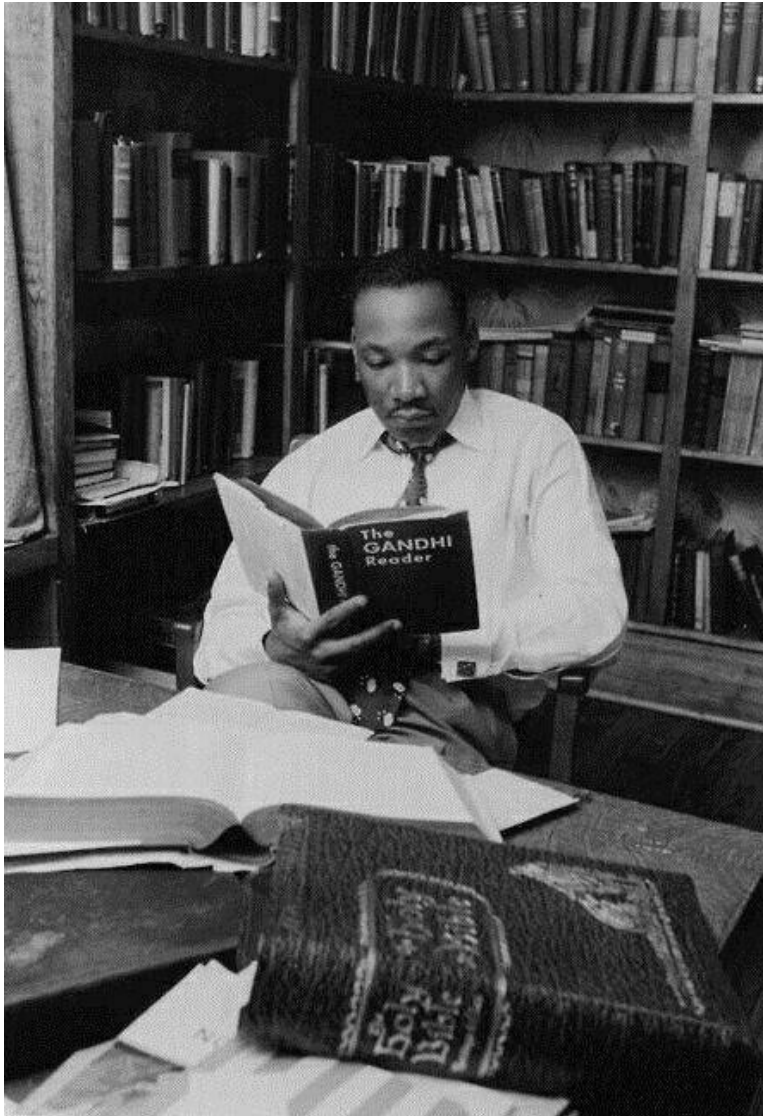


(Quasi) Socratic Seminar
“Letter from A Birmingham Jail”



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the most prominent leader of the Civil Rights movement (1954 – 1968). He was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. He graduated from Morehouse College. Dr. King became nationally recognized when he led the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama (1956). He also led many nonviolent protests and demonstrations against poverty, racism, segregation, and injustice. He and his wife, Coretta Scott King,

had four children. On April 4, 1968, he was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

Socratic Seminar Directions

Students will be divided into pairs. They will pull numbers to determine which questions that they will answer and discuss for (and with) their peers.

Prerequisites: (1) Students should have already thoroughly read the text; (2) students should have the teacher any questions prior to the seminar; (3) students must be prepared to answer questions from peers and the teacher.

1. What action prompted Martin Luther King, Jr., to write the letter?
2. Why did he address the letter to White clergymen?
3. When Dr. King made references to the Bible, what rhetorical device was he using?
4. What references to the Bible did he make in the letter? (Name at least two.)
5. Why do you think he used Biblical references?
6. What justification did Dr. King give for the marches in Birmingham? From the text, cite evidence to support your answer?
7. According to Dr. King, what are the two types of laws?
8. What did Dr. King say about Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam? Why did he mention him in his letter?
9. Which justification for the demonstrations in Birmingham is the most powerful to you?
10. What kind of writing is "Letter from a Birmingham Jail?"
11. Cite one example when Dr. King pathos in his letter.
12. Cite one example when Dr. King used ethos in his letter.
13. Cite one example when Dr. King used logos in his letter.
14. Give one example of "charged language" in Dr. King's letter.
15. Give one example of parallelism in Dr. King's letter.
16. . How does Dr. King address the charge of being labeled an "outsider"?
17. Examine the following quote: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable

network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." What does this quote mean for the people of Birmingham?

18. According to Dr. King, what are the four basic steps that a nonviolent campaign must follow?
19. Why did Dr. King and his supporters initially decide to delay protesting racial injustice?
20. What does Dr. King mean by "constructive nonviolent tension" and how does he define its goal?
21. Read this quote from Dr. King's letter: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed." Can you think of other examples in history that illustrate his point? Explain your answer.
22. According to Dr. King's letter, how does one distinguish between a law that is just, and one that is not? What historical examples does he cite to support his argument?
23. What does Dr. King warn will happen if the Negro community is not allowed to demonstrate through nonviolent actions?
24. According to Dr. King, who are the South's real heroes?
25. Why does Dr. King believe that religious leaders have a special role in leading the resistance against the system of segregation?
26. What are three quotes from the letter when Dr. King uses "allusion"?
27. Give two examples when Dr. King used a rhetorical question in his letter?
28. Give one example of when Dr. King used an analogy in his speech?
29. What do the following words mean: cognizant, affiliate, moratorium, idly, postpone? Share at least one sentence when Dr. King used each word.

30. What to the following words mean: philosopher, ordinance, anarchy, and status quo? Share at least one sentence when Dr. King used each word or expression.
31. What to the following words mean: optimistic, antidote, sanctimonious, and nullification? Share at least one sentence when Dr. King used each word or expression.
32. What to the following words mean: secular, yearnings, profundity, and nullification? Share at least one sentence when Dr. King used each word or expression.
33. At the end of Dr. King's letter, what did he say he would like to do with the men that he was addressing and why?

Deeper Reflection

Can you think any recent examples in the news where the law has been "wrong" or "unjust"? Explain your answer.

Now that you have read Dr. King's letter, determine if he was writing about justice, transformation, or reconciliation. Find out an excerpt from the letter that indicates your choice and be able to defend your selection in the class discussion.