

8 Worksheet on Analyzing Rhetorical Devices – Answer Key

Text: Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream”, from: Peter Freese, *The American Dream*, Viewfinder Topics (München: Langenscheidt, 2011), pp. 22f.

B TASKS

1. The text starts with a paragraph full of metaphors (p. 22, ll. 1-7). Identify three of them and analyze them according to the pattern outlined above.

Suggested answer:

At the beginning of this excerpt, ML King uses metaphors of light and darkness. He calls the Emancipation Proclamation “a great beacon of hope” (l. 4), and in this poetic image, the slaves can be seen as the passengers of a ship in heavy sea, to whom the light from the lighthouse (the “beacon”) gives orientation and the hope of reaching a safe harbour soon. Then King speaks of the “flames of withering injustice” (ll. 5-6) to describe the suffering of these slaves. Here, injustice is depicted as a deadly fire, perhaps even evoking associations of fire as a torture instrument, to make it clear how terrible the consequences of this injustice have been. This metaphor is followed by a contrast of light and darkness to underline once again what a difference the Emancipation Proclamation made to the African-American population: the state of slavery is portrayed as “the long night of their captivity” (ll. 6-7), and King describes the signing of the Proclamation as ending this time of fear and uncertainty like a “joyous daybreak” (l. 6). This beginning of a new day can be interpreted as the beginning of a new era for the African-Americans, but it also bears religious connotations since in Christian symbolism, light stands for the presence of god.

- 2 The adverbial “one hundred years later” is used effectively in the following paragraphs (ll. 8-16). Find out what device it is used for, and explain its effect on the listeners (and readers).**

Suggested answer:

The phrase “one hundred years later” occurs four times in these eight lines, and as it always comes at the beginning of a sentence (except for the first time), this is not only a repetition, but also an example of anaphora. The effect of this stylistic device here is that it hammers in how long the black people’s desperate situation has been going on. With each repetition of “one hundred years later”, King makes the time span sound more like an accusation, underlining the failure of America to act upon its promise.

- 3 In the three paragraphs after that (ll. 18-40), there is an extended metaphor consisting of and surrounding the word “check”. What does this “check” stand for, and how does King play with this poetic image? Explain.**

Answer:

In this passage of King’s speech, after praising the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and deploring that it has not been realized, he turns to a new metaphor by identifying the founding documents of America, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, with a “check” (l. 19) or “promissory note” (l. 22), which is a document declaring that you owe something to somebody. His meaning is not left in the dark, King states it clearly what this check stands for: “a promise that all men [...] would be guaranteed to the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (ll. 23-26). But then he goes on as in a wordplay and, referring to how black people have been treated, calls this promise a “bad check” – freedom and justice have not been issued so far by the “bank of justice” (ll. 33-34). At this point there is a turn towards optimism, when King says it is impossible for the bank of justice to be bankrupt, and the promise of the documents must now be turned into reality (cf. ll. 33-40).

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