Worksheet\_4): Analyzing stylistic means and their function in a speech

**Text:**

**Excerpt from:** Martin Luther King, “I’ve been to the Mountain Top” (April 3, 1968, Memphis, Tennesse)

Thank you very kindly, my friends. As I listened to Ralph Abernathy and his eloquent and generous introduction and then thought about myself, I wondered who he was talking about. It’s always good to have your closest friend and associate to say something good about you. And Ralph Abernathy is the best friend that I have in the world. I’m delighted to see each of you here tonight in spite of a storm warning. You reveal that you are determined to go on anyhow.
Something is happening in Memphis; something is happening in our world. And you know, if I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of taking a kind of general and panoramic view of the whole of human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, “Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?” I would take my mental flight by Egypt and I would watch God’s children in their magnificent trek from the dark dungeons of Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the promised land. And in spite of its magnificence, I wouldn’t stop there.

I would move on by Greece and take my mind to Mount Olympus. And I would see Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Euripides and Aristophanes assembled around the Parthenon. And I would watch them around the Parthenon as they discussed the great and eternal issues of reality. But I wouldn’t stop there.

I would go on, even to the great heyday of the Roman Empire. And I would see developments around there, through various emperors and leaders. But I wouldn't stop there.

I would even come up to the day of the Renaissance, and get a quick picture of all that the Renaissance did for the cultural and aesthetic life of man. But I wouldn’t stop there.

I would even go by the way that the man for whom I am named had his habitat. And I would watch Martin Luther as he tacked his ninety-five theses on the door at the church of Wittenberg. But I wouldn't stop there.

I would come on up even to 1863, and watch a vacillating President by the name of Abraham Lincoln finally come to the conclusion that he had to sign the Emancipation Proclamation. But I wouldn't stop there.

I would even come up to the early thirties, and see a man grappling with the problems of the bankruptcy of his nation. And come with an eloquent cry that we have nothing to fear but “fear itself.” But I wouldn't stop there.

Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, “If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the 20th century, I will be happy.”

Now that’s a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around. That’s a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding.

Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee – the cry is always the same: “We want to be free.”

And another reason that I’m happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we are going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn’t force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them. Men, for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it's nonviolence or nonexistence. That is where we are today.

And also in the human rights revolution, if something isn't done, and done in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed. Now, I’m just happy that God has allowed me to live in this period to see what is unfolding. And I’m happy that He’s allowed me to be in Memphis.

I can remember – I can remember when Negroes were just going around as Ralph has said, so often, scratching where they didn’t itch, and laughing when they were not tickled. But that day is all over. We mean business now, and we are determined to gain our rightful place in God's world.

And that’s all this whole thing is about. We aren’t engaged in any negative protest and in any negative arguments with anybody. We are saying that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying – We are saying that we are God’s children. And that we are God’s children, we don’t have to live like we are forced to live.

Now, what does all of this mean in this great period of history? It means that we’ve got to stay together. We’ve got to stay together and maintain unity. […]

source: http://archives.ubalt.edu/bsr/articles/king%20speech.pdf

Worksheet\_4 a): Analyze the stylistic means and their effect on the reader / listener in Martin Luther King’s speech “I’ve been to the Mountain Top” (April 3, 1968)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| line(s) | quote  | means | function in the text |
| l. 1 | “my friends” | direct address |  |
| l. 7 | “Something is happening in Memphis; something is happening in our world.” | parallelismclimax |  |
| ll. 10, 11, 14, 18, 20, 25, 28, 31 | “I would” | anaphora |  |
| ll. 13, 14-15, 19, 21, 24, 27, 30 | “I wouldn’t stop there” | repetition |  |
| l. 33, l. 34 | “strange statement” |  |  |
| l. 33f. | “the nation is sick” |  |  |
| l. 35 | “only when it’s dark enough you can see the stars” |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

Worksheet\_4 b): Analyze the stylistic means and their effect on the reader / listener in Martin Luther King’s speech “I’ve been to the Mountain Top” (April 3, 1968) – key

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| line(s) | quote  | means | function in the text |
| l. 1 | “my friends” | direct address | to involve the listeners to create a bond between himself and his (mostly African American) audience |
| l. 7 | “Something is happening in Memphis; something is happening in our world.” | parallelismclimax | to emphasize that the fight for civil rights in Memphis is a part of the global struggle for equalityto stress the importance of the events in Memphis |
| ll. 10, 11, 14, 18, 20, 25, 28, 31 | “I would” | anaphora | to emphasize and unify this part of his speech leading up to the present to express the importance of the present time in which the audience lives, to express that he would do anything that is necessary to achieve his goals even if it takes a very long timeto underline his feelings that he is happy to live at this time because change is finally possibleto underline the importance of taking actions and to not just accept the present situation |
| ll. 13, 14-15, 19, 21, 24, 27, 30 | “I wouldn’t stop there” | repetition |
| l. 33, l. 34 | “strange statement” | alliterationrepetition | to emphasize his determination to be part of the Civil Rights Movementto express the importance of the present events and actions |
| l. 33 | “the nation is sick” | personification | helpful to better understand and create the image of a country with a problem that might be cured like the disease of a sick person |
| l. 35  | “only when it’s dark enough you can see the stars” | metaphor | to create an image in the listener’s mind comparing darkness to the dire situation African Americans are in because of racismto express hope that after darkness the light of day, meaning hope, will come |
| ll. 38ff. | “Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee” | enumeration | to show the importance of the movement in America and put it into a global perspective (civil rights as a global issue) |
| l. 42, l. 44 | “grapple” | repetition | to express the importance of African Americans being ready to struggle for their rights and being persistent |
| l. 44 | “talking about war and peace” | contrast | to point out the different opinions on how to achieve civil rights  |
| ll. 44f. | “But now, no longer can they just talk about it” | inversion | to put emphasis on the decisive nature of the situation and the fact that it has become unbearable |
| l. 45 | “a choice between violence and nonviolence” | contrast | to make the listeners understand the two opposing options in the struggle for civil rights |
| l. 46 | “nonviolence or nonexistence” | parallelism | to stress the devastating consequences of a violent approach and his appeal for peaceful means |
| ll. 48f. | “their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect” | parallelism | to underline the ongoing injustice African Americans have been enduring |
| l. 50 | “I can remember – I can remember” | repetition | to point out his experiences with injustice to give them more credibility and to evoke similar memories in the audience |
| l. 52 | “scratching where they didn’t itch, and laughing when they were not tickled” | metaphor | to create a vivid image that African Americans used to be patronized and bossed around, behaving the way they were expected to by white people |
| ll. 56 f. | “We are saying” | anaphora/ repetition | to emphasize unity among African Americans to point out the urgency of measures to end injustice |
| ll. 56f. | “we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people” | parallelism/ climax | to emphasize his prime concern for equality and human dignity to stress the urgency of overcoming dehumanizing oppression |
| ll. 57f. | “we are God’s children” | repetition | to point out the African Americans’ legitimate claims and equality as the core issue of the Civil Rights Movement |
| l. 59 | “What does all of this mean in this great period of history?” | rhetorical question | to guide the listeners and make them see the importance of the present struggle for civil rights |
| ll. 59f. | “we’ve got to stay together. We’ve got to stay together” | repetitioninclusive language/use of 1st person plural | to stress the importance of a consensus among African Americans concerning their approachto express that the speaker identifies as one of the people he speaks to, as a member of the African American community |