *paternalistically*?

- 💬 King uses the word “paternalistically” to show that the white moderate treats African Americans like children just as slave owners treated slaves like children.

How does King use the word *paternalistically* to criticize the white moderate?

- 💬 Because the white moderate “constantly says, ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can’t agree with your methods of direct action,’” King uses the word “paternalistically” to strengthen his point that the white moderate does not actually “agree with [King] in the goal [he] seek[s],” since the white moderate treats African Americans like children (par. 19).

① This discussion of the word *paternalistically* supports students’ engagement with L.9-10.4, which addresses students’ ability to clarify the meaning of an unknown word.

Based on what King writes in paragraph 19 about “the white moderate,” who or what is “the white moderate”?

- 💬 The white moderate is a group of white people who are not openly opposed to civil rights but do not actively support them either.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider providing the following definition: *moderate* means “a person who is moderate in opinion or opposed to extreme views and actions, especially in politics or religion.” Also, consider explaining that King uses the phrase “white moderate” as a collective noun, meaning that numerous individuals are grouped together and spoken of as a whole.
- ① Consider drawing students’ attention to their work with L.9-10.4.a as they use context clues to determine the meaning of a word.
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Instruct students to form groups and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

In paragraphs 1–18, how has King described his addressees’ opinions similarly to how he describes the white moderates’ opinions in paragraph 19?

- 💬 The addressees, like the white moderates, want King and civil rights activists to “wait” for racial justice and to obey the “unjust” segregation laws.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle, consider reminding them to look at their annotations from Lesson 8’s homework.

What is the impact of the connection King implies between the white moderate and his addressees?

- 💬 When King refers to the white moderate, he is also implying that his addressees are part of that group. King is indirectly criticizing the addressees by including them in his criticism of the white moderate.

What is King’s claim in paragraph 19? How is this claim different from other supporting claims in paragraphs 1–18?

- 💬 Student responses may include:
- King claims that the white moderate, with their “shallow understanding” and “lukewarm acceptance,” are “the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom” (par. 19). The white moderate is the main reason injustice has not ended.
 - This supporting claim is different from other supporting claims, because here King is criticizing the white moderate instead of defending his actions against accusations from his addressees (as he did in paragraphs 1–18).

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider encouraging students to refer back to their Argument Delineation Tools to help them answer the question.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses. Instruct students to use their Argument Delineation Tool to record the supporting claim, evidence, and reasoning discussed in paragraph 19.

① The Argument Delineation Tool supports student engagement with RI.9-10.8.

Instruct student groups to reread paragraphs 20–21 (from “In your statement you asserted that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned” to “time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class.

What supporting claim does King make in the first sentences of paragraph 20?

- The clergymen’s idea that King’s “actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence” is illogical (par. 20).

What evidence does King provide to support his claim that the clergymen’s assertion is illogical?

- King shows that the clergymen are illogical by comparing their reasoning to the examples of “condemning the robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery,” “condemning Socrates” for being killed by opponents of truth, and “condemning Jesus” for being crucified by opponents of God (par. 20).

How do these examples relate to King’s moral high ground in previous paragraphs?

- These examples of innocent, heroic men show that King and other civil rights activists are innocent, heroic people who are morally and logically better than their opponents (the white moderate) who are like the robbers and murderers of innocent, heroic men.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses. Instruct students to record on their Argument Delineation Tools the supporting claim, evidence, and reasoning discussed in paragraph 20.

Instruct student groups to answer the following questions about paragraph 21 before sharing out with the class.

How does King define the “myth of time” in paragraph 21?

- King defines the “myth of time” as “the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills” (par. 21).

How does the “myth of time” connect to the white moderate’s “lukewarm acceptance” of the struggle to end injustice?

- If the white moderate thinks that time will “cure all ills” as the “white brother in Texas” does, then they will not engage in “the tireless efforts and persistent work” necessary to end injustice (par. 21). This indicates only “lukewarm acceptance” (par. 19) of the struggle to end injustice.

What is the cumulative impact of King’s specific word choices in paragraph 21?

- In paragraph 21, King emphasizes his confrontational and critical tone by using judgmental and aggressive words and phrases like “tragic misconception,” “strangely irrational,” “repent,” and “appalling silence.” These words and phrases give force to King’s criticism of the white moderate and show the extent to which King is disappointed in the white moderate.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses. Instruct students to record on their Argument Delineation Tools the supporting claim, evidence, and reasoning discussed in paragraph 21.

Activity 5: Quick Write**15%**

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

How does King’s new claim in paragraphs 19–21 refine his central claim in paragraphs 1–18?

Instruct students to look at their annotations to find evidence. Ask students to use this lesson’s vocabulary whenever 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 assignment. For homework, instruct students to reread paragraphs 1–21, reviewing their notes, annotations, and Rhetorical Impact Tools in preparation for the next lesson’s Mid-Unit Assessment. When rereading paragraphs 1–21, students should focus particularly on King’s use of rhetoric and specific word choice, annotating and adding to the Rhetorical Impact Tools as necessary.

- ▶ Students follow along.

Homework

Reread paragraphs 1–21 of King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and review and expand your notes, annotations, and Rhetorical Impact Tool in preparation for the next lesson’s Mid-Unit Assessment. When rereading paragraphs 1–21, focus particularly on King’s use of rhetoric and specific word choice, annotating and adding to your Rhetorical Impact Tools as necessary.

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:

Action must be taken to end injustice.

Supporting Claim:

King claims that the white moderate, with their “shallow understanding” and “lukewarm acceptance,” are “the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom” (par. 19).

Evidence:	Explain how the evidence is relevant:	Explain whether the evidence is sufficient:
By telling African Americans to wait and not to engage in direct action, the white moderate “paternalistically . . . set[s] the timetable for another man’s freedom” (par. 19).	This shows the white moderate’s “shallow understanding” (par. 19) of the African Americans’ experience.	Yes, it is sufficient. King uses rhetorical questions to give three examples as evidence.
Reasoning:		Explain whether the reasoning is valid:
By using the word “paternalistically” King recalls racial oppression that goes back as far as slavery and by association compares the white moderate to slave owners who “paternalistically” controlled all aspects of their slaves’ lives (par. 19). The white moderate’s advice to “wait” for a “more convenient season” (par. 19) condemns African Americans to unending racial injustice.		King clearly connects the white moderate’s advice to wait to their paternalistic attitude towards African Americans’ freedom.
Supporting Claim:		
The white moderate asserts that the African Americans’ peaceful, nonviolent actions “must be condemned because they precipitate violence” (par. 20).		

Evidence:	Explain how the evidence is relevant:	Explain whether the evidence is sufficient:
<p>“Isn’t this like condemning the robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery?” (par. 20)</p> <p>“Isn’t this like condemning Jesus because His unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to His will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion?” (par. 20)</p>	<p>It shows by similar and more obvious examples that also appeal to the clergymen’s religious sensibilities that their argument is illogical.</p>	<p>Yes, three increasingly compelling examples are sufficient.</p>
Reasoning:		Explain whether the reasoning is valid:
<p>Through examples given as rhetorical questions in paragraph 20, King reasons that his addressees’ assertion is both not logically made (“Isn’t this like condemning the robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery?”) and immoral (“Isn’t this like condemning Jesus because His unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to His will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion?”).</p>		<p>Yes, King’s reasons are logically consistent.</p>
Supporting Claim:		
<p>The white moderate has not “reject[ed] the myth of time” (par. 21).</p>		
Evidence:	Explain how the evidence is relevant:	Explain whether the evidence is sufficient:
<p>King gives an example of the “white brother in Texas” to show this (par. 21).</p>	<p>The example of the “white brother in Texas” shows the white moderate’s acceptance of the “myth” that time “will inevitably cure all ills” (par. 21).</p>	<p>Yes, it is sufficient. King’s example is representational of a larger group of people.</p>
Reasoning:		Explain whether the reasoning is valid:
<p>Through his example of the “white brother in Texas,” King demonstrates that when people believe in the myth of time, they will have only “lukewarm acceptance” of the struggle to end injustice because they are waiting for time to “cure all ills.” Therefore, they are unwilling to engage in “the tireless efforts and persistent work” necessary to prevent “time itself [from becoming] an ally of the forces of social stagnation” (par. 21).</p>		<p>Yes, King’s reasoning logically follows.</p>