

Analyzing a Political Speech “I Have a Dream”—MLK Jr.

Certain rhetorical devices called figures of speech (similes, metaphors, allusions, alliterations, etc.) are used in both poetry and prose to make ideas more memorable and forceful. For centuries speakers and writers have known that such devices affect listeners and readers in powerful ways.

On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions

1. In the guide to literary terms in the back of your textbook, find and write the definitions of each of the following: alliteration, allusion, metaphor, repetition, and simile.
2. “Five score years ago,” the opening phrase of King’s speech, is an allusion to what or whom?
3. Why was this an appropriate and strong way for King to begin his speech?
4. King’s speech contains other allusions in addition to the one with which he opens his speech. Find an allusion to the Declaration of Independence.
5. Find an allusion to the Bible.
6. Find an allusion to a famous song.
7. Find three (3) examples of alliteration in King’s speech.
8. Find two (2) examples of a metaphor.
9. Find two (2) examples of a simile.
10. A rhetorical question is a question that is asked for effect rather than to be answered. Find an example of a rhetorical question in King’s speech.
11. Another figure of speech is called an anaphora or the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of a sentence, verse, or paragraph. Besides the famous “I have a dream” phrase, find two (2) other examples of anaphora.
12. What are two possible effects upon King’s audience of repeating the phrase, “I have a dream?”
13. In the second paragraph, King says that “the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.”
 - a. What type of figure of speech is this?
 - b. These words bring up strong images of slavery. Why would this be an effective method of moving his audience?
 - c. What inference was King making about the progress of African Americans to enter the mainstream of American life in the one hundred years which followed the end of slavery?

14. What are some specific acts of injustice against African Americans which King cites in his speech?
15. Besides the Declaration of Independence and the Bible, King cites "the American dream" as a source for his own dream. Write two or three sentences defining "the American Dream."
16. King was assassinated for his work in civil rights. A quotation from the Bible on the memorial at his gravesite reads, "Behold the dreamer. Let us slay him, and we will see what will become of his dream." What do you think has become of King's dream? Write two paragraphs: one telling in what ways the dream has been fulfilled and one telling what yet remains to be accomplished.

After you have completed your questions, create a poster supporting the "I Have a Dream" speech. Your poster (8x10) should include logical, emotional and ethical appeal through words or pictures. It should also reflect MLK's vision for the future.



Ethos (Credibility), or **ethical appeal**, means convincing by the character of the author. We tend to believe people whom we respect. One of the central problems of argumentation is to project an impression to the reader that you are someone worth listening to, in other words making yourself as author into an authority on the subject of the paper, as well as someone who is likable and worthy of respect.

Pathos (Emotional) means persuading by appealing to the reader's emotions. We can look at texts ranging from classic essays to contemporary advertisements to see how pathos, emotional appeals, are used to persuade. Language choice affects the audience's emotional response, and emotional appeal can effectively be used to enhance an argument.

Logos (Logical) means persuading by the use of reasoning. This will be the most important technique we will study, and Aristotle's favorite. We'll look at deductive and inductive reasoning, and discuss what makes an effective, persuasive reason to back up your claims. Giving reasons is the heart of argumentation, and cannot be emphasized enough. We'll study the types of support you can use to substantiate your thesis, and look at some of the common logical fallacies, in order to avoid them in your writing.