A Eulogy for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

What’s the Connection?

In “Montgomery Boycott,” Coretta Scott King recalls an important event in the civil rights movement that was also a turning point in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s career. Now, in “A Eulogy for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” you will read a moving speech that Robert F. Kennedy delivered on the day of King’s assassination.

Standards Focus: Analyze Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical devices are techniques that allow writers to communicate ideas more effectively. Speeches often contain rhetorical devices, because they help keep an audience’s attention. By analyzing rhetorical devices, you can gain insight into what makes a speech powerful or memorable.

Writers use **diction**, or word choice, as well as **syntax**, sentence structure, to help create rhetorical devices. One common rhetorical device is the **repetition** of the same word, phrase, or sentence for emphasis. Another device is **parallelism**, the use of similar grammatical constructions to express related ideas. The chart shows examples of these rhetorical devices from a speech delivered by Martin Luther King Jr. during the Montgomery bus boycott. Use a similar chart to identify examples of rhetorical devices in the following selection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Example</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>“Tired of being segregated and humiliated; tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallelism</td>
<td>“They are protesting for the perpetuation of injustice in the community, we’re protesting for the birth of justice…”</td>
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On April 4, 1968, hundreds of African Americans gathered for what they thought would be an exciting political event. Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy was coming to speak to them. Before he was to deliver his speech, however, Kennedy was informed that Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated earlier that day. He nevertheless went to the rally, where he found the people upbeat in anticipation of his appearance. Realizing that they were unaware of the tragic event, he began his speech with the following words.

I have bad news for you, for all of our fellow citizens, and people who love peace all over the world, and that is that Martin Luther King was shot and killed tonight.

Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice for his fellow human beings, and he died because of that effort.

In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it is perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in. For those of you who are black—considering the evidence there evidently is that there were white people who were responsible—you can be filled with bitterness, with hatred, and a desire for revenge. We can move in that direction as a country, in great polarization—black people amongst black, white people amongst white, filled with hatred toward one another.

Or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand and to comprehend, and to replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed that has spread across our land, with an effort to understand with compassion and love.

For those of you who are black and are tempted to be filled with hatred and distrust at the injustice of such an act, against all white people, I can only say that I feel in my own heart the same kind of feeling. I had a member of my family killed, but he was killed by a white man. But we have to make an effort in the United States, we have to make an effort to understand, to go beyond these rather difficult times.

My favorite poet was Aeschylus. He wrote, “In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.”
What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness but love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice towards those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or they be black.

So I shall ask you tonight to return home, to say a prayer for the family of Martin Luther King, that's true, but more importantly to say a prayer for our own country, which all of us love—a prayer for understanding and that compassion of which I spoke.

We can do well in this country. We will have difficult times. We've had difficult times in the past. We will have difficult times in the future. It is not the end of violence; it is not the end of lawlessness; it is not the end of disorder.

But the vast majority of white people and the vast majority of black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings who abide in our land.

Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and to make gentle the life of this world.

Let us dedicate ourselves to that, and say a prayer for our country and for our people.

RHETORICAL DEVICES
What idea does Kennedy call attention to through parallelism in lines 36–39?

RHETORICAL DEVICES
What does Kennedy suggest through the repetition of the phrase “let us dedicate ourselves” in lines 43–46?
Comprehension

1. **Recall**  What personal experience has helped Kennedy understand the feelings of African Americans following King’s assassination?

2. **Summarize**  What kinds of reactions does Kennedy hope his speech will prevent?

Text Analysis

3. **Analyze Rhetorical Devices**  Review the examples of rhetorical devices in the chart you created as you read. Choose an example of each device, and explain how it helps make the speech effective.

4. **Interpret Statement**  What do you make of the statement by Aeschylus that Kennedy quotes in lines 24–26?

Read for Information: Cite Evidence

**WRITING PROMPT**

In “A Eulogy for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,” Kennedy urges the audience to follow King’s approach to fighting injustice. How do Martin Luther King Jr.’s words and actions in “Montgomery Boycott” support the message of Kennedy’s speech?

To answer this prompt, you will need to identify Kennedy’s message and cite evidence from “Montgomery Boycott” that supports this message. Use the following steps:

1. Reread Kennedy’s speech, looking for statements about injustice to help you identify his message.

2. Reread “Montgomery Boycott” and keep track of statements, facts, and anecdotes that are relevant to Kennedy’s message. Indicate line numbers for each item in your notes.

3. Review your notes and evaluate each item to see whether it supports Kennedy’s message.