Worksheet\_3): Analyzing stylistic means and their function in a speech

Text

Excerpt from: Martin Luther King, “I Have A Dream” (delivered 28th August, 1963, at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.)

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American[[1]](#footnote-1), in whose symbolic shadow we stand, signed the Emancipation Proclamation[[2]](#footnote-2). This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.

But 100 years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.

And so we’ve come here today to dramatize an appalling condition. In a sense we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a cheque. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad cheque which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we’ve come to cash this cheque – a cheque that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. 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 to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro’s legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. 1963 is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.

There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3170387.stm

Worksheet\_3 a): Identify the stylistic means and analyze their function in Martin Luther King’s speech “I Have A Dream” (delivered 28th August, 1963, at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.).

Mark () the stylistic means you would choose to include in your written analysis.

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| line(s) | quote  | means | general function (optional, as a reminder) | function in the speech |  |
| ll. 1f.l. 3l. 4 | “the greatest demonstration” “a great American”“a great beacon light” |  |  |  |  |
| l. 3 | “a great American , in whose symbolic shadow we stand” |  |  |  |  |
| l. 4 | “a great beacon light of hope” |  |  |  |  |
| l. 5  | “seared in the flames of withering injustice” |  |  |  |  |
| l. 6. | “a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity” |  |  |  |  |
| ll. 7-10 | “100 years later” |  |  |  |  |
| ll. 9f. | “a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity” |  |  |  |  |
| l. 11 | “the corners of American society” |  |  |  |  |
| l. 13,l. 21l. 19l. 20ll. 20f. | “to cash a cheque”“to cash a cheque”“a bad cheque”“we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt”“We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation” |  |  |  |  |

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| ll. 25-27 | “Now is the time” |  |  |  |  |
| ll. 25f. | “to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice” |  |  |  |  |
| ll. 26f. | “the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood” |  |  |  |  |
| l. 34 | “The whirlwinds of revolt” |  |  |  |  |
| ll. 34f. | “the bright day of justice” |  |  |  |  |

Worksheet\_3 b): Identify the stylistic means and analyze their function in Martin Luther King’s speech “I Have A Dream” (delivered 28th August, 1963, at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.). – Key

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| line(s) | quote  | means | general function (as a reminder) | function in the speech |
| ll. 1f.l. 3l. 4 | “the greatest demonstration for freedom” “a great American”“a great beacon light” | superlative repetition | to stress the importance of certain words | to point out the immense importance of the event (March on Washington) and relate it to other defining events in the history of African Americans  |
| l. 3 | “a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand” | allusion | to put complex ideas/stories in a nutshell; to show that author and audience share the same knowledge | to share the common knowledge about the role of President Lincoln in freeing slaves and to honor his legacy |
| l. 4 | “a great beacon light of hope” | metaphor | to create a vivid image of something | to illustrate that the Emancipation Proclamation served as a signal light which gave African Americans a sense of direction and hope of a free life |
| l. 5  | “seared in the flames of withering injustice” | metaphor | to create a vivid image of something | to express the incredible pain African Americans had to endure, a pain that felt like burning in a destructive fire |
| l. 6. | “a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity” | contrastmetaphor | to highlight differencesto create a vivid image of something | to highlight the dire living conditions of African Americans slaves, a life led in complete darkness and hopelessness, and contrast this life with the new beginning, a new life full of light and hope  |
| ll. 7-10 | “100 years later” | anaphora | to emphasize certain words and what they express | to stress the long period of time without any improvement for African Americans, to illustrate the duration of their misery |
| ll. 9f. | “a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity” | metaphor contrast | to create a vivid image of somethingto highlight differences | to illustrate the exclusion of African Americans from the mainstream American society, to denounce the wealth gap |
| l. 11 | “the corners of American society” | metaphor | to create a vivid image of something | to illustrate the exclusion of African Americans from American society |
| l. 13, l. 21l. 19l. 20ll. 20f. | “to cash a cheque”“to cash a cheque”“a bad cheque”“we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt”“We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation” | (extended) metaphoranaphora | to create a vivid image of somethingto emphasize certain words and what they express | America compared to a bank which safeguards constitutional rights and hands out “checks” which entitle people to these rights; African Americans are cheated out of themto lend emphasis to the point that African American are entitled to equal rights and that there is no excuse for withholding these constitutional rights from them  |
| ll. 25-27 | “Now is the time” | anaphora | to emphasize certain words and what they express | to stress the urgency of action for African Americans to gain equality and for the American society to grant it  |
| ll. 25f. | “to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice” | contrast metaphor  | to highlight differencesto create a vivid image of something | to highlight the immense differences between the miserable living conditions and the reality of segregation in the lives of African Americans and the lives they aspire to, differences in altitude and brightness ( dark valley vs. sunlit path) associated with differences in living conditions |
| ll. 26f. | “the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood” | contrast metaphor  | to highlight differencesto create a vivid image of something | to illustrate the immense differences between what reality for African Americans is like and what it should be likeracial injustice shown as treacherous, life-threatening condition, brotherhood shown as a sound foundation of society |
| l. 34 | “The whirlwinds of revolt” | metaphor | to create a vivid image of something | to express the force and the impact of the fight of African Americans for freedom; like a force of nature it will eventually destroy the old order and injustices |
| ll. 34f. | “the bright day of justice” | metaphor | to create a vivid image of something | to evoke the pleasant image of a wonderful summer’s day and thus define (racial) justice as a desirable and enjoyable state |

1. Abraham Lincoln [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. a presidential order which freed the African-American slaves [↑](#footnote-ref-2)