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**I Have A Dream Literary Devices**

**Introduction to “I have dream”**

On a sunny day, August 28th, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. held a very important speech. He addressed an enormous audience, constituted of more than 250,000 people who were in the streets of Washington D.C to fight against unfair employment and inequality. King faced the Lincoln Memorial and declared his great dream.

He dreamed of a future where people of all colors coexisted in peace and harmony. He wanted to end the unfair treatment of blacks. His expressive utterances brought significant changes. In fact, due to his speech, the law was adopted in 1964. The absolute exclusion of treating everyone equally regardless of their skin color was denied. The speech remains one that is well associated with that fight.

**Summary of “I Have a Dream”**

The speech begins with King lamenting the broken promise of the Emancipation Proclamation a century prior, denouncing ongoing racial injustice as a “bad check” returned with insufficient funds. He declares “now is the time” to finally pay this moral debt, setting an immediate, urgent tone.

King then vividly describes the nightmare of oppression faced by black Americans, from blatant terror to insidious shame. However, he resolves to meet hatred and violence not with violence, but through the transformative powers of nonviolent resistance rooted in Christian love.

At the core of the speech is King’s ardent articulation of his “dream” that America will rise up to fulfill its highest ideals of equality and dignity for all people, regardless of race. King locates this crucial dream in vivid metaphors drawn from biblical sources and American patriotic imagery like the Declaration of Independence.

He issued several rousing calls to action to keep marching, struggling, and going to jail if needed for the sake of justice. King gives shining examples of courageous resistance through moving descriptions of men gallantly sitting at lunch counters and “creative suffering.”

The speech builds on its climactic conclusion as King takes listeners to a mountaintop vision of freedom, racial harmony, and national redemption. He exhorts listeners to continue working to make this prophetic dream real through nonviolent commitment and steadfast faith. King’s stirring conclusion cemented “I Have a Dream” as a rallying cry that would fuel the continuing fight for civil rights.

**Themes in “I Have a Dream”**

In an iconic address from the civil rights era, many of the key themes relate to ending racial injustice and creating a more just, integrated society:

* The frustrating persistence of inequality and oppression towards black Americans despite legal advances like abolition and fair employment laws
* The moral duty to fight against immoral racial prejudices, discrimination, and segregation through nonviolent protest
* Dr. King’s vision of a “dream” of true racial equality and reconciliation is founded on ethical Christian principles of love, dignity, and brotherhood.
* The necessity of freedom and justice for all people as natural birthrights
* Transforming society through sacrificial struggle against unjust laws and institutional racism
* Capturing America’s founding ideals of liberty and opportunity while denouncing the nation’s failure to uphold these values for all citizens

**Literary Devices Used in “i have a dream”**

**1- Metaphor**

**“Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.”**

In the passage, Martin Luther King Jr., without using the words “like” or “as” compares two things. He uses the metaphor of two different things. He speaks of “dark and desolate valley of segregation” and “the sunlit path of racial justice” as if they were described as a real valley and path. But, the “dark valley” is where people are treated unreasonably because of the color of their skin. The “sunlit path” represents a worldview where people are born free and equal and while being human, they should be treated with dignity and respect. It’s analogous to suggesting we should transition from a miserable, unjust place to a pleasant, just place.

**2- Simile**

King compares issues with memorable similes:

**“We can never be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.”**

The simile here says Negroes (black people) in Mississippi not being allowed to vote is as unsatisfying as Negroes in New York feeling they have no reason to vote. Although the situations look different, King Jr. is saying that they make him and the others equally dissatisfied. Black voting rights not only give them the power but also the voice without this. He employs a simile to tie his examples of inequality across states and cities together.

**3- Imagery**

The speech overflows with striking images that paint a scene:

**“With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.”**

Martin Luther King Jr. employs a powerful image while elaborating on hope. He paints a picture of words which is about people cutting and carving a stone of hope from a huge mountain of despair. Such visualization puts the listener in a position of carving out chunks of Godzilla sized rock manifestation of sadness and hardship. They have got a tiny gleaming stone which is the symbol of the idea that everything can improve somehow.

The imagery is used to illustrate the abstract concept of hope that otherwise would be hard to explain. This sends the message that even in the face of insurmountable problems faith helps to see the thread of hope as a precious stone in the rock. The imagery remains in the mind to take in King’s enlightening thought of overcoming darkness with light.

**4- Allusion**

King makes allusions to create resonant associations:

**“One day…little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.”**

King Jr. makes an allusion to unity and partnership. Allusion means speaking about something indirectly without mentioning it directly. The part where King mentions “little black boys and black girls” holding hands with “little white boys and white girls” refers to belief that all kinds of children, irrespective of race, can live in peace together. It provides a scene of the black and white children playing as siblings, happily. This message, therefore, captures King’s optimistic belief that point in time will come when racial divides will end and everyone will see each other as equals- like brothers and sisters.

**5- Parallelism**

Parallel structures provide a poetic cadence and rhythm:

**“Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time…”**

Martin Luther employs parallelisms in his speech to underline his message. Parallelism is where you repeat the same phrase structure or words. King begins three sentences the same – “Now is the time…”. Through exact repetition of that word he brings it to the attention of the listener. The reiteration of ‘Now is the time’ at the beginning of each sentence emphasizes King’s main idea. That is what he is telling us: these changes should now – not tomorrow or later but exactly then – take place. The parallelism emphasizes the necessity.

**6- Repetition**

King makes repetition a powerful refrain:

**“We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied.”**

In the above excerpt, the repetition in his speech has been employed to emphasize his point about inequality. King repeats the phrase “We can never be satisfied” twice in the quote. This exact repetition of the line word-for-word draws the listener’s attention. He is repeating that phrase to stress that as long as Negroes face awful police brutality, he and others will continue to feel extremely unsatisfied. The repetition hammers home that this injustice of police violence against African Americans is wholly unacceptable.

**7- Rhetorical Questions**

King directly involves listeners by asking questions:

**“When will you be satisfied? When will you be free?”**

Here, the two rhetorical questions have been collided. When King says “When will you be satisfied?” and “When will you be free?”, he is not seeking for the crowd to respond. On the contrary, those questions indicate to the listener that he won’t feel satisfied or seem relax when he still lacks equality.

The rhetorical questions repeatedly suggest that people should realize that in effect the parliament is only reacting, refusing to listen or take any steps earlier as they are invited to wait instead. The question invites self-evaluation in terms of the current unresolved injustices in the land that can only be righted when African Americans attain freedom.

**8- Anaphora**

Repeating words at the start of consecutive phrases, known as anaphora, creates a sense of crescendo:

**“So let freedom ring from…let freedom ring from…let freedom ring!”**

The repetition of “let freedom ring” swells into a unifying call to action.

**9- Alliteration**

King’s alliteration gives words extra oomph:

**“But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free.”**

King Luther uses alliteration for particular point emphasis. Alliteration is when the words which are next to each other begin with the same sound. In this quote, King juxtaposes the words “face the tragic fact”. The repetition of the letter “F” in “face,” “tragic,” and “fact” is alliteration. Highlighting these words bolsters King’s argument by accenting a truth he wants the audience to face up to — that a century after the Emancipation Proclamation African Americans still did not possess equal rights and freedoms.

**10- Biblical Cadence**

His concluding message adopts a biblical style with language like:

**“Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty we are free at last.”**

King utilizes a biblical rhythm and repetition style when he proclaims “Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last.” This type of repetitive pattern gives biblical cadence. It copies the way verses and lines are structured in religious works such as the Bible, with some kind of music rhythm. The phrase of ” free at last” being repeated two times here is an echo of lines in biblical psalms and hymns. It has almost like the those of music.

By incorporating the phrase “Thank God Almighty “he makes use of the sacred language. This endows his words with sense of finality, relief and joy stemming from a deep spirituality as he imagines his eventual liberation from human inequality and segregation. Thus, the biblical cadence leaves listeners feeling hopeful about the dream indeed, in the way church services motivate people to move through the flow, rhythmic delivery tracing biblical language.

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