

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING CREATIVELY ABOUT MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

EXERCISES

- Write an essay that contemplates the significance of the first African American President. How did the election impact your feelings about race in America? What do you think will be the new challenges for race relations in America and/or the world?
- “King was especially inspired by gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, who joined him at several rallies” (Kim Lawton, PBS Religion & Ethics, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week620/feature.html>). Which musicians or artists do you connect to King’s legacy of activism, equality, and peace? Quote some of their lyrics and include them in a poem, short story or essay about King.
- Visit your local library and find some speeches or writings by Martin Luther King, Jr. Select a speech you’ve never heard or read before. Quote one of the lines from the speech (or letter) and use it as the first line of a short story or as the refrain of a poem. Resist the temptation of using the familiar “I Have a Dream,” speech, and take advantage of the opportunity to learn something new about Dr. King while writing something new!
- On February 9, 1959 King visited New Delhi, India. He is quoted as saying: "To other countries I may go as a tourist, but to India I come as a pilgrim" (The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/liberation_curriculum/lesson_plans/index.htm). What does it mean to “come as a pilgrim”? Has a visit to another place ever influenced or changed the way you see the world? How did the visit open your eyes to the struggles of someone else?
- Review the following quotes by or about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Notice the variety of topics that emerge from the quotes, and consider how you might use one or more of the ideas to begin an essay, poem, or short story of your own:

“The impulse to art, the impulse to creativity is very similar to the impulse to spirituality and to imagining and creating a more humane society. It’s a way to connect to something that gives you deep roots. And with the roots, then you’re kind of able to stretch out and move in directions that perhaps you wouldn’t have had the strength or the inspiration to do otherwise.”

--Dr. Rachel Harding (Veterans of Hope Project)

“Many labels were attached to him during his lifetime. He was called a civil rights activist; he was called a social activist, a social change agent, a world figure. But I

think he thought of himself first and foremost as a preacher, as a Christian pastor.” –Lewis Baldwin

“Perhaps he was more courageous than soldiers who fight and die on the battlefield. There is an element of compulsion in their dying. But when Martin Luther faced death again and again, and finally embraced it, there was no external pressure. He was acting on an inner compulsion that drove him on. More courageous than those who advocate violence as a way out, for they carry weapons of destruction for defense. But Martin Luther faced the dogs, the police, jail, heavy criticism, and finally death; and he never carried a gun, not even a knife to defend himself. He had only his faith in a just God to rely on; and the belief that "thrice is he armed who has his quarrels just." The faith that Browning writes about when he says:

‘One who never turned his back but marched breast forward, / Never doubted clouds would break, / Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph, / Held we fall to rise, and baffled to fight better, / Sleep to wake.’” --Benjamin Mays, Eulogy of Martin Luther King delivered April 9, 1968

- King’s legacy is rich, multifaceted, and far-reaching. Men, women, and children of all ethnicities have benefited from his work. Do not feel limited by the exercises on these pages. Experiment with what you learn about King, and use that knowledge in your writing.

This contest is not looking for research papers recounting the life and work of Dr. King. Rather, we are looking for personal narratives dealing with individual experiences with racial difference, or personal reflections on King’s legacy, which rely on concrete detail.

THE DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES IS MONDAY, DECEMBER 8th, 2008

**To view programs and writings from previous MLK Day celebrations at Carnegie Mellon University please visit:
http://english.cmu.edu/degrees/ba_cw/mlk/mlk_awards.html*