

Rhetorical Structures: Figures of Speech • "I Have a Dream" Analysis

Overview

CERTAIN RHETORICAL DEVICES called **FIGURES OF SPEECH** (similes, metaphors, allusions, alliteration, etc.) are used in both poetry and prose to make ideas more memorable and forceful. For centuries, speakers and writers have known that such well worded devices affect listeners and readers in powerful ways. After hearing and reading King's famous speech, respond to the following questions, offering support for each answer.

1. "Five score years ago," the opening phrase of King's speech, is an **ALLUSION** to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address? Why was this an appropriate and strong way for King to begin his speech?
2. King's speech contains other **ALLUSIONS** in addition to the one with which he opens his speech. Find an allusion to the Declaration of Independence and the Bible.
3. Find at least one example of **ALLITERATION** in King's speech.
4. Find at least one example of a **METAPHOR**.
5. Find at least one example of a **SIMILE**.
6. In the second paragraph, King says that "the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination."
 - ♦ What type of figure of speech is this?
 - ♦ These words bring up strong images of slavery. Why would this be an effective method of moving his audience?
 - ♦ What inference was King making about the progress of African Americans to enter the mainstream of American life in the one hundred years which followed the end of slavery?
7. Another figure of speech is called an **ANAPHORA** or the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of a sentence, verse, or paragraph. Besides the famous "I have a dream" phrase, find two other examples of anaphora.
8. List at least two possible effects upon King's audience of repeating the phrase, "I have a dream."
9. Nearly every line of King's speech is filled with powerful images, or "mental pictures," many created by using figures of speech. Images help audiences to feel what speakers/writers want them to feel, help them remember what they have read or heard, and help them understand difficult material. Discuss which of King's images you find most powerful and appealing and explain why this image had meaning for you.
10. Write a paragraph summarizing King's dream in your own words.
11. What appeals (emotional, ethical, and logical) did he use? Did he present any appeals that were not true or were stretched to meet his needs?
12. Do you think King successfully persuaded his audience? Why or why not?