

10.2.1**Lesson 14****Introduction**

In this lesson, students read and analyze paragraphs 26–33 of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (from “Let me rush on to mention my other disappointment” to “whose disappointment with the church has risen to outright disgust”), in which King criticizes the white church for its failure to take a stance. Students discuss how King unfolds his analysis of the church’s position and the way in which he orders his points.

Following this discussion, the lesson culminates in a Quick Write on the following prompt: How does King unfold his analysis in paragraphs 26–33? For homework, students reread paragraphs 26–33 and annotate for central ideas. Additionally, 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.9-10.3	Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.
Addressed Standard(s)	
L.9-10.5.a	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.

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"> How does King unfold his analysis of the church in paragraphs 26–33? Provide three or more examples from the text to support your response.

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response should:

- Determine that King uses this section of the letter to criticize the white church and its leadership.
- Analyze how King unfolds and structures his analysis (e.g., King begins his critique of the white church in paragraph 26 with a concession, admitting that there are “notable exceptions” who have taken “significant stands.” In paragraph 27, he takes the moral high ground by emphasizing his love of the church and the fact that he speaks “as a minister of the gospel,” not as a “one of those negative critics of the church.” In doing so, he both maintains a moderate tone and sets the ground for his argument that “notable exceptions” are not enough. In paragraphs 28–30, he develops his disappointment with the church, contrasting the “strange feeling” (par. 28) he had that the church would support his cause and the “hope” (par. 29) that he had in coming to Birmingham with the reality of “shattered dreams” (par. 29). In paragraphs 31 and 32 he compares the power of the early Christians, who acted “with the conviction that they were a ‘colony of heaven’ and had to obey God rather than man” (par. 31) with the modern church which is “so often a weak, ineffectual voice” (par. 32). Finally, in paragraph 33, King introduces the idea that the church is at a decisive moment, because “the judgment of God is upon the church as never before” and young people’s disappointment with the church “has risen to outright disgust”).

Vocabulary**Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)**

- blatant (adj.) – brazenly obvious
- pious (adj.) – deeply religious, devoted to a particular religion; falsely appearing to be good or moral
- trivialities (n.) – things of very little importance or value
- sanctimonious (adj.) – making a hypocritical show of religious devotion, piety, righteousness, etc.
- irrelevancies (n.) – things that are not applicable or related to the matter at hand
- consoled (v.) – lessened the grief, sorrow, or disappointment of
- vocal (adj.) – expressing opinions in a public or forceful way
- sanction (n.) – authoritative permission or approval
- mores (n.) – the customs, values, and behaviors that are accepted by a particular group, culture, etc.
- authentic (adj.) – not false or copied; genuine; real
- forfeit (v.) – lose, as in consequence of some crime, fault, or breach of engagement

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

- arch (adj.) – chief; principal

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards & Text: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards: RI.9-10.3, L.9-10.5.a Text: “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr., paragraphs 26–33 Learning Sequence: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Lesson Agenda Homework Accountability Masterful Reading Jigsaw Reading and Discussion Quick Write Closing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10% 10% 10% 50% 15% 5%

Materials

- Student copies of the 10.2 Common Core Learning Standards Tool (refer to 10.2.1 Lesson 1)
- 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

10%

Begin by reviewing the agenda and assessed standard for this lesson: RI.9-10.3. In this lesson, students read and analyze paragraphs 26–33 of “Letter from Birmingham Jail” in order to determine how King unfolds his analysis and introduces and develops his ideas. Students engage in evidence-based discussion and complete a Quick Write to close the lesson.

- ▶ 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: L.9-10.5.a. 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 L.9-10.5.a.

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

💬 Student responses should include:

- Determine the meaning of figures of speech.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

10%

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: *blatant, pious, trivialities, sanctimonious, irrelevancies, consoled, vocal, sanction, mores, authentic, and forfeit.*

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

Activity 3: Masterful Reading

10%

Have students listen to a Masterful Reading of paragraphs 26–33 of “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (from “Let me rush on to mention my other disappointment” to “whose disappointment with the church has risen to outright disgust”). Instruct students to follow along and pay attention to the way in which King unfolds his criticism of the white church.

- ▶ Students follow along, reading silently.

Activity 4: Jigsaw Reading and Discussion

50%

Instruct students to form pairs to analyze paragraph 26 (from “Let me rush on to mention my other disappointment” to “for integrating Springhill College several years ago”) and answer the following questions before sharing out with the class. Ask students to take out their Rhetorical Impact Tracking Tools and record examples of rhetoric they identify as they read and discuss.

Post or project each set of questions below for students to discuss.

What does King cite as the cause of his disappointment in paragraph 26?

- 🗨️ King is disappointed in the white church and its leadership.

What was the first disappointment that King developed in paragraphs 19–25?

- 🗨️ King has been discussing his disappointment with white moderates who have failed to support his cause.

How is this disappointment similar to the disappointment King expressed in the second sentence of paragraph 19? How is it different?

- 🗨️ Student responses may include:
 - In paragraph 19, King expressed his disappointment with white moderates who have failed to support his cause.
 - In paragraph 26, King expresses a similar disappointment with the white church, which has also failed to take a stand.
 - However, King now shifts the focus of his criticism to “the white church and its leadership” (par. 26).

What is the impact of King’s shift from criticizing white moderates in general to “the white church and its leadership” in specific?

- 🗨️ Student responses may include:
 - By criticizing the white church, King begins to undermine the moral authority of those who do not support his cause, including the “fellow clergymen” (greeting and par. 22) to whom he addresses his letter.
 - In calling into question the moral authority of the white church, King continues to take the moral high ground.

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

What do we know about those whom King is addressing and their connection to “the white church and its leadership”?

- King has referred to those he is addressing as “my fellow clergymen” in paragraph 22; it seems likely that at least some of those he is addressing represent “the white church and its leadership” (par. 26).

What differences do you notice between King’s discussion of white moderates in paragraph 19 and his introduction of his disappointment with the church in paragraph 26?

Student responses may include:

- In paragraph 19, King is strongly critical of white moderates: he states that he has been “gravely” disappointed, and suggests that the white moderate who “prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice” is more of a “stumbling block in the stride toward freedom” than those who actively oppose civil rights.
- In paragraph 19, King condemns white moderates as a group, without making any exceptions.
- In paragraph 26, however, King refers to “notable exceptions” of “significant stands” and gives examples such as the Reverend Stallings, who welcomed black worshippers to his Church on a non-segregated basis, as well as the integration of Springhill College.
- King uses the pronoun “you,” addressing his audience directly when he speaks of these “notable exceptions,” saying “each of you has taken significant stands” (par. 26).
- King repeats the phrase “I commend” to emphasize his praise for the “notable exceptions” (par. 26).
- By using the phrase “of course” (par. 26), King implies that it is an obvious truth that there are white church leaders who have taken a stand on civil rights.

How do these differences change the tone of King’s criticism?

- By admitting that there are exceptions to the failure of the white church and including at least some of his addressees in those exceptions, King softens his criticism of the white church.

① If students struggle, consider reminding them that “tone” is the writer’s attitude towards a subject.

Explain to students that this technique of softening criticism by acknowledging a point made by one’s opponent is known as *concession*.

What is the impact of King’s use of concession in paragraph 26?

Student responses may include:

- By conceding that there are “notable exceptions” (par. 26) to the general failure of the white church and addressing some of them directly, King avoids offending his partners in the movement and keeps their attention.

- King’s use of concession keeps his tone measured and reasonable, allowing him to take the moral high ground.
- King uses concession to develop his argument that “notable exceptions” (par. 26) are not enough, and so reinforces his argument that the church as an institution is failing.

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of student responses. Remind students to record King’s use of rhetoric in paragraph 26 as discussed here.

Explain to students that they are going to participate in a jigsaw discussion. Assign students to analyze one of the following three sections in their pairs: paragraphs 27–28, paragraphs 29–30, or paragraphs 31–32. Ensure that the three sections of the excerpt are evenly distributed throughout the class. In other words, several pairs should read and analyze each section. Remind pairs to record examples of rhetoric they identify as they read and discuss.

Post or project the following questions for students reading paragraphs 27–28 (from “But despite these notable exceptions, I must reiterate” to “the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows”) to answer in pairs before sharing out with a jigsaw group.

What is the impact of the use of the word “but” at the beginning of paragraph 27?

- 💬 The word “but” marks a shift away from concession to criticism.

What phrases does King repeat in paragraphs 26 and 27?

- 💬 Student responses may include:
 - King repeats “I have been disappointed” (par. 26 and 27).
 - King repeats “notable exceptions” (par. 26 and 27).

What is the impact of King’s use of repetition in paragraphs 26 and 27?

- 💬 Student responses may include:
 - The repetition of “I have been disappointed” (par. 26 and 27) emphasizes King’s disappointment.
 - The repetition of “notable exceptions” (par. 26 and 27) emphasizes that although there have been exceptions, they are only exceptions and not the rule.

① Consider reminding students that *repetition* is a rhetorical strategy that means the repeating of a word or phrase in order to provide emphasis.

How does King describe his relationship to the church in paragraph 27? How does he use rhetoric to underline that relationship?

🗨️ Student responses may include:

- King reminds his reader that he is not “one of those negative critics” of the church but rather, part of the church as “a minister of the gospel” (par. 27). He is speaking to his audience not as a critical outsider but as one of them.
- King uses repetition to emphasize his point, repeating the word “who” at the beginning of multiple phrases.

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

What does King say that he is in paragraph 27?

🗨️ He says that he is “a minister of the gospel” (par. 27).

What does King say that he is not?

🗨️ He is not “one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church” (par. 27).

How does King understand his relationship to the church and the clergymen?

🗨️ He understands himself as being within the church and with the clergymen, his addressees.

How does King use maternal imagery to develop his relationship with the church?

🗨️ King personifies the church as a kind of mother to him with the phrase “who was nurtured in its bosom” (par. 27).

① If necessary, remind students of their work with *personification* in the 10.2.1 Lesson 13 study of Tagore’s poem “Freedom.”

① Consider drawing students’ attention to their application of standard L.9-10.5.a through the process of interpreting figurative language.

In paragraph 28, what does King say that he expected from the white church?

🗨️ King expected that “we would have the support of the white church” and that leaders of the white church would be “some of our strongest allies” (par. 28).

What was the reality that he found?

🗨️ Student responses may include:

- Some white church leaders were “outright opponents” (par. 28) of the freedom movement.

- Many others were “more cautious than courageous” (par. 28) and refused to support King’s movement.

Post or project the following questions for students reading paragraphs 29–30 (from “In spite of my shattered dreams of the past” to “between bodies and souls, the sacred and the secular”) to answer in pairs before sharing out with a jigsaw group.

How had King’s expectations changed when he came to Birmingham in paragraph 29?

- Whereas King had expectations before, the “strange feeling” (par. 28) that the white church would support him, now he only had “hope” (par. 29).

What criticism does King unfold of the church leadership in paragraph 30?

- Student responses may include:
 - King criticizes the church leaders for failing to take a moral stand: “I have heard numerous religious leaders of the South call upon their worshippers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers say, follow this decree because integration is morally right and the Negro is your brother” (par. 30).
 - King criticizes the church leadership for separating spiritual and secular matters, for making “a strange distinction between bodies and souls, the sacred and the secular” (par. 30).

What type of evidence does King give to support his criticisms of the church leadership in paragraph 30?

- King gives direct, personal, eyewitness evidence. He refers to things that he himself has seen and heard: “I have heard . . . I have watched . . . I have watched” (par. 30).

How does King use specific word choices and rhetoric to support his criticism of the white church in paragraph 30?

- Student responses may include:
 - King uses verbs related to sense and perception to indicate that he has been a witness to what he describes. “I have heard”; “I have watched” (par. 30).
 - He repeats the pronoun “I” to emphasize that he himself has seen and heard the failings of the white church and its leadership.
 - He uses repetition to underline his point: he repeats the phrases “in the midst” and “so many” (par. 30).
 - He uses alliteration such as “stand on the sidelines” and “merely mouth” (par. 30) to draw attention to his descriptions of the failure of the white church.

Post or project the following questions for students reading paragraphs 31–32 (from “There was a time when the church was very powerful” to “the church’s often vocal sanction of things as they are”) to answer in pairs before sharing out with a jigsaw group.

In paragraph 31, what does King suggest made the early church powerful?

- ☞ The early church was powerful because Christians were happy to suffer for what they believed in.

What image does King use to explain and describe the power of the early church in paragraph 31?

- ☞ King compares the early church to a thermostat, which did not merely record popular opinion and customs, like a thermometer, but actively changed them.

What does King mean when he describes the modern church as the “arch supporter of the status quo” in paragraph 32?

- ☞ King means that the church is the principal defender of existing conditions.
- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle with this, consider asking them to define *arch* in the phrase “arch enemy.”
 - ☞ In this context *arch* means principal or most important.
 - ▶ Students write the definition of *arch* on their copy of the text or in a vocabulary journal.
- ① Also, consider reminding students of their work with the phrase “status quo” in 10.2.1 Lesson 7.

How does King contrast the early church and the modern church in paragraphs 31–32?

- ☞ Student responses may include:
 - King describes the early church as “very powerful” in paragraph 31, but he claims that, “things are different now” at the beginning of paragraph 32. He describes the church as having “a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound” (par. 32).
 - The early church was a force for change that disturbed existing power structures: “[the church] transformed the mores of society” (par. 31). In contrast, King describes the modern church as “the arch supporter of the status quo” (par. 32).

What is King’s purpose in these paragraphs? How does this contrast between the early church and the modern church advance this purpose?

- ☞ Student responses may include:

- King's purpose is to criticize the white church and by extension the clergymen, his addressees.
- By contrasting the early church as a force for change with the modern church as "so often the arch supporter of the status quo" (par. 32), King implies the modern church should be doing more to promote social change.
- The contrast that King draws between the early and the modern church develops King's representation of himself as a messenger, which he introduced in paragraph 3: he likens himself and his cause to early Christians who brought about social change.
- Through the comparison with early Christians, King takes the moral high ground, lining himself up with a cause to which his addressees can relate.

When pairs have completed their analysis of their section, direct them to split up and form a group with two other students, each of whom have analyzed a different section. In other words, students form groups of three to share their responses to their section of text. Remind students to record King's use of rhetoric in paragraphs 27–32 as discussed here. Circulate to ensure student comprehension.

Instruct students to remain in their new jigsaw groups in order to read and discuss paragraph 33 (from "But the judgment of God is upon the church" to "whose disappointment with the church has risen to outright disgust"). Post or project the following questions for students to answer in groups before sharing out with the class.

What claim does King make about the church in paragraph 33?

💬 Student responses may include:

- King claims the church is at a decisive moment as "the judgment of God is upon the church as never before" (par. 33).
- King warns that the church is in danger of becoming "an irrelevant social club" (par. 33).

How does King support his claim about the church in paragraph 33?

💬 Student responses may include:

- King invokes God by warning that "the judgment of God is upon the church" (par. 33).
- King cites the young people that he meets "every day" who have expressed "disappointment" and even "disgust" with the church (par. 33).

What is the impact of King's choice of the word "disappointment" in paragraph 33?

💬 Student responses may include:

- King's choice of the word "disappointment" (par. 33) echoes King's expression of his own disappointment with the church.

- Some students may note that the repetition of the prefix *dis-* in “disappointment” and “disgust” draws a connection between the two, emphasizing the change from mere “disappointment” to “outright disgust” (par. 33).

Lead a brief, whole-class discussion of class responses. Remind students to record King’s use of rhetoric in paragraph 33 as discussed here.

Activity 5: Quick Write

15%

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

How does King unfold his analysis of the church in paragraphs 26–33? Provide three or more examples from the text to support your response.

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 6: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to reread paragraphs 26–33 (from “Let me rush on to mention my other disappointment” to “whose disappointment with the church has risen to outright disgust”) and annotate for central ideas using the annotation code CI.

Also for homework, 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 26–33 and annotate for central ideas using the annotation code CI.

Also, 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 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
Concession: technique of softening criticism by acknowledging a point made by one’s opponent	“I am not unmindful that each of you has taken some significant stands” (par. 26)	The use of concession here makes King appear moderate and reasonable, in contrast to criticisms of him as being “extreme.”
Repetition	“I have been disappointed” (par. 26 and 27)	King uses repetition to underline his disappointment. At the same time, he calls attention to a slight variation—King broadens his criticism from “the white church and its leadership” (par. 26) to “the church” (par. 27) as a whole.
Personification: a type of figurative language that describes giving	“who loves the church, who was nurtured in its bosom” (par. 27)	King personifies the church as a kind of mother to him with the phrase “who was nurtured in its bosom” (par. 27). He emphasizes his closeness to the church through this image.

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
human qualities or characteristics to a nonliving object or idea		
Imagery	“as long as the cord of life shall lengthen” (par. 27)	King uses imagery to highlight his devotion to the church.
Alliteration	“as long as the cord of life shall lengthen” (par. 27)	King uses alliteration to highlight his image of life as a cord.
Repetition	Repeats pronoun “I” in “I have seen” and “I have heard” (par. 30)	Repetition of “I” emphasizes that King is reporting what he has seen directly.
Alliteration	“stand on the sidelines” and “merely mouth” (par. 30)	King uses alliteration to draw attention to his descriptions of the failure of the white church.
Imagery	“the church was not merely a thermometer that recoded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was the thermostat that transformed the mores of society” (par. 31)	Through imagery, King shows vividly how the church did not merely reflect society, but also transformed it.
Alliteration	“sacrificial spirit” (par. 33)	King uses alliteration to call attention to the phrase “sacrificial spirit” (par. 33).
Repetition	Repeats the word disappointment from paragraphs 26 and 17 and the prefix <i>dis-</i> (par. 33): “I meet young people every day whose disappointment with the church has risen to outright disgust”	King’s choice of the word “disappointment” echoes King’s expression of his own disappointment with the church, and the repetition of the prefix <i>dis-</i> in “disappointment” and “disgust” draws a connection between the two, emphasizing the change from mere “disappointment” to “outright disgust” (par. 33).