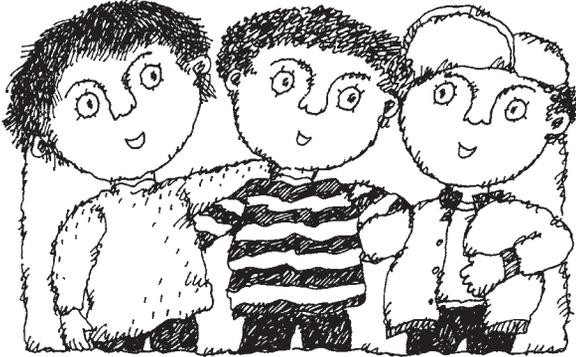


Big Words, Strong Words

Teaching Notes



Background

Martin Luther King, Jr. always loved words. He learned to read at age four and joined the debating team in high school. At college, King studied the writings of Henry David Thoreau and Mahatmas Gandhi. Both of these men were willing to go to jail rather than obey unjust laws. King decided nonviolent, “passive resistance” was the answer to gaining equal rights for African Americans. When Rosa Parks, a black woman, decided not to give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger, she was arrested. So King and other leaders organized a successful bus boycott.

Using nonviolent methods in the face of brutality, King organized civil rights marches across the country. He inspired people with his speeches, and finally, in 1964, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, giving every citizen the right to vote. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize that same year. He was the youngest person ever to receive that honor. The birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. is now a national holiday. He is the only American who was not a president whose birthday is remembered in this way.

Extension Activities

Some Dreams

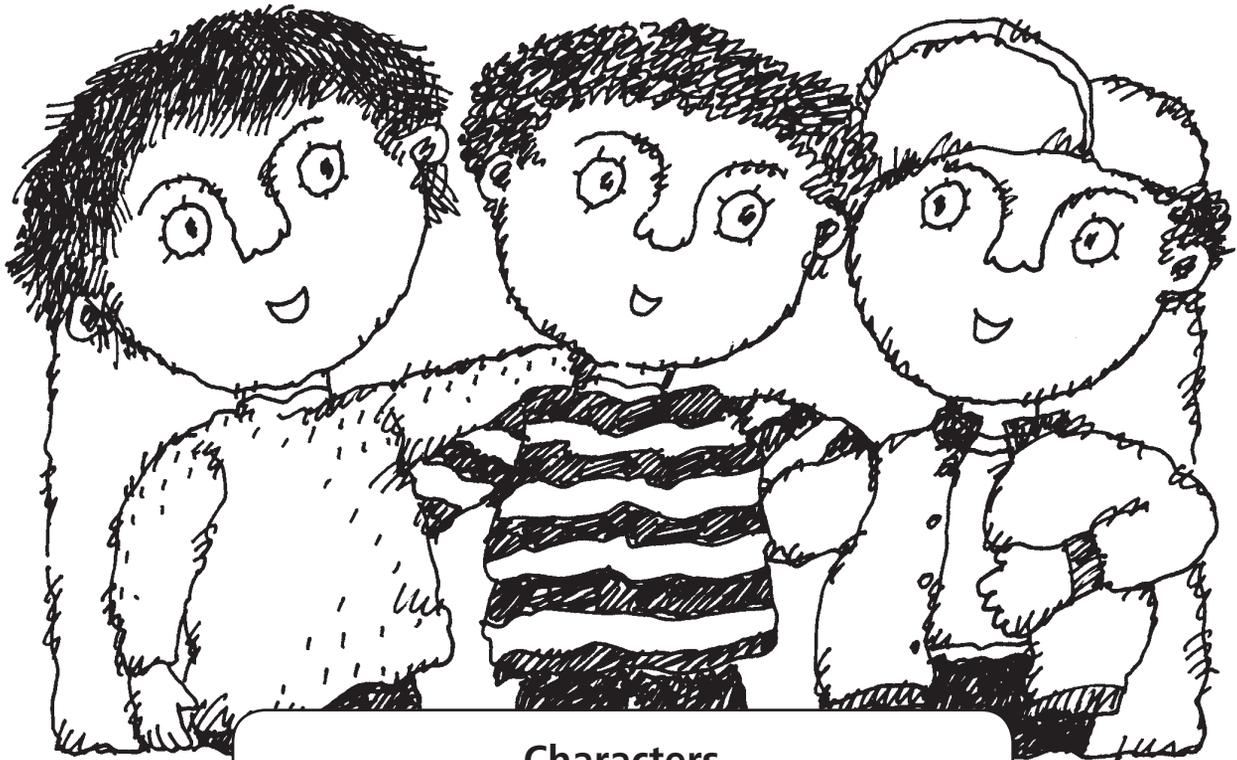
Talk with students about the difference between King’s type of dream and a nighttime dream they may remember having. After establishing the difference between the two different dream types, encourage students to express their own personal hopes and dreams for their family, their country and the world. Have students illustrate their dreams. To create a class book, group the illustrated dreams into separate chapters (personal hopes, and dreams for family, country and world) and bind the pages together. Title the book “We Have Dreams.”

Peacekeepers

Ask students to talk about situations that make them angry and the different ways they have to settle disputes with others. Record any and all possible solutions on a chart. Then, talk with students about how Martin Luther King, Jr. believed that the best way to settle arguments was peacefully. Return to your list and use a red marker to cross out those solutions students agree are not peaceful or positive. Ask students to consider the remaining items as a list of alternative behaviors they could try when they feel angry enough to strike back with harsh words or deeds. Post the list in the classroom and, when tempers run high, remind students to check the list before acting.

Big Words, Strong Words

by Bobbi Katz



Characters

- Narrator 1
- Narrator 2
- Mrs. Alberta King (King's mother)
- Christine (King's sister as a child)
- A.D. (King's brother, Alfred Daniel, as a child)
- M.L. (Martin Luther King, Jr. as a child)
- Mama Williams (King's grandmother)
- Martin Luther King, Sr.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. (at age 34)
- Crowd 1
- Crowd 2

Act 1

Narrator 1: If you ever go to Auburn Avenue, near the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, you'll find the boyhood home of Martin Luther King, Jr. Several generations of ministers have raised their families in that house. There's even a bronze plaque with the inscription: MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. WAS BORN IN THIS HOUSE ON JANUARY 15, 1929.

Narrator 2: When he was born they called him M.L. At first he was like any other baby, cooing and crying. But soon, anyone could see that this little boy was growing into someone special.

The King family living room.

Mrs. Alberta King: Come along, children! It's time to leave for church. You know Daddy doesn't like us to be late.

Christine: But Mother, just look at the boys!

Mrs. Alberta King: M.L.! A.D.! Have you been fighting?

A.D.: It's all M.L.'s fault!

M.L.: Mother, A.D. says he's bigger and stronger than I am. But I'm six years old now—I just had to show him I wasn't afraid of him. We were just wrestling a little bit.

Mrs. Alberta King: *[sighing]* Now M.L., you should set a good example for your brother. Both of you, wash those messy hands and faces and change your shirts. Mama, will you please help these two little rascals?

Mama Williams: *[smiling]* Come along, children, let's go wash up. You don't want to miss a word of Daddy's sermon.

M.L.: *[changing shirt]* Mama, what is Daddy preaching about today?

Mama: I'm not sure, M.L. But I bet he'll be urging folks to stand tall—to be the very best they can be! And to meet hate with love.

M.L.: I love you, Mama.

Mama: I love you, too, M.L. Now we should get going before you and A.D. get into any more mischief.

[Later, same day. The whole family is at the dinner table.]

Martin Luther King, Sr.: Hmm. Alberta, Mama, you sure know how to cook! Fried chicken, collard greens, sweet potato pies. Now this is what I call a feast fit for a king!

M.L.: *[teasingly]* That's why the King family is eating it!

Mama: *[laughing]* M.L. certainly has a way with words! He takes after his Daddy.

M.L.: *[seriously]* But Daddy has big words, strong words. When Daddy talks in church, people get all quiet trying to listen. Daddy, can you give me some of those words? Those big words?

Martin Luther King, Sr.: Son, you will have to find your own words. Grow, work hard, study, and you will find them.

M.L.: OK, I will! Mama, Daddy, Mother, A.D., Christine! Listen! I'm going to get words—big, strong words. Just you wait. I'm going to get them.

Act 2

Narrator 1: It's August 28, 1963, in Washington, D.C., and luckily, it's a beautiful day. More than 250,000 Americans from all over the country have come together in the spirit of peace. They have come carrying signs demanding equal rights for all Americans. Most of the people are black Americans. But there are many whites among them. Hand in hand, they march to the Lincoln Memorial.

Narrator 2: The leaders, who have been working hard for civil rights, speak to the sea of people. And then the man who had touched the hearts of fair-minded people throughout the world, comes to the microphone. He puts the speech he has written in his pocket. His words come from his heart.

Martin Luther King, Jr.: *[folding papers into his pocket]* Five score years ago a great American signed the Emancipation Proclamation . . . but a hundred years later . . . the Negro is still not free . . .

Crowd 1: Amen! Amen!

Martin Luther King, Jr.: I say to you my friends . . . I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream! I have a dream that one day this nation . . . will live out the meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal. I have a dream!

Crowd 2: Amen! Amen! Oh yes, Amen!

Martin Luther King, Jr.: I have a dream that my four little children will one day . . . not be judged by the color of their skin . . . I have a dream today.

Crowd 1: Dream on! Dream on!

Crowd 2: *[cheering]* Amen! Dream on!

Martin Luther King, Jr.: I have a dream today! Little black girls and little black boys will join hands with little white girls and little white boys and walk together as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today!

Crowd 1: *[swaying to the rhythm of the words]*
Yes! Yes! Dream on! Dream on!



Martin Luther King, Jr.: Let freedom ring from the . . . mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the . . . Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill . . . of Mississippi. Let freedom ring!

Act 3

Later that night in a quiet room.

Martin Luther King, Sr.: Remember when M.L. was little and used to say he was going to get himself some big words. Even then he knew how strong words can be.

Mrs. Alberta King: And he has found the strongest words of all—peace and love.

Martin Luther King, Sr.: I just hope the people listen with their ears . . . and their hearts.

The End