

An Icon of Civil Rights

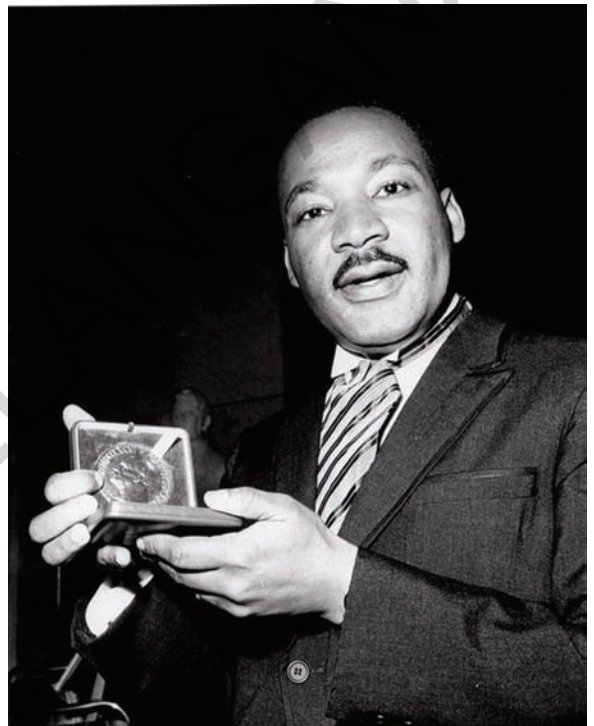
Martin Luther King's Acceptance Speech, on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, December 10, 1964.

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness, Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I accept the Nobel Prize for Peace at a moment when 22 million Negroes of the United States of America are engaged in a creative battle to end the long night of racial injustice. I accept this award on behalf of a civil rights movement which is moving with determination and a majestic scorn for risk and danger to establish a reign of freedom and a rule of justice. I am mindful that only yesterday in Birmingham, Alabama, our children, crying out for brotherhood, were answered with fire hoses, snarling dogs and even death. I am mindful that only yesterday in Philadelphia, Mississippi, young people seeking to secure the right to vote were brutalized and murdered. And only yesterday more than 40 houses of worship in the state of Mississippi alone were bombed or burned because they offered a sanctuary to those who would not accept segregation. I am mindful that debilitating and grinding poverty afflicts my people and chains them to the lowest rung of the economic ladder.

Therefore, I must ask why this prize is awarded to a movement which is beleaguered and committed to unrelenting struggle; to a movement which has not won the very peace and brotherhood which is the essence of the Nobel Prize.

After contemplation, I conclude that this award which I receive on behalf of that movement is a profound recognition that nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political



and moral question of our time - the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to violence and oppression. Civilization and violence are antithetical concepts. Negroes of the United States, following the people of India, have demonstrated that nonviolence is not sterile passivity, but a powerful moral force which makes for social transformation. Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love. The tortuous road which has led from Montgomery, Alabama to Oslo bears witness to this truth. This is a road over which millions of Negroes are travelling to find a new sense of dignity. This same road has opened for all Americans a new era of progress and hope. It has led to a new Civil Rights Bill, and it will, I am convinced, be widened and lengthened into a super highway of justice as Negro and white men in increasing numbers create alliances to overcome their common problems.

I accept this award today with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of mankind. I refuse to accept despair as the final response to the ambiguities of history. I refuse to accept the idea that the "isness" of man's present nature makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal "oughtness" that forever confronts him. I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life, unable to influence the unfolding events which surround him. I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.

I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of thermonuclear destruction. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why 'right' temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. I believe that even amid today's mortar bursts and whining bullets, there is still hope for a brighter tomorrow. I believe that wounded justice, lying prostrate on the blood-flowing streets of our nations, can be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men. I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centered men have torn down, men other-centered can build up. I still believe that one day

mankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive good will proclaim the rule of the land. "And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree and none shall be afraid." I still believe that We Shall overcome!

This faith can give us courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom. When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, we will know that we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born.

Today I come to Oslo as a trustee, inspired and with renewed dedication to humanity. I accept this prize on behalf of all men who love peace and brotherhood. I say I come as a trustee, for in the depths of my heart I am aware that this prize is much more than an honor to me personally.

Every time I take a flight, I am always mindful of the many people who make a successful journey possible - the known pilots and the unknown ground crew.

So you honour the dedicated pilots of our struggle who have sat at the controls as the freedom movement soared into orbit. You honor, once again, Chief Lutuli of South Africa, whose struggles with and for his people, are still met with the most brutal expression of man's inhumanity to man. You honor the ground crew without whose labour and sacrifices the jet flights to freedom, could never have left the earth. Most of these people will never make the headline and their names will not appear in Who's Who. Yet when years have rolled past and when the blazing light of truth is focused on this marvelous age in which we live - men and women will know and children will be taught that we have a finer land, a better people, a more noble civilization - because these humble children of God were willing to suffer for righteousness' sake.

I think Alfred Nobel would know what I mean when I say that I accept this award in the spirit of a curator of some precious heirloom which he holds in trust for its true owners - all those to whom beauty is truth and truth beauty - and in whose eyes the beauty of genuine brotherhood and peace is more precious than diamonds or silver or gold.

- Martin Luther King Jr.

About the speaker

Martin Luther King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. King, both a Baptist minister and civil rights activist, had a seismic impact on race relations in the United States, beginning in the mid 1950s. Among many efforts, King headed the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference). Through his activism, he played a pivotal role in ending the legal segregation of African-American citizens in the South and other areas of the nation, as well as the creation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. King received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, among several other honors. King was assassinated in April 1968, and continues to be remembered as one of the most lauded African-American leaders in history, often referenced by his 1963 speech, *"I Have a Dream"*.



Glossary

scorn (<i>n</i>)	:	contempt
hoses (<i>n</i>)	:	pipes for sending out gas
sanctuary (<i>n</i>)	:	shelter and protection
segregation (<i>n</i>)	:	a social system that provides separate facilities for minority groups
debilitating (<i>adj</i>)	:	weakening
antithetical (<i>adj</i>)	:	opposite
elegy (<i>n</i>)	:	a song of sadness
audacious (<i>adj</i>)	:	bold
flotsam and jetsam (<i>n</i>)	:	things thrown away as useless
redemptive good (<i>n.phr</i>)	:	good that frees
heirloom (<i>n</i>)	:	gift from ancestors

Answer the following questions.

1. The speaker talks about “a creative battle” in the beginning of his speech. What does he mean by this phrase?
2. What is Martin Luther King’s speech about? List the issues he is talking about.
3. Do you think that this is an emotive speech? If yes, pick out the expressions that show that it is an emotive speech.
4. What sort of future does the speaker visualize for the Americans and the mankind in general?
5. Everyone has the right to safety and dignity. If this right is abused, it is always the abuser’s fault. How can you resist and report about an abuser?



Vocabulary

I. Given below are the words taken from the reading passage listed as key words. Match the word with the meaning as used in the text.

Key word	Choice words
afflict	affect, touch, cause pain
beleaguered	experienced criticism, shattered, humiliated
retaliation	violation ,reformation, revenge
tortuous	complicated, unclear, straight
prostrate	lie flat, roll on, unmoved
turmoil	certainty, great confusion, trouble
curator	representative, person in charge, physician

II. Read the following expressions taken from the reading passage.

1. blazing light of truth
 2. wounded justice
 3. majestic scorn
- Do they have any specific meaning?
 - Why does the speaker use such expressions?

The above phrases are figurative expressions. They mean a word or a phrase used in a different way from its usual meaning in order to create a particular mental image

or effect to add interest to a speech or a writing. Here the two words that convey opposite meaning are combined together to get a positive meaning.

Now read the passage once again and pick out the figurative expressions. Find out the meanings of all the expressions including the ones given above.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.



Writing

I. You have listened to the speech delivered by Subhash Chandra Bose and read the speech by Martin Luther King Jr.

Let's analyze their speeches.

Discuss the following questions in groups.

- How do they begin their speeches?
- Do you find any logical sequence of ideas in their speeches?
- What sort of language do they use? (Persuasive, argumentative, emotive)
- Do you notice any quotations, examples? (to support their argument)
- Do they use any linkers for cohesion?
- Do they maintain unity of ideas/ thoughts for coherence?
- What expressions do they use to conclude their speeches?

II. Prepare a speech on the following occasion in your school.

Independence Day.

You can use some of the quotations given in the box.

- Lock up your libraries if you like, but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.

- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

- I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.

- S. G. Tallentyre

- He who has overcome his fears will truly be free.

- Aristotle

- Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being. With freedom comes responsibility. For the person who is unwilling to grow up, the person who does not want to carry his own weight, this is a frightening prospect.

- Eleanor Roosevelt, *You Learn by Living*

- Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

- Martin Luther King Jr.



Project Work

Collect information about the great leaders who fought for the freedom of our country. Arrange the information in the table given below:

- Discuss in groups and write down the questions you will need to get the information.
- On the basis of the information collected in the table below, write a brief biographical sketch of any one of them and present it before the class.

Name of the leader	Personal details		Movements in which they participated	Pains / hardships they faced	The qualities that you like in them
	Date of birth	Place of birth			

Self Assessment

How well have I understood this unit?



Read and tick (✓) in the appropriate box.

Indicators	Yes	Somewhat	No
I read and understood the text:			
A. A Long Walk to Freedom			
B. Freedom			
C. An Icon of Civil Rights			
I was able to identify the most appropriate meanings given under 'Vocabulary'.			
I was able to do 'defining relative clauses and noun phrases' activity given under 'Grammar'.			
I was able to write an essay on discrimination in life given under 'Writing'.			
I was able to participate in the debate on the topic, 'Women should work in the kitchen and Men in office' given under 'Oral Activity'.			
I was able to complete the chronological table given under 'Study Skills'.			
I listened to and understood the speech of Subhash Chandra Bose, answered the questions.			
I was able to understand the figurative expressions and did the exercises given under 'Vocabulary'.			
I was able to understand the features of an ideal speech and prepare a speech on the occasion of Independence Day under 'Writing'.			
I was able to complete the 'Project Work'.			