

Aim:

*Which text makes a more persuasive case for overcoming racism – Martin Luther King’s Detroit “I Have a Dream” speech or the trial closing argument of Atticus Finch in **To Kill a Mockingbird**?*

Instructional Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. analyze the power of rhetoric to persuade, using figurative language and other rhetorical devices such as appeals to God and religion and appeals to the U. S. Constitution;
2. identify the specific rhetorical devices in use in Martin Luther King’s Detroit “Dream” speech and the closing trial argument of Atticus Finch in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, finding both commonalities and differences;
3. explain how the intended audience of a piece of rhetoric shapes the particular rhetorical devices which are used;
4. understand how literature can be commentary on what has occurred in history;
5. describe how the problems of Jim Crow racism in the South were persistent, from its beginnings after the end of Reconstruction until the late 1960s, and included both the time frame of the early 1960s “I Have a Dream” speech and the mid-1930s *To Kill a Mockingbird* book.

Grade Level: Secondary, Grades 9-12

Common Core Standards

Grades 9-10

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1](#) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2](#) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3](#) Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.5](#) Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

Writing

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3](#) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.5](#) Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 9–10 [here](#).)

Speaking and Listening

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1](#) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.3](#) Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

Language

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1](#) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.2](#) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.3](#) Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.4](#) Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grades 9–10 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

Grades 11-12:

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1](#) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2](#) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3](#) Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.5](#) Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

Writing

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3](#) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.5](#) Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 11–12 [here](#).)

Speaking and Listening

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1](#) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.3](#) Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

Language

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.1](#) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.2](#) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3](#) Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.4](#) Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grades 11–12 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

Overarching Understanding:

Length:

This lesson will take one or two fifty minute periods, depending upon the extent of supports needed for different skill levels of students.

Resource Materials:

- Drew Hansen, *The Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Speech that Inspired a Nation*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003. pp. 112-113. Selection from King's Detroit "I Have a Dream" speech provided at the conclusion of this lesson plan.
- Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Pleasantville, NY: Readers' Digest Association, 1993. Selection provided at the conclusion of this lesson plan.

About The Lesson:

This lesson would be part of a longer unit on Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It can be broken up into two periods for English Language Learners or students with special needs, with each period examining one of the two texts.

Write Now:

Prompt: If you were the character Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and had to make a trial closing argument to defend Tom Robinson, what would you say to convince the all-white jury of his innocence?

Independent Practice

Allow students to write 5-8 sentences in response to the prompt for 5 minutes.

Guided Practice

After 5-8 minutes select 2-3 students to share their responses aloud.

Lesson Development:

Place students in groups of four. Have two to four students volunteer to read the two texts to the entire class. As the class follows the reading, have them annotate the text as follows:

- Place a question mark for places where you are confused

- Underline words that stand out to you
- Circle words you do not understand.

Note:

Make sure to explain to students that the version of the “I Have a Dream” speech they are reading is from a speech in Detroit, and not King’s March on Washington speech. King had given several “I Have a Dream” speeches in addition to his most famous speech at the March on Washington. This particular version was delivered at a Detroit rally in June 1963, two months before the March on Washington.

After the speeches are read, ask if there were questions raised or places that needed clarification.

For twenty minutes, students are directed to compare and contrast:

1. How do Martin Luther King and the character Atticus Finch build on their arguments?
2. What situations do they cite in their speeches?
3. Who is their audience? How different is King’s audience from Finch’s audience?
4. What case or point are King and Finch trying to make?
5. In what time period do the two speeches take place?
6. How are the two speeches relevant to the time/story?
7. What commonalities do they share?
8. Why are they significant to our lives and our history?

Ask students to repeat directions so they know what is expected of them and to check for understanding of the task.

Independent Practice

Students work for 15-20 minutes on answering questions and analyzing text. They can place answers to questions on large Post-It Paper to be posted around the room.

Guided Practice

Have students place their posters around the room. As they do so, walk and take down notes on the various responses. As they walk around, ask students what they notice and if they think the answers were the best ones to the questions.

Summary Questions:

What have you learned from these two speeches?

How were they similar and different?

What was the purpose of the lesson?

Homework:

Using the notes from the speeches in class, write your own speech on injustice. Make sure you give examples of the inequalities and solutions to these issues.

Martin Luther King's Detroit "I Have a Dream" Speech

"And so this afternoon, I have a dream.

It is a dream deeply rooted in the American Dream.

I have a dream that one day, right down in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama, the sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to live together as brothers.

I have a dream this afternoon that one day, one day little white children and little Negro children will be able to join hands as brothers and sisters.

I have a dream this afternoon, that one day, one day men will no longer burn down houses and the church of God simply because people want to be free.

I have a dream this afternoon that this will be a day when we will no longer face the atrocities that Emmett Till had to face or Medgar Evers had to face but, that all men can live with dignity.

I have a dream this afternoon that my four little children, that my four little children will not come up in the same young days that I came up within, but they will be judged on the basis on the content of their character, and not the color of their skin.

I have a dream this afternoon that one day, right here in Detroit, Negroes will be able to buy a house or rent a house anywhere that their money will carry them and they will be able to get a job.

Yes, I have a dream this afternoon that one day in this land the words of Amos will become real and justice will roll like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I have a dream this evening that one day we will recognize the words of Jefferson that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I have a dream this afternoon.

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 the flesh shall see it together.

I have a dream this afternoon that the brotherhood of man will become a reality in this day".

The Trial Closing Argument of Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

“Gentlemen, I shall be brief, but I would like to use my remaining time with you to remind you that this case is not a difficult one, it requires no minute sifting of complicated facts but, it does require you to be sure beyond all reasonable doubt as to the guilt of the defendant. To begin with, this case should never have come to trial. This case is as simple as black and white...

She was white, and she tempted a Negro. She did something that in our society is unspeakable: she kissed a black man. Not an uncle, but a strong young Negro man. No code mattered to her before she broke it, but it came crashing down on her afterwards...

We do know in part what Mr. Ewell did: he did what any God-fearing, persevering, respectable white man would do under the circumstances-he swore out a warrant, no doubt signing it with his left hand, and Tom Robinson now sits before you, having taken the oath with the only good hand he possesses-his right hand...

You know the truth, and the truth is: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women-black or white. But this truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men. There is not one person in this courtroom who has never told a lie, who has never done an immoral thing, and there is no man living who has never looked upon a woman without desire...

One more thing, gentlemen, before I quit. Thomas Jefferson once said that all men are created equal, a phrase the Yankees and the distaff of the Executive branch in Washington are fond of hurling at us. There is a tendency in this year of grace, 1935, for certain people to use this phrase out of context, to satisfy all conditions...

We know all men are not created equal in the sense some people who run public education promote the stupid and idle with the industrious- because all men are created equal, educators will gravely tell you, and children left behind suffer terrible feelings of inferiority...

But there is one way in this country in which all men are created equal- there is one human institution that makes a pauper the equal of a Rockefeller, the stupid man the equal of Einstein, and the ignorant man the equal of any college president. That institution, gentlemen, is a court...

Gentlemen, a court is no better than each of you sitting before me on this jury. A court is only as sound as its jury, and a jury is only as sound as the men who make it up. I am confident that you gentlemen will review without passion the evidence you have heard, come to a decision, and restore this defendant to his family. In the name of God, do your duty.”