### Title of Lesson:
Dr. King and His Advice For DreamsDeferred

### Lesson By:
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<th>Grade Level/ Subject Areas:</th>
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| High School- English Language Arts and Social Studies | Can be modified for any class size | 2, 95 minute classes (can be extended to several days with activities)

### Guiding Questions:
- How did King deal with the failure or deferment of his dream for America?
- What nonviolent strategies helped direct the frustration of the oppressed into nonviolent expression?
- What can we do to avoid despair when we are striving toward a goal and there are hardships to be faced?

### Lesson Abstract:
This lesson focuses on how we process frustration and despair when our goals are delayed and the path is full of hardships. Dr. King, as well as other leaders of the civil rights movement, was faced with the challenge of maintaining the positive, nonviolent focus of millions of protestors as they continued to actively practice noncooperation. Students will look at King’s public addresses which warn of the dangers and offer advice. Students will also look at “Harlem: A Dream Deferred,” by Langston Hughes and compare Hughes’ insights into the impact of delayed goals to King’s writings.

### Lesson Content:

**Dr. King and his advice for a Dream Deferred.**

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it--always.’

*Mohandas K. Gandhi*  
*Indian political and spiritual leader (1869 - 1948)*

Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the leaders of the civil rights movement faced with the task of elevating, harnessing, and maintaining the energy of millions of African Americans in the nonviolent struggle for freedom during the 50’s and 60’s. Change was needed, but slow in coming. How did Dr. King maintain his self-discipline and avoid despair while experiencing delays and frustrations? What advice did he integrate into his sermons and speeches in order to encourage and support the spirits of his nonviolent army?

Imbued in his public addresses were words of fortification intended to reinforce the principles of nonviolence. The importance of accepting the hardships and consequences resulting from pursuit of nonviolent resistance was emphasized. King also reiterated the critical importance of avoiding internal, or psychological, and external violence. As the protests continued, endurance and hope occasionally waned. King warned against resentment and bitterness urging
acceptance of the challenges and faith in the justice of the cause.

During the 1957 meeting of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in St. Louis, Missouri King warned of the consequences of violence born from repressed anger and frustration.

“If the American Negro and the other victims of oppression succumb to the temptation of using violence in the struggle for freedom, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and their chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos” (Clayborne, p. 323-4).

As a prominent and well educated spokesperson of the oppressed, King bridged the cultural gap between the majority and minority. This statement portrays the destructive force of oppression and possible outcome should the privileged classes continue to ignore the plight of those less fortunate.

April 16th, 1963 King composed a “Letter from Birmingham Jail” in response to a criticism published by eight clergymen. He refuted claims of extremism drawing attention to the violent tactics of the black nationalist groups and discussed the two opposing forces of the negro community. One force, stripped of self-respect, was complacent while the other force was full of bitterness and hatred. The result of frustration born of bitterness and hatred, King warned, was a loss of faith in America, Christianity, and the belief that white people are evil. Explaining the focus on nonviolent social activism as a healthy, creative option to complacency and violence, King expressed his concern that without the support of nonviolent efforts “millions of negroes will, out of frustration and despair, seek solace and security in black nationalist ideologies- a development that would inevitably lead to a frightening racial nightmare” (Clayborne, p. 197). This warning was not intended as a threat, but as a caution to victims as well as perpetrators of oppression. In this publicly released letter he reiterated the focus and ideologies of nonviolent intent and process. The repressed emotions resulting from long-standing inequality and oppression would not merely disappear, they must be acted upon. The crucial question was how best to proceed to attain the highest possible outcome.

“So let him march; let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; let him go on freedom rides-and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. So I have not said to my people: "Get rid of your discontent." Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action.” (Clayborne, p. 198).

Not only did King address the misconceptions of the clergymen in this publicly released letter, he also reinforced the central values and disciplines of nonviolent social reform. From Birmingham jail he crafted a powerfully motivational reminder for those on the front lines of the struggle: Let the tremendous collective energy have creative, positive focus. Let the methods used for social change be as pure as the intended goal.

Within a few weeks the jails of Birmingham were filled with well over one thousand protestors. On May 4, 1963 the newspapers revealed the brutality used against peaceful protestors, women and children alike. Images of police wielding clubs and fire hoses while police dogs attacked
children moved the conscience of the nation. Of this individual suffering, King states that they did not feel bitterness.

As national enthusiasm for the movement grew, successful demonstrations illustrated the power of unified nonviolent mass social action. In the pursuit of equality, the freedom fighters experienced varying degrees of police brutality as well as personal reprisals and jail time. Lest momentum should wane or morale decline, the masses marched on Washington in August of 1963. This highly symbolic peaceful protest was a homage to the March on Washington Movement of the 1940’s. Two hundred fifty thousand people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial and heard King’s speech, “I Have a Dream.” King repeated his caution to avoid the use of immoral or wrongful methods to achieve freedom lest the end results be corrupted by the means used to attain them.

He spoke to external violence (that perpetrated against others) and internal violence which damages the self. Like Langston Hughes, King was concerned about the corrosive emotional and psychological damage caused by bitterness, frustration, and anger. Perhaps the easiest and basest reaction to racial prejudice is to blindly return that bias. King warned against a general racial hatred of their oppressors, drawing attention to the presence of conscientious objectors who had joined the freedom struggle.

“Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred…Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force…must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny.”

(Clayborne, p. 225)

King also endeavored to fortify against despair by speaking to the hardships incurred through not only oppression but also protest. Acknowledging the injuries suffered by police brutality, incarceration, and life in the ghettos, he urged them to persevere. “You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.”

(Clayborne, p. 225)

“Harlem: A Dream Deferred,” written by Langston Hughes in 1951, spoke to the previously mentioned corrosive effects of frustrated dreams. Throughout many of his public addresses, King cautions against destructive expression and offers alternative options for creative, productive expression of the desire for change. Rather than letting the desire for freedom, equality, and social change “dry up like a raisin in the sun,… fester like a sore,… stink like rotten meat,…crust and sugar over,… sag like a heavy load… or explode” King and his fellow leaders in nonviolent protest offered another choice. (Hughes, lines 2-11) Frustration, disappointment, anger, outrage, and despair could be transformed into proactive, organized action- noncooperation with systemic injustice.

A value endemic to mass nonviolent movements is consciousness of the well-being of others. This concept known as sarvodaya by Gandhi, was referred to by Dr. King as being “Other-centered.” Increased empathy for the circumstances and experiences of others not only places our own suffering in context but also helps us to understand and eventually love our opponents. Dr. Bernard LaFayette joined the civil rights movement as a student in the Nashville lunch
counter sit-ins. He was extensively trained in the methods of nonviolent action by James Lawson. Dr. LaFayette related his experience in the discipline of other-centeredness when he was attacked by twelve cab drivers. While his body rolled with the kicks and punches his mind was focused on trying to understand the social and cultural experiences that drove his attackers. He was able to forgive his attackers, perhaps love them, by understanding that they were a product of a diseased system. Gandhi believed, as did King, that it is crucial to separate the individual from the system. We may fault the system, institution, or government, but we should love the individual.

In an effort to maintain his, and his fellow nonviolent freedom fighters, determination, discipline, and hope Dr. King diligently revisited the values and methodologies of the movement. He addressed the hazards of resorting to violence and reminded them of the importance of their cause when the hardships felt burdensome. Through sermons, speeches, and published writing King disseminated the ideologies, methodologies, and aspirations of the nonviolent mass movement of the United States while fortifying the participants.

**State Content Standards:** California State Standards

### 3.0 Literary Response and Analysis

Students read and respond to historically or culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and social science. They conduct in-depth analyses of recurrent patterns and themes.

**Narrative Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text**

3.5 Compare works that express a universal theme and provide evidence to support the ideas expressed in each work.

**Literary Criticism**

3.12 Analyze the way in which a work of literature is related to the themes and issues of its historical period. (Historical approach)

**Materials Needed:**

- Handouts: “Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes, “I Have A Dream” by Dr. King
- Recommended: video of King’s speech [http://www.mlkonline.net/video-i-have-a-dream-speech.html](http://www.mlkonline.net/video-i-have-a-dream-speech.html)
- Journals and writing utensils

**Suggested Teaching Activities:**

1. View King’s speech *in its entirety*. As a class re-read his speech annotating and circling all repeated phrases.
   - Challenge students to find at least 7 segments focused on one repeated phrase or device. (i.e. one hundred years later)
   - Ask students to look for juicy similes and metaphors. (i.e. promissory note)
   - Ask students to underline and star sources of authority referred to by King. (i.e. Emancipation Proclamation)

Share out as a class. Teacher or student records student responses on the whiteboard. First have students list in order the repeated phrases/devices. (Use these to discuss his speech)
structure and intended outcome.) Next share juicy uses of figurative language (promissory note is very popular) then the sources of authority which legally support the cause.

2. Return to the ninth and tenth paragraphs. Ask students what they think King means by not drinking from the cup of bitterness. Let the discussion follow the students’ insights. Then introduce Langston Hughes, pass out the handout and read “Harlem: A Dream Deferred.” Before giving the students a few minutes to answer the questions on their own, ask them what they think deferred, fester, and montage mean. After sharing out responses in small groups then as a whole class, ask students to identify any similes or metaphors used. Record on board in sequence. Ask students what each figurative expression means to them. Ask for examples from literature, personal experience, movies, etc… of individuals letting their frustrated dream fester, crust over, explode, etc… What are our choices? Hughes vividly and succinctly captures the corrosive and destructive qualities of repressed and frustrated hopes. Are there other ways we can handle our feelings? Do we have choice in how we- or those near us- are impacted?

3. I like to use this before teaching the play A Raisin in the Sun, by Lorraine Hansberry. We return to the speech and poem throughout our reading of the play. I ask students to compare the poem’s metaphor and similes to the characters as they experience their hopeful expectation, suffer from disappointment, and make choices for their futures.

Bibliography:

King, Martin Luther, Jr. Address at St. Augustine, Florida, 1964. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNPryUk9H4c


For streaming video of the speech: http://www.mlkonline.net/video-i-have-a-dream-speech.html

Appendices:
1. “Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes
2. “I Have A Dream” by Dr. King
“Harlem: A Dream Deferred,” from *Montage of a Dream Deferred* by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore -  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over -  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

- Langston Hughes, 1951

*Highlight words or phrases that you find expressive.*

1. What about the language appeals to you?

2. What central question does the poem ask?

3. What are the destructive possibilities of frustration as presented by Hughes (in your own words)?

4. Can you think of examples from your experience or the experiences of others that reflect one or more of these outcomes? (describe)
Martin Luther King, Jr.

"I Have a Dream"

delivered 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of
Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. And those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. And there will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom.

We cannot walk alone.

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead.

We cannot turn back.

There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of
travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their self-hood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: "For Whites Only." We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."¹

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. And some of you have come from areas where your quest -- quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!
I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."²

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

And this will be the day -- this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning:

*My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.*

*Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride,*

*From every mountainside, let freedom ring!*

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.
But not only that:

Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.
From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

*Free at last! Free at last!*

*Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!*

http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm