

Encounter with Martin Luther King Jr.

Autobiography by Maya Angelou



Video link at
thinkcentral.com

What if you could meet your HERO?

COMMON CORE

RI.3 Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text.

You see them on TV, read about them in magazines and newspapers, and even watch movies that tell the stories of their accomplishments. But for most of us, meeting our famous heroes in person is something that only happens in daydreams. In this selection, Maya Angelou recounts an unforgettable private meeting with her larger-than-life hero, Martin Luther King Jr.

QUICKWRITE If a hero of yours walked into your home tomorrow, what would you say to him or her? In your journal, note whom you would like to meet in this way. Then write five questions you would ask if you had the chance.



● TEXT ANALYSIS: CHARACTERIZATION IN NONFICTION

To help her readers understand what Martin Luther King Jr. was like, Maya Angelou uses methods of **characterization** that fiction writers use. She reveals King's personality by

- making direct statements about his personality
- describing his appearance and actions
- showing how others acted toward him
- sharing what he said and what others said about him

As you read the selection, notice the ways in which Angelou conveys what King was like in person.

● READING STRATEGY: CONNECT

Whenever you find similarities between your life and someone else's, you are connecting with that person. You can **connect** with what you are reading by comparing the events described with experiences you are familiar with. As you read, keep a **log** to record connections between you and Angelou.

Angelou	Me
Angelou was so surprised to see King that she didn't shake his hand right away.	When I saw my teacher at the grocery store, I was so surprised that I didn't say hello right away.

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The boldfaced words help Angelou convey the African-American experience in the 1960s. To see how many of them you know, restate each sentence, using a different word or words for the boldfaced term.

1. He did not allow his bitterness to **fester** and ruin his life.
2. For King, nonviolence was the key to winning the **fray**.
3. She is **punctual** and in her seat before the bell rings.
4. His kindness helped to **redeem** her from sadness.
5. For some, a **shanty** was the only affordable housing.

Maya Angelou

born 1928

An Early Activist

At age 16, Maya Angelou wanted to become a streetcar conductor in San Francisco. However, the railway would not hire female or African-American drivers. Supported by organizations that backed her cause, Angelou went to the railway office every day. After three weeks, she became San Francisco's first female African-American streetcar driver.

Renaissance Woman

Angelou eventually moved on to many other pursuits. She has been a dancer, an actor, a mother, a poet, and a songwriter as well as the author of six autobiographies, each covering a different time in her life.

BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

Civil Rights Supporter

Under the leadership of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) promoted nonviolent protest as a way to gain civil rights for African Americans. In 1960, Angelou wrote and co-produced a musical to raise funds for the organization. She later became the Northern coordinator for the group. King was just becoming famous when Maya Angelou met him at the SCLC office.



Author
Online



Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML7-267



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Encounter with
**Martin
Luther
King Jr.**

Maya Angelou

I returned from lunch. In the outer office Millie Jordan was working over a table of papers. Hazel was busy on the telephone. I walked into my office and a man sitting at my desk, with his back turned, spun around, stood up and smiled. Martin Luther King said, “Good afternoon, Miss Angelou. You are right on time.”

The surprise was so total that it took me a moment to react to his outstretched hand.

I had worked two months for the SCLC, sent out tens of thousands of letters and invitations signed by Rev. King, made hundreds of statements in his name, but I had never seen him up close. He was shorter than I expected and so young. He had an easy friendliness, which was unsettling. Looking at him in my office, alone, was like seeing a lion sitting down at my dining-room table eating a plate of mustard greens. **A**

“We’re so grateful for the job you all are doing up here. It’s a confirmation for us down on the firing line.”¹

**Analyze
Visuals** ▶

What might you **infer** about the expression on King’s face?

A CHARACTERIZATION

Reread lines 10–13. What do you learn about King from Angelou’s description of him?

1. a **confirmation . . . line**: proof to us in the middle of the struggle that we are doing the right thing.



WE MARCH FOR INTEGRATED SCHOOLS NOW!

WE DEMAND DECENT HOUSING NOW!

NO U.S. DOWN TO HELP JIM CROW GROW

I.U.E. MARCH FOR FULL CITIZENSHIP NOW!

WE MARCH FOR EFFECTIVE CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS NOW!

UA JO FRE Every

ASBURY THODIST HURCH

UA

ALDC

NATIONAL

ALL

ALL

ALL

ALL

ALL

ALL

ALL

ALL

ALL

ALL

ALL

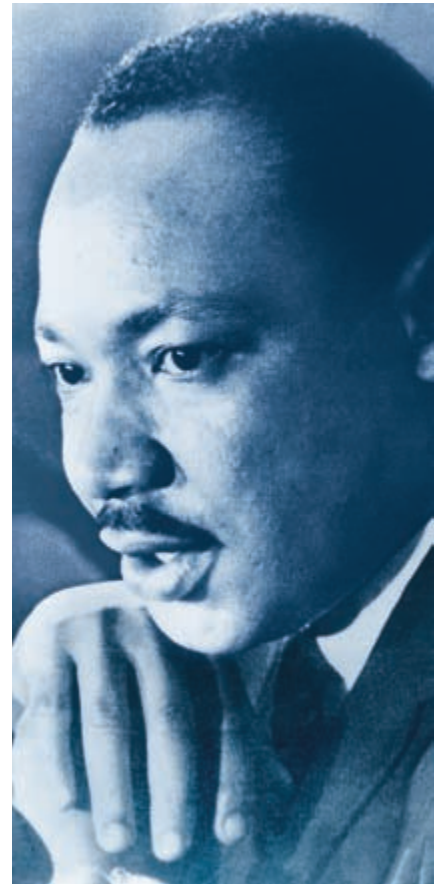
ALL

ALL

ALL

ALL

ALL



I was finally able to say how glad I was to meet him.

“Come on, take your seat back and tell me about yourself.”

I settled gratefully into the chair and he sat on the arm of the old sofa across the room.

20 “Stanley says you’re a Southern girl. Where are you from?” His voice had lost the church way of talking and he had become just a young man asking a question of a young woman. I looked at him and thought about the good-looking . . . school athlete, who was invariably the boyfriend of the . . . cheerleader. **B**

I said, “Stamps, Arkansas. Twenty-five miles from Texarkana.”

30 He knew Texarkana and Pine Bluff, and, of course, Little Rock. He asked me the size and population of Stamps and if my people were farmers. I said no and started to explain about Mamma and my crippled uncle who raised me. As I talked he nodded as if he knew them personally. When I described the dirt roads and **shanties** and the little schoolhouse on top of the hill, he smiled in recognition. When I mentioned my brother Bailey, he asked what he was doing now.

The question stopped me. He was friendly and understanding, but if I told him my brother was in prison, I couldn’t be sure how long his

B CHARACTERIZATION

Reread lines 20–24.

What change does the author notice in King’s speech pattern? What does this suggest about King?

shanty (shăn’tē) *n.*
a rundown house;
a shack



understanding would last. I could lose my job. Even more important, I might lose his respect. Birds of a feather and all that, but I took a chance and told him Bailey was in Sing Sing.²

He dropped his head and looked at his hands.

40 “It wasn’t a crime against a human being.” I had to explain. I loved my brother and although he was in jail, I wanted Martin Luther King to think he was an uncommon criminal. “He was a fence. Selling stolen goods. That’s all.” **C**

He looked up. “How old is he?”

“Thirty-three and very bright. Bailey is not a bad person. Really.”

“I understand. Disappointment drives our young men to some desperate lengths.” Sympathy and sadness kept his voice low. “That’s why we must fight and win. We must save the Baileys of the world. And Maya, never stop loving him. Never give up on him. Never deny him. And remember, he is freer than those who hold him behind bars.” **D**

50 Redemptive³ suffering had always been the part of Martin’s argument which I found difficult to accept. I had seen distress **fester** souls and bend

C CONNECT

Have you ever felt the need to explain or defend the actions of someone you love? Why do you think Angelou might have done this?

D CHARACTERIZATION

Reread lines 45–49. What does King’s statement suggest about him?

fester (fēs’tər) v. to become an increasing source of irritation or poisoning

2. **Sing Sing**: a prison in New York State.

3. **redemptive**: earning freedom or salvation.

peoples' bodies out of shape, but I had yet to see anyone **redeemed** from pain, by pain.

There was a knock at the door and Stanley Levison entered.

“Good afternoon, Maya. Hello, Martin. We’re about ready.”

Martin stood and the personal tenderness disappeared. He became the fighting preacher, armed and ready for the public **fray**.

He came over to my desk. “Please accept my thanks. And remember, we are not alone. There are a lot of good people in this nation. White people who love right and are willing to stand up and be counted.”
60 His voice had changed back to the mellifluous Baptist cadence⁴ raised for the common good. **E**

We shook hands and I wondered if his statement on the existence of good whites had been made for Stanley’s benefit.

At the door, he turned. “But we cannot relax, because for every fair-minded white American, there is a Bull Connor⁵ waiting with his shotgun and attack dogs.”

I was sitting, mulling over the experience, when Hazel and Millie walked in smiling.

70 “Caught you that time, didn’t we?”

I asked her if she had set up the surprise. She had not. She said when Martin came in he asked to meet me. He was told that I was due back from lunch and that I was fanatically **punctual**. He offered to play a joke by waiting alone in my office.

Millie chuckled. “He’s got a sense of humor. You never hear about that, do you?”

Hazel said, “It makes him more human somehow. I like a serious man to be able to laugh. Rounds out the personality.” **F**

Martin King had been a hero and a leader to me since the time when
80 Godfrey and I heard him speak and had been carried to glory on his wings of hope. However, the personal sadness he showed when I spoke of my brother put my heart in his keeping forever, and made me thrust away the small constant worry which my mother had given me as a part of an early parting gift: Black folks can’t change because white folks won’t change. **G**

redeem (rĭ-dēm’) v.
to set free

fray (frā) n. a fight; a heated dispute

E CHARACTERIZATION

Reread lines 56–62. Describe the shift in King’s attitude. What can you **infer** about why he is different in private than he is in public?

punctual
(pŭngk’chōō-əl) adj.
on time; prompt

F CHARACTERIZATION

What do you learn about King through Millie’s and Hazel’s words?

G CONNECT

Think about how Angelou feels toward King. Who has touched your heart or mind in a similar way?

4. **mellifluous** (mə-lĭf’lōō-əs) **Baptist cadence** (kād’ns): the smooth rhythms of speech characteristic of Baptist preachers.

5. **Bull Connor**: an official in Birmingham, Alabama, best known for ordering police officers to use fire hoses and police dogs to break up a civil rights demonstration in 1963.

Comprehension

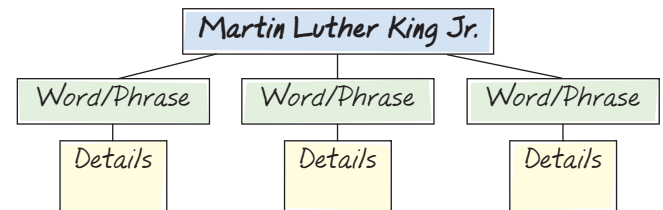
1. **Recall** What joke does King play on Maya Angelou?
2. **Recall** Why is Angelou afraid to tell King about her brother?
3. **Clarify** Why did King want to meet Angelou?



RI.3 Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text.

Text Analysis

4. **Examine Connections** Review the notes you made in your log. What events were you able to connect with? Note which connection surprised you the most.
5. **Interpret Meaning** Reread lines 12–13. When Angelou enters her office and sees King, she describes her hero as a “lion sitting down at my dining-room table eating a plate of mustard greens.” What does she mean by this?
6. **Analyze Characterization** What three words or phrases would you use to describe King’s personality? Write them in a chart like the one shown. Below each word or phrase, cite several details from the selection to support it.
7. **Make Inferences** Reread the last paragraph. Why do you think King’s comments about Angelou’s brother helped Angelou stop worrying so much, or, in her words, “thrust away the small constant worry” she had felt since her mother left her?
8. **Draw Conclusions** Which side of King, the “fighting preacher” or the tender young man, do you think meant the most to Angelou? Give examples from the text to support your answer.



Extension and Challenge

9. **SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION** Read the workplace document from Martin Luther King Jr. on page 275. Why were King and the SCLC concerned about the African-American vote in the South? What was the result of their efforts? Research the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to find the answers. Also note how the law changed voting practices

What if you could meet your HERO?

Recall the questions you would ask your hero. Since reading Maya Angelou’s account, would you change any of your questions? Why or why not?

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the letter of the term that is most closely related to the boldfaced word.

1. **shanty**: (a) mansion, (b) abode, (c) hut
2. **fester**: (a) improve, (b) disturb, (c) go away
3. **redeem**: (a) rescue, (b) enslave, (c) preserve
4. **fray**: (a) conflict, (b) converse, (c) sew
5. **punctual**: (a) lazy, (b) on time, (c) late

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• analyze • aware • develop • react • respond

Think of a social problem of today. If King were alive today, how would he **react** to this problem? Write a brief statement of the issue and of how you think King would deal with it. Use at least one of the Academic Vocabulary words in your statement.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: USING REFERENCE AIDS

To express ideas clearly and accurately, you need to choose just the right words. Reference aids, or resources of information, can improve your writing by providing synonyms for words you already know. Synonyms are words with similar meanings. For example, a synonym for *shanty* is *shack*. To find a synonym for a word, look in a reference aid.

- A **thesaurus** is a reference book of synonyms. Also, many word-processing programs contain an electronic thesaurus tool.

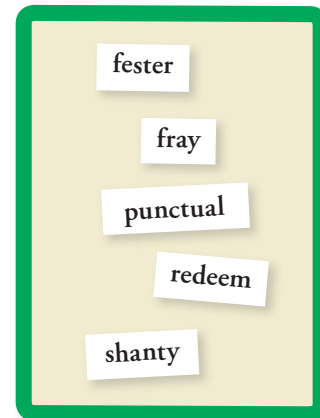
shanty *noun* hovel, hut, lean-to, shack

- A **dictionary** lists synonyms after the definitions of some words.

shanty (shăn'tē) *n., pl. -ties* a rundown house: *The shanty collapsed after years of neglect.* **syn** HOVEL, HUT, LEAN-TO, SHACK

PRACTICE Use a reference aid to find a synonym for each word. Note the synonym and the reference aid you used to find it. Then use each synonym in a sentence that matches its shade of meaning.

1. abolish
2. extricate
3. monopolize
4. voracious



COMMON CORE

L.4c Consult general and specialized reference materials, both print and digital, to clarify meaning.

Interactive Vocabulary **THINK** central
Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML7-274

MEMORANDUM Following is a memo that Dr. King sent to the people organizing the opening-day rallies for the Crusade for Citizenship, a drive to register African Americans to vote. Notice the phrases that reflect Dr. King's fairness and leadership.

FROM: M. L. King Jr., President
TO: Speakers, Local Contacts, Participants in S. C. L. C.
RE: Crusade for Citizenship Mass Meeting, February 12, 1958

UNITY OF EMPHASIS

At our executive committee meeting on Thursday, Jan. 30, 1958, many expressed the hope that all persons would leave the Mass Meetings with a clear picture of the aims and purposes of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, with a firm determination to register and vote, and with a sense of being part of a southwide "crusade."

To help achieve this unity of aim and direction, we are urging you to make certain that the following points are clearly and simply made from the platform by some responsible person during the mass meeting:

1. The Crusade for Citizenship is a southwide movement. These meetings express this. The list should be read. It should be clear that this is the opening step in a long and hard, but necessary and glorious struggle.
2. The Crusade has two aims:
 - (a) to double the number of Negroes who vote in the South
 - (b) and thus, to help liberate all Southerners, Negro and white, to extend democracy in our great nation. When Negroes can vote, white people will have greater economic and political freedom. The South can have a real two party system—a necessity for real democracy.
3. The Crusade will place emphasis on preparing spiritually and tactically for registration prior to the 1958 and 1960 elections.
4. The Crusade is non-partisan. Its major purpose is to get men and women to realize that voting is a "moral" and "political" duty to God, to the nation, to themselves, and to their children; then to help them learn how to register and to want to vote. The Crusade will not engage in partisan politics. We urge people to vote: we do not want to influence them to vote for any particular party. We believe in the people. When they are aroused to vote, they will vote intelligently. No one need tell them where their political interest lies. This is morally the right approach.
5. The right to vote is related to all other rights. When Negroes have won and fully exercise their right to vote many changes can then occur:
 - (a) segregated buses will disappear
 - (b) wages will be increased
 - (c) police brutality will be a thing of the past
 - (d) men who believe in justice will be sent to congress
 - (e) "mob violence" will fade away
 - (f) justice will be established in the courts.

These things will come about because the mayors, city councilmen, police commissioners, the governors, congressmen and even the President will know that they must do the right things or be turned out of office when the people go to the ballot box. . . .