

# Literary analysis of martin luther king jr's letter to birmingham jail essay samp...

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In his letter from a Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King Jr. employs many rhetorical techniques in order to persuade his audience to understand his ideologies. MLK uses diction and pathos, as well as allusions to solidify his arguments throughout the letter.

Martin Luther King Jr. makes careful choices in his diction which strengthen his arguments. He makes an effort to not offend or criticize his readers. He begins the letter with, " My Dear Fellow Clergymen." (p261, ¶1) This not only establishes a connection with his readers, but this is also a utilization of logos. With this line, MLK ensures the readers will not be offended, as well as makes them believe he is looking at the situation from a logical standpoint. Throughout the letter, Dr. King continues to make connections with not only the clergymen but to all people. The line " With his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America and the Caribbean," (p269 ¶30), MLK establishes a connection with all races and people, showing he is a man of equality and justice. He consistently uses the word " brothers," even when referring to whites to show he bears no hatred for them. (p270 ¶33) He appears to merely try to get the readers to see the injustice of segregation and not trying to disparage the clergymen's opinions. MLK's use of diction gives him credibility as he establishes connections with the audience and comes off as a reasonable person.

Martin Luther King Jr. also appeals to the readers' pathos throughout his letter as an attempt to convince them about the immoral nature of segregation. MLK uses examples of segregation in society and how it negatively affects the people who are subjected to injustice. His story about

the girl who can't go to Funtown because it is closed to colored children closes with the line, "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?" invokes a great deal of sadness from the reader. (p265 ¶14) The reader can't help but pity the poor little girl as her innocence is shattered and an animosity for white people develop. MLK then proceeds to use more personal examples. He talks about when blacks are forced to live in constant fear of what might happen, when a person's family's safety is put in jeopardy all because ignorant people don't like the color of their skin. (p265 ¶14) This causes the readers who think of their own families and gradually begin to relate to the troubles blacks face everyday. MLK's use of pathos allows the reader to understand the situation blacks face due to segregation.

In addition to diction and pathos, Martin Luther King Jr. also uses allusions in his letter to justify his actions and present his beliefs. The clergymen called his actions "extremist." MLK responded at first with several religious allusions. Lines like "Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment," rationalize being an extremist. (p270 ¶31) The religious allusions are effective as MLK is writing to a group of clergymen who have all embraced Christianity and live by the bible. By establishing a parallel connection between himself and Jesus Christ, he is effectively eliminating any arguments against his actions. Men of faith do not question the bible and thus cannot question MLK's actions. In addition, MLK also makes allusions to respected men in history such as Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. This further strengthens his argument as both of these historical figures are respected and supporters of

equality. (p269 ¶31) MLK's use of allusions crushed any opposing arguments and not only justified his actions but rationalized his beliefs as well.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s use of rhetorical strategies throughout his letter make it so the reader can't help but agree with his viewpoint. He effectively utilizes careful diction, pathos and allusions in order to solidify his argument and fully persuades the reader that segregation is immoral.

Sources:

The Language of Composition: p261-275 by Renee H. Shea, Lawrence Scanlon & Robin Dissin Aufses