

WRITING THROUGH THE RHETORICAL MODES

SECTION 2: A RHETORICAL MODES READER

Chapter One: Developing a Response Essay

Developing a Response Essay: Reading 1

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote this famous letter, originally published as “The Negro Is Your Brother,” while incarcerated during the Birmingham campaign, an effort meant to draw attention to African Americans’ efforts to integrate that city, as well as to the resistance to that effort. King wrote this letter as a response to white religious leaders’ public statement of caution, and it now stands as one of the most important documents of the civil rights movement. This version is an abridgement published in the April 16th, 2013 issue of The Atlantic to mark the letter’s 50th anniversary.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/04/martin-luther-kings-letter-from-birmingham-jail/274668/>

Assignment:

In “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King states: “How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law, or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. . . . Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality ...”

Write an essay that discusses your understanding of an law that is “just” and a law that is “unjust” and discuss whether you find Dr. Martin Luther King’s claim a legitimate one.

Your essay must present a clear thesis. Support your thesis with details to illustrate your position. In your essay, you may use examples from your own experience and/or something you have read, viewed, or witnessed to demonstrate your point. In addition, you must directly reference King’s essay to support your claims and illustrate how you are responding his ideas.

Your response essay should be about five paragraphs will be assessed on the following:

- Clarity of the argument/thesis.
- Development of your argument/thesis and utilization of the rhetorical modes: description, comparison/contrast, narration, cause and effect, definition, and/or exemplification.

- Integration of your ideas with the ideas in the texts through paraphrases and direct quotations. Balance your own analysis with ideas in the text.
- Organization of your overall essay
- Language and mechanics, such as sentence clarity and fluid use of transitions.



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