

# Theatre IV CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

## *I Have A Dream*

*by Bruce Miller*

### **PLAY SYNOPSIS:**

**M**artin Luther King, Jr., the most influential leader of the civil rights movement, was born in Atlanta, Georgia on January 15, 1929. Young Martin was always a good student and passed the entrance examination to Morehouse College in Atlanta without graduating from high school. While a student at Morehouse, his professors encouraged him to seek the truth. King was one of six Blacks to enroll in the 100-student freshman class at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania.

At Crozer, King heard about several people who influenced his beliefs. First, he heard of Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy of love and non-violence. Another influence was Henry David Thoreau's essays; especially one entitled "Civil Disobedience." King grasped how Thoreau's principles tied in with Gandhis social campaigns and the teachings of Jesus, and this understanding formed the basis for his personal philosophy.

King received his Bachelor of Divinity from Crozer and won a scholarship to study at Boston University, where he received his Ph.D. in Systematic Theology in 1955. While in Boston, King met and married Coretta Scott. At the age of twenty-five, while working on his doctorate, he became pastor of the Dexter Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

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## PLAY SYNOPSIS (continued)

Almost immediately, King got an opportunity to test his philosophies. In December of 1955, Rosa Park, a forty-two year old seamstress, refused to give up her bus seat to a white man and was arrested. King gained national recognition when he became the leader of a boycott to protest segregation on the city buses. During this time, King was indicted and a bomb was thrown onto the porch of his Montgomery home. On June 4, 1956 a U.S. district court ruled that racial segregation on city bus lines was unconstitutional.

The following February, King became president of a new civil rights group, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In 1959, he moved to Atlanta to continue his work with the SCLC. As president, he led many civil rights demonstrations including the 1963 Freedom March on Washington, D.C. In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

On April 4, 1968 while in Memphis supporting a sanitation workers strike, King was shot and killed as he stood on his hotel balcony. Scattered incidents of rioting were followed by a national day of mourning observed in the spirit of non-violence that characterized King's work. Before his death, King dedicated one of his books to his four children with words that echo his most famous speech: "I dream that one day they will no longer be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1929 Martin Luther King, Jr. was born.
- 1932 Franklin Delano Roosevelt becomes President.
- 1941 Japan attacks Pearl Harbor; U.S. declares war on Japan.
- James Farmer establishes Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and begins lunch counter sit-ins in Chicago.
- 1944 King passes entrance exam to Atlanta's Morehouse College without graduating high school.
- President Roosevelt elected for 4th term.
- 1945 President Roosevelt dies, Harry Truman becomes President.
- 1947 King is licensed to preach and becomes assistant to his father who is pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.
- 1948 King graduates from Morehouse College; goes to Crozer Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Gandhi is assassinated.

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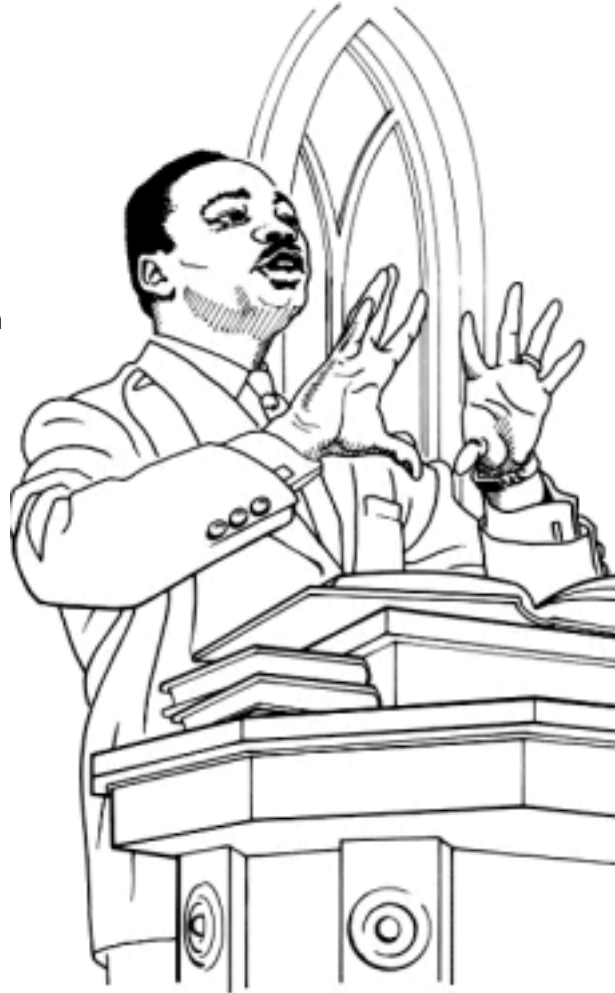
## CHRONOLOGY (continued)

- 1950 Beginning of Korean War.
- 1951 King graduates from Crozer with a Bachelor of Divinity; enters Boston University.
- 1952 Dwight Davis Eisenhower becomes President.
- King meets Coretta Scott.
- 1953 Martin and Coretta marry.
- 1954 Martin becomes pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.
- U.S. Supreme Court rules that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional.
- 1955 King receives a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Boston University.
- Rosa Parks refuses to give her bus seat to a white person and is arrested. King leads boycott of segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama.
- 1956 Kings house is bombed.
- Supreme Court rules that segregation on buses is unconstitutional.
- Bus boycott in Montgomery ends.
- President Eisenhower is re-elected.
- 1957 Governor of Arkansas tries to prevent integration at Central High School in Little Rock; federal troops enforce Supreme Court ruling.
- Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is formed; King elected its president.
- Civil Rights Act enacted.
- 1958 Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story is published.
- King is stabbed in the chest by Izola Curry.
- 1959 King visits India to study Gandhi's techniques.
- 1960 John F. Kennedy becomes President.
- Sit-ins begin in the South to integrate lunch counters and other public places.
- King family moves from Montgomery to Atlanta; King becomes co-pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church with his father.
- 1961 "Freedom Riders" in the South try to force integration on interstate buses.
- Alan Shepherd becomes the first American to go into space.
- 1962 James Meredith attempts to enroll at the University of Mississippi.
- King meets with President Kennedy.

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## CHRONOLOGY (continued)

- 1963 King is arrested in Birmingham, Alabama during a sit-in demonstration; writes "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."
- Governor George C. Wallace tries to stop court-ordered integration of the University of Alabama by "standing in the schoolhouse door."
  - Rioting occurs after civil rights leader Medger Evers is killed in Jackson, Mississippi.
  - King gives his "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D.C.
  - Four black girls die in church bombing.
  - President Kennedy is assassinated.
- 1964 "Bloody Sunday": 650 marchers attacked by police in Selma, Alabama.
- King wins Nobel Peace Prize.
  - Why We Can't Wait published.
- 1965 Malcom X, Black Muslim leader, is killed.
- Voting Rights Act is passed.
  - Dr. King leads protest march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.
- 1966 Edward Brook of Massachusetts becomes first black Senator since Reconstruction.
- 1967 Thurgood Marshall becomes first black Supreme Court Justice.
- Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community published.
- 1968 King is assassinated by James Earl Ray in Memphis; riots break out in protest.
- Poor Peoples March, originally planned by King, occurs in Washington, D.C.
  - Senator Robert Kennedy is killed in Los Angeles.



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## GLOSSARY

***Abernathy, Rev. Ralph D.*** - A longtime friend of King, together they organized the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott of 1955-56 and formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957

***boycott*** - to join together in refusing to deal with someone or to buy, sell or use something

***civil rights*** - those rights guaranteed to each individual, especially by the 13th and 14th Amendments to the Constitution of the United States

***Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand*** - (1869-1948) Nationalist leader of India, known by his informal title Mahatma ("Great Soul"); he led the struggle for India's independence from England by calling for non-violent resistance to repressive measures

***segregation*** - the separation of people based on race

***separate but equal*** - The Supreme Court ruled (1869) that state legislated segregation was not in violation of the constitution so long as separate but equal facilities were provided

***Supreme Court ruling*** - a decision regarding the constitutionality of federal, state and local laws

***Thoreau, Henry David*** - (1817-62) American essayist and naturalist known for his eloquent pleas for the simple life; his paper titled "Civil Disobedience" advocated a program of passive resistance which offered inspiration and technique to those who would oppose sheer power

***unconstitutional*** - that which is in opposition to the expressed or implied intent of the United States Constitution

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## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Make a list of important events from Martin Luther King's life, making sure to include important civil rights events (Rosa Parks' bus ride, the "I Have a Dream" speech, integrating Little Rock's schools). Get with two other students and write a short scene about the event. Act the scenes for the class.
2. After seeing the production, write some of the 'dreams' that Martin Luther King talked about in his speech on the board. Discuss these dreams with the class. Have any of these dreams become realities?
3. Write your own "I Have a Dream" speech. Include the things that you dream about for yourself, your family, your country, and the world.
4. In what ways did the Civil Rights Movement change the lives of African Americans? Make a list of different aspects of the movement and the outcomes that arose from each. Discuss your thoughts with the class.
5. As a class project, create a biographical dictionary with short descriptions (one or two paragraphs) on other African American leaders. Mount each on colorful poster board and include photographs or drawings. You can also include other events from the Civil Rights Movement. Date each entry and hang them chronologically around the classroom.
6. Discuss the key events that led to the establishment of a holiday in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

# I Have a Dream

Theatre IV is the second largest theatre for young audiences in the nation and is the Children's Theatre of Virginia. We encourage your comments about *I Have a Dream*, please send your letters to:

**Theatre IV, 114 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23220**

If you need to reach Theatre IV by phone, please call **1-800-235-8687**.

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