

## Martin's Big Words

by Doreen Rappaport and illustrated by Bryan Collier

### Themes

Never Giving Up  
Resolve  
Determination  
Overcoming Obstacles  
Encouraging Others



This illustrated biography of Dr. Martin Luther King's childhood and adult life draws attention to the meaningful words and statements that echo from the pre-Civil Rights era through today. We learn about Dr. King's resolve to NEVER GIVE UP during his life-long struggle for justice, fairness, equality, and love for all people. 2002 Caldecott Honor Book for distinguished American picture book.

### Key Vocabulary

**Blistering:** extremely hot; severe or harsh (words or weather)

**Indian nation:** referring to country of India and not American Indians

**Movement:** effort made by many to achieve a goal; organized effort to bring about change

**Protest:** doing something publicly to show they are angry and disagree with something that they believe is unfair or wrong

**Segregation:** the practice of keeping people with differences apart and making them live or work separate from others

**Threatened:** warning of trouble or harm to come

**Civil Rights:** rights given by a nation's government to ALL its citizens

## Discussion Starters

1. Remind students of the meaning of imagery and metaphor. Show the illustration of the stained-glass windows that are in the first pages of the book. Tell students that the illustrator intended it as a metaphor.
2. What could the windows represent in a book about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  
*Answers may vary, though one answer is that the multiple colors symbolize multiple races.*
3. Are there other metaphors in the book?  
*Answers may vary, though one answer is that the four candles in the last picture represent the four girls who were killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.*  
Share the illustrator's note in the front of the book to further make these connections.
4. The illustrator used collage as the artistic style for this book. Why might the author and illustrator wanted to choose to use that style for a book about Dr. King?  
*In the collage style, many different things are*

### IMAGERY & METAPHOR

A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that compares two unrelated objects without using the words "like" or "as." *EX: The wheels of justice turn slowly.* Wheels help something move forward. Justice often takes a long time to move forward.

**Imagery** is a visual representation. Imagery is often used in literature in order to help the reader to better understand the meaning of words by using the senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and even emotions.

### The Artistic Style of **COLLAGE**

**Collage** is a type of visual artwork in which diverse and seemingly unconnected things, such as photographs, flowers, newspaper words, hair, or other objects are all pasted upon a surface to form a complete picture.

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*pieced together (even if they don't have a clear relationship to each other). This allows the reader to bring their own meanings, experience and interpretation to the story.*

5. **In the first illustration of Martin and his mother, what do you see in the collage and why do you think the illustrator included each specific detail?**

*You see a waste basket (a waste basket holds things that are unwanted. The young MLK felt bad and unwanted), church steeples (churches and their leaders were actively talking about race issues during this time - some churches supported segregation, other churches said that it was not what God intended for people), windows (a symbol for different views), and arrows (a symbol for change and progress).*

6. **This illustrator, Bryan Collier, commented in an interview that "In storytelling, one image has to introduce the next." Throughout the illustrations in this book, can you identify ways that each image introduces the next image?**

*Some connection could be made on every page. Early in the book, there is a picture of Martin reading the Bible as a child. On the next page, he is grown up and is the preacher at a church.*

7. **Why is this book titled Martin's BIG Words? What are the literal and figurative (metaphorical) meanings of the word "big"?**

*The word "big" does not just mean big in length, but it also means big in significance. The words would make a big difference for billions of people throughout the rest of history.*

8. **In one quote from the book, Martin is saying, "When I grow up, I'm going to get big words, too." What did he mean by this? What would he need to do in order to get what he wanted and intended?**

*He meant that he wanted to grow up with the courage to use words that motivate people to believe in goodness and in love and in a community of peace.*

9. **What obstacles did the civil rights movement face? What obstacles did Dr. King face?**

*Discuss how some goals have many obstacles & can take more than a lifetime to achieve: The supreme court decided in 1896 (Plessy vs. Ferguson) that segregation would be lawfully supported. This was not overturned until 1954 (Brown vs. the Board of Education). In 1956, many black leaders were arrested for leading "bus boycotts." Black voter registration activists are killed in the 60s as they organized for the rights for black people to vote. Dr. King was imprisoned and eventually killed for his civil rights stance.*

10. **What was achieved within Dr. King's lifetime?**

*The busses were desegregated in 1956. The 24th amendment was written to abolish the obstacles that prevented southern blacks from voting. President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin. The law also provided the government with powers to enforce desegregation.*

11. **What parts of Dr. King's dream are still being pursued?**

*Answers could vary widely. Some answers may allude to every race being equally represented when it comes to good housing, health care, wealth and leadership.*

12. **How is the Civil Rights movement an example of people never giving up?**

*People never gave up on the dream that racial justice and equality could be achieved in the US despite the hardships, riots, police brutality, that all of the civil rights organizers would face*

 PRINTABLE:

Speech Transcript

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NOTE: If you have students who also speak a language other than English, ask them if they know their chosen "big" words in the other language. *Does it's meaning change at all?*

*throughout their struggle. The struggle toward full racial equality continues to require that people never give up, as it takes many generations to correct the horrible aspects of history.*

### Writing Prompts

Think of something big that you want to do to make better in the world - something that will take your best effort for every year of your life. Why is this thing important enough to you to never give up on, even if it takes many years?

Using at least two sources, research a human/civil rights champion (Examples: Mahatma Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, Aung San Suu Kyi). Write a report that describes two specific situations where, despite a major challenge, this person decided to NEVER GIVE UP on her/his movement? Make a reasoned argument for why never giving up was critical in each situation.

### Activities

#### Big Words

Make copies of the printable, containing the full speech text of *I Have a Dream*, for each student. Instruct students to highlight five words that have the "biggest" meaning for them, personally. Ask students: *How would you explain the meaning of those words to someone else? Why are each of those words personally important to you?*

#### Little "Big" Speech

Using the "big" words that you highlighted from the *I Have a Dream* speech, create a short speech about a "big" dream you have for your school, country, or world. Incorporate at least one picture to support your presentation and start your speech with: *"I have a dream that one day..."*

#### "Big" Signs

Divide students into small groups. Assign each group to make signs that declare a "big" word. Then, using art materials (markers, colored pencils) and/or collage materials (newspaper, magazines), add imagery that supports the big word on the sign. Once signs are completed, have groups present the meanings of their signs to the rest of the class.

### Resources

#### For more info...

Accelerated Reading Quiz: 57412

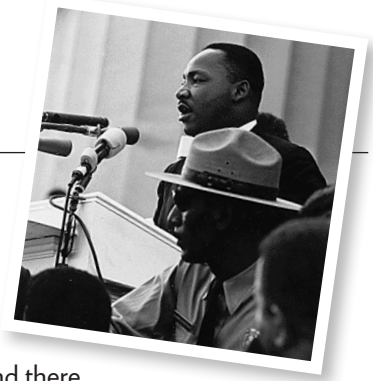
Speech Audio: [www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkhaveadream.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkhaveadream.htm) (apprx. 17 mins)

National Archives: [www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf)

# I Have a Dream

Martin Luther King Jr.

28 August 28, 1963, 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.”<sup>1</sup>

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

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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."<sup>2</sup>

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, and 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!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Amos 5:24 (rendered precisely in The American Standard Version of the Holy Bible)

<sup>2</sup>Isaiah 40:4-5 (King James Version of the Holy Bible). Quotation marks are excluded from part of this moment in the text because King's rendering of Isaiah 40:4 does not precisely follow the KJV version from which he quotes (e.g., "hill" and "mountain" are reversed in the KJV). King's rendering of Isaiah 40:5, however, is precisely quoted from the KJV.

<sup>3</sup>At: [http://www.negrospirituals.com/news-song/free\\_at\\_last\\_from.htm](http://www.negrospirituals.com/news-song/free_at_last_from.htm)

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