Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Class Period: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Stride Toward Freedom

Martin Luther King Jr.

**Background:** *In the 1950’s the civil rights movement focused its efforts on overturning the so-called Jim Crow laws, the segregation laws that kept African Americans from equal participation in public life. In 1954, the Supreme Court issued its decision in the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education. In this decision, the court declared that “separate but equal” education, a central provision of segregationist policy, was inherently discriminatory. Buoyed by this win, civil rights activists began to challenge Jim Crow through other forms of peaceful protest, such as the year-long mass boycott of segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama, beginning in 1955. In the Stride Toward Freedom, published in 1958, a confident and optimistic King describes the philosophy behind the successful boycott.*

Oppressed people deal with their oppression in three characteristic ways. One in the way is acquiescence: the oppressed resign themselves to their doom. They tacitly[[1]](#footnote-1) adjust themselves to oppression, and thereby become conditioned to it. In every movement toward freedom some of the oppressed prefer to remain oppressed. Almost 2,800 years ago Moses set out to lead the children of Israel from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land[[2]](#footnote-2). He soon discovered that slaves do not always welcome their deliverers. They become accustomed to being slaves. They would rather bear those ills they have, as Shakespeare pointed out, then flee to others that they know not of[[3]](#footnote-3). They prefer the “fleshpots of Egypt” [[4]](#footnote-4)to the ordeals of emancipation.

There is such thing a thing as the freedom of exhaustion. Some people are so worn down by the yoke of oppression that they give up. A few years ago in the slum areas of Atlanta, a Negro guitarist used to sing almost daily: “Been down so long that down don’t bother me.” This is the type of negative freedom and resignation that often engulfs the life of the oppressed.

But this is not the way out. To accept an unjust system is to cooperate with that system; thereby the oppressed become evil as the oppressor. Noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. The oppressed must never allow the conscience of the oppressor to slumber. Religion reminds every man that he is his brother’s keeper[[5]](#footnote-5). To accept injustice or segregation passively is to say to the oppressor that his actions are morally right. It is a way of allowing his conscience to fall asleep. So acquiescence—while often the easier way—is not the moral way. It is the way of the coward. The Negro cannot win the respect of his oppressor by acquiescing; he merely increases the oppressor’s arrogance and contempt. Acquiescence is interpreted as proof of the Negro inferiority. The Negro cannot win the respect of the white people of the South or the peoples of the world if he is willing to sell the future of his children for his personal and mediate comfort and safety.

A second way that oppressed people sometimes deal with oppression is to resort to physical violence and corroding hatred. Violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones.

Violence as a way of achieving racial injustice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. The old law of an eye for an eye[[6]](#footnote-6) leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. A voice echoes through time saying to every potential Peter, “Put up your sword[[7]](#footnote-7).” History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations that failed to follow this command.

If the American Negro and other victims of oppression succumb to the temptation of using violence in the struggle for freedom, future generations will be the recipients of a desolate night of bitterness, and our chief legacy to them will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos. Violence is not the way.

The third way to open to oppressed people in their quest for freedom is the way of nonviolence resistance. Like the synthesis[[8]](#footnote-8) in Hegelian philosophy[[9]](#footnote-9), the principle of nonviolent resistance seeks to reconcile the truths of two opposites—acquiescence and violence—while avoiding the extremes and immoralities of both. The nonviolent resister agrees with the person who acquiesces that one should not be physically aggressive toward his opponent but he balances the equation by agreeing with the person of violence that evil must be resisted. He avoids the nonresistance of the former and the violent resistance latter. With nonviolent resistance, no individual or group need submit to any wrong, not need anyone resort to violence in order to right a wrong.

It seems to me that this is the method that must guide the actions of the Negro in the present crisis in race relations. Through nonviolent resistance the Negro will be able to rise to the noble height of opposing the unjust system while loving the perpetrators of the system. The Negro must work passionately and unrelentingly for full stature as a citizen, but he must not use inferior methods to gain it. He must never come to terms with falsehood, malice, hate, or destruction.

Nonviolent resistance makes it possible for the Negro to remain in the South and struggle for his rights. The Negro’s problem will not be solved by running away. He cannot listen to the glib[[10]](#footnote-10) suggestion of those who would urge him to migrate en masse to other sections of the country. By grasping hos great opportunity in the South he can make a lasting contribution to the moral strength of the nation and set a sublime example of courage for generations yet unborn.

By nonviolent resistance, the Negro can also enlist all men of good will in his struggle for equality. The problem is not a purely racial one, with Negros set against whites. In the end, it is not a struggle between people at all, but a tension between justice and injustice. Nonviolent resistance is not aimed against oppressors but against oppression. Under its banner conscience, not racial groups, are enlisted.

If the Negro is to achieve the goal of integration, he must organize himself into a militant and nonviolent mass movement. All three elements are indispensable. The movement for equality and justice can be a success if it has both a mass and militant character; the barriers to be overcome require both. Nonviolence is an imperative in order to bring about ultimate community.

A mass movement of a militant quality that is not at the same time committed to nonviolence tends to generate conflict, which in turn breeds anarchy. The support of the participants and the sympathy of the uncommitted are both inhibited by the threat of that bloodshed will engulf the community. This reaction in turn encourages the opposition to threaten and resort to force. When, however the mass movement repudiates violence while moving resolutely toward its goal, its opponents are revealed as the instigators and practitioners of violence if it occurs. Then public support is magnetically attracted to the advocates of nonviolence, while those who employ violence are literally disarmed by overwhelming sentiment against their stand.

**Comprehension**

Read each of the following questions. Then choose the letter to the best answer.

1. According to King, oppressed people must

1. quietly accept the ills of oppression
2. cooperate with the oppressor’s system
3. resign themselves to negative freedom
4. keep the oppressor’s conscience awake

2. King regards violence as impractical because it

1. results in destruction for all
2. brings momentary results
3. strengthens the oppressor
4. increases injustice

3. The detail that helps you discern the historical context of King’s essay is his

1. reference to Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt
2. depiction of a guitar player in the slums of Atlanta
3. description of how to achieve the goal of integration
4. explanation that anarchy will result from a violent movement

4. Which of these beliefs or premises does King embrace?

1. The African American should migrate en masse to other sections of the country.
2. The struggle for equality must be seen as a struggle between races.
3. It is necessary to accept the fact that slavery causes people to stop resisting.
4. The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everyone blind.

**Vocabulary**

Choose the answer that best explains the meaning of each underlined word.

5. To succumb is to

1. go through
2. push beyond
3. give in
4. leave behind

6. To repudiate something is to

1. reject it
2. complete it
3. defeat it
4. recreate it

7. A militant person is

1. politically unaware
2. randomly angry
3. particularly fair
4. aggressively active

“If We Must Die”

Claude McKay

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 5  10 | If we must die, let it not be like hogs  Hunted and penned in an inglorious[[11]](#footnote-11) spot,  While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,  Making their mock at our accursed lot.  If we must die, O let us nobly die,  So that our precious blood may not be shed  In vain; then even the monsters we defy  Shall be constrained[[12]](#footnote-12) to honor us though dead!  O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!  Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,  And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!  What though before us lies the open grave?  Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,  Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back! |

8. Who is the speaker addressing in the poem?

1. His brother
2. African-Americans
3. White men
4. People against segregation

9. How does the speaker’s portrayal of the enemies as murderous show his perspective?

1. He does not want them to passively accept hostility
2. He does not want them to acknowledge that they are outnumbered
3. He does not want them to shed their precious blood
4. He does not want them to be offended by the mocking

10. McKay uses animal metaphors until the last two lines, what does this show about how his perspective?

1. He wants to fight as fiercely as animals
2. He wants to show he is better than those who act like animals
3. He wants to emphasize the people are like a pack of animals
4. He wants to die like animals in the wild

11. Which of these statements most accurately compares and contrasts King’s and McKay’s beliefs?

1. While King can never accept the use of violence, McKay believes in the use of violence to fight back
2. While King can accept only nonviolent methods, McKay suggests the use of violence and nonviolence.
3. King believes there are times when racism must be accepted, while McKay believes they must die like hogs in the pen.
4. King is concerned primarily with his immediate time and place, whereas McKay’s plans are for the future.



12. What is the visual effect of not showing the heads of the Marshalls?

1. emphasize the wall
2. emphasize the girl
3. emphasize the clothing
4. emphasize the importance of the Marshalls

13. The artist chose the girl to be in a bright white dress because

1. The dress symbolizes purity
2. The dress distracts from the words on the wall
3. The dress alludes to the title
4. The dress stresses the importance of school

 14. What detail in this picture illustrates the historical context?

1. Graffiti was accepted in the 1960’s.
2. Little girls’ hair styles were different in the 60’s from now.
3. Children wore uniforms of all white to school in the 60’s
4. A black child had to be protected by US marshals in the 60’s

15. Which selection, the excerpt, the poem, or the picture, expresses its message clearest to the reader/viewer? Explain with support.

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| 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Response is clearly stated with direct quotation or support from the piece chosen. An explanation of the support is clearly elaborated. | Response is clearly stated with a reference from the chosen piece. The explanation is lacking or non-existent. | Response is totally wrong, inappropriate, or blank. |

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16. What bias does the artist have in the picture? Explain with support.

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| Response is clearly stated with support from the piece. An explanation of the support is clearly elaborated. | Response is clearly stated with a reference to the piece. The explanation is lacking or non-existent. | Response is totally wrong, inappropriate, or blank. |

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17. Given the historical context of each of the pieces, with whom do you think you might have agreed more: King, McKay, or Rockwell? Write a subjective response, but support it only with details from the selection.

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| 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Response is subjective, clear, and supported by more than one detail from the text/piece and references the history. An explanation of the support is clearly elaborated. | Response is subjective, clear, and supported by a single detail from the text or piece. Some reference to history is made. The explanation of the support is somewhat clear. | Response is clear but not subjective nor clearly supported. There is minimal reference to history made. There is no explanation of support given. | Response is blank, inappropriate, or shows clear misunderstanding of the question. |

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| 1. Main idea (2.4f) | D (1PT) |
| 2. Author’s Perspective (2.4f) | A (1PT) |
| 3. Historical Context (4.3a) | C (1PT) |
| 4. Author’s Perspective (2.4f) | D (1PT) |
| 5.Context Clues (2.2a) | C (1PT) |
| 6.Context Clues (2.2a) | A (1PT) |
| 7.Context Clues (2.2a) | D (1PT) |
| 8. Audience (1.5; 4.2c) | B (1PT) |
| 9. Author’s Perspective (2.4f) | A (1PT) |
| 10. Author’s Perspective (2.4f) | B (1PT) |
| 11. Author’s Perspective (2.4f) | A (1PT) |
| 12. Author’s decision/genre (4.2c) | B (1PT) |
| 13. Author’s decision/genre (4.2c) | A (1PT) |
| 14. Historical Context (4.3a) | D (1PT) |
| 15. Implied Purpose (2.4f; 4.2c) | 0,1,2 |
| 16. Bias (3.3a2; 2.5f) | 0,1,2 |
| 17. Historical Context (4.3a) | 0,1,2,3 |

15. Students’ response may vary depending on choice. Students could focus on Dr. King’s message of nonviolence, McKay’s message of fighting back, or Rockwell’s message. Answers will be supported with details taken from the text or picture.

16. Answer will vary on students’ interpretation of picture. Some answers could focus on the idea of Rockwell being racist or not racist or wanting to change the view of racism or wanting society to acknowledge racism as being wrong.

17. Responses will vary. Students may say that they would have agreed with King's message of nonviolent action. Students may use the following details from "Stride Toward Freedom" to support their responses:

a. Violence is impractical: it brings destruction for all (line 35).

b. Violence is immoral, because it makes brotherhood impossible (lines 157-177).

c. Violence defeats itself, as history has shown (lines 40-43).

d. From violence, future generations inherit bitterness (lines 44-47).

e. By giving up on violence, a person or group does not give up on resistance; instead, they participate in a more perfect form of resistance (lines 48-63).

f. Nonviolent methods create good will by turning the struggle into a tension between justice and injustice, instead of a struggle between races or people (lines 70-75).

g. Violence breeds anarchy (lines 81-82).

h. Nonviolent methods gain public support (lines 85-90).

Students also may have agreed with McKay stating…

Students may have agreed with Rockwell emphasizing…

1. **Tactile** - silently [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Promised land** – the land of Canaan, promised by God in the Bible to Abraham’s descendants. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **Bear those ill…know not of** – an allusion to a line in Act 3, Scene 1, of Hamlet by William Shakespeare. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **“fleshpots of Egypt** – an allusion to a line in the book of Exodus in the Bible. As Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egypt, some of them grumbling and wished they had stayed there. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **Brother’s keeper** – In the book of Genesis, after Cain killed his brother Abel, he denied knowing Abel’s whereabouts by asking, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” In general, the saying refers to a reluctance to accept responsibilities for others. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. **An eye for an eye** – an allusion to Exodus 21:23-25: “You shall give life for life, eye for eye… [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. **Peter…sword”** – When Jesus’ disciple Peter drew his sword to try to protect Jesus; Jesus condemned his use of violence. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. **Synthesis** – the union of parts or elements into a whole. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. **Hegelian philosophy** – the philosophy of Georg Hegel (1770-1831), which proposed that each situation has an opposite and that both extremes will eventually be reconciled. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. **Glib** – showing little thought, preparation, or concern [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. **Inglorious:** shameful; disgraceful [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. **Constrained:** forced [↑](#footnote-ref-12)