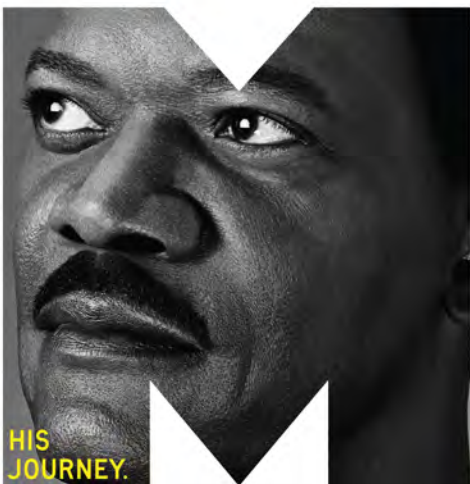


SAMUEL L. JACKSON

ANGELA BASSETT



THE **MOUNTAIN TOP**

A NEW PLAY BY **KATORI HALL**

DIRECTED BY **KENNY LEON**

PHOTOS BY MARY ELLEN MARK

TEACHER'S GUIDE

TEACHING TOLERANCE 

A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER
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Introduction

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968 unleashed a collective cry of grief and anger that echoes to this day. His leadership was crucial to the American civil rights movement, and his slaying in Memphis—following what would become one of his most famous and prescient speeches—appeared difficult to overcome.

But the movement continued—with other leaders, other voices and important successes that gave power to those who had little. In the meantime, Dr. King became an idol—a legacy deservedly memorialized in stone in our nation's capital. Today's students surely know he was an important leader. They might know what he did to help ensure their rights as citizens. But they might have a harder time knowing King himself—the man with self-doubt as well as self-confidence, with anger as well as acceptance.

In “The Mountaintop,” playwright Katori Hall brings us that man. Her depiction of the civil rights leader is controversial. But it serves to link King's humanity with our own. And it challenges us to think not about the movement silenced, but about the movement passed into the hands of future generations.

This teaching guide includes three lessons that reinforce these messages. The first challenges students to rethink the idea of leadership and to create—as Hall did—their own image of Dr. King. The second allows them to see King's role within the context of the larger civil rights movement. The third passes King's baton into their own hands, asking them to search out and help resolve injustice and inequality where they see it.

The lessons include these recurring elements:

Setting the Stage provides a lesson overview, including the essential questions students will answer.

Vocabulary in Context points out vocabulary words and their definitions, with actors' lines from the play included for context.

Aside includes notes for you on a few elements of the play's structure: character, symbols, and the “fourth wall.” These short mini-activities will help students dig deeper into the playwright's intent.

Dialogue provides a few discussion questions to begin each lesson.

Taking the Stage is the main activity, with students constructing meaning both from their viewing of the play and from additional research and debate.

Both “The Mountaintop” and this teaching guide call citizens of all ages to action. In the end, this is really how we honor the memory of Dr. King.

MEETING STANDARDS

Activities and embedded assessments address the following standards from McREL 4th edition and Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts:

MCREL STANDARDS

ARTS – ART CONNECTIONS

Standard 1. Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines

ARTS – THEATRE

Standard 5. Understands how informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions create and communicate meaning

ARTS – VISUAL ARTS

Standard 1. Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts
Standard 4. Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

HISTORY – HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

Standard 1. Understands and knows how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns
Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

HISTORY – UNITED STATES HISTORY

Standard 29. Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties

LIFE SKILLS – THINKING AND REASONING

Standard 3. Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences

LIFE SKILLS – WORKING WITH OTHERS

Standard 1. Contributes to the overall effort of a group
Standard 4. Displays effective interpersonal communication skills

LANGUAGE ARTS – WRITING

Standard 1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process
Standard 2. Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
Standard 4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes

LANGUAGE ARTS – READING

Standard 7. Uses skills and strategies to read a variety of informational texts

LANGUAGE ARTS – LISTENING AND SPEAKING

Standard 8. Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

LANGUAGE ARTS – VIEWING

Standard 9. Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

LANGUAGE ARTS – MEDIA

Standard 10. Understands the characteristics and components of the media

COMMON CORE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	LESSON		
	1	2	3
READING			
Standard 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.	●	●	●
Standard 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.	●	●	●
Standard 4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.	●	●	
Standard 6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.	●	●	●
Standard 7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.	●	●	●
Standard 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.	●	●	
Standard 9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.	●	●	●
Standard 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.	●	●	●
WRITING			
Standard 1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.		●	●
Standard 2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.	●	●	●
Standard 3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.		●	●
Standard 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	●	●	●
Standard 6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.	●	●	●
Standard 7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.	●	●	●
Standard 8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.	●	●	●
Standard 9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.	●	●	●
Standard 10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.	●	●	●
SPEAKING AND LISTENING			
Standard 1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	●	●	●
Standard 2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.	●	●	●
Standard 3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.		●	
Standard 4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	●	●	●
Standard 5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentation.	●	●	●

continued...

COMMON CORE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS	LESSON		
	1	2	3
LANGUAGE			
Standard 3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.	●	●	●
Standard 4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.	●	●	●
Standard 5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.	●	●	●
Standard 6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level.	●	●	●

LESSON 1

Just a Man

*“You done brought us far. But you a man. You just a man ...
You’re not God, though some folk’ll say you got mighty close.”*

—CAMAE, to King

SETTING THE STAGE

“The Mountaintop” offers its audience an image of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that they may not have seen before. For some, the character of King in the play is controversial. For others, the character personalizes the idea that we often boost our historic leaders to impossible heights. We write biographies, we build memorials, we read or listen to each word they wrote and said—sometimes at the expense of really understanding what they achieved. But like all of us, King was “just a man,” which means that we have just as much potential to create a better world.

With Lesson 1, you will answer these essential questions:

What do we look for in our leaders?

What sources do we draw from in understanding their lives and work?

What are the pros and cons of martyrdom?

ASIDE NOTES ON THE PLAY // CHARACTER

As “The Mountaintop” began, you knew that the main character would represent Dr. King. But, as Katori Hall depicts him, he may not have been quite the man you expected. He swore. He drank a little. He showed weaknesses. The character of Camae also may have been a surprise. She turns out to be more than her station in life might have dictated. What aspects of the character of King showed him to be most human? How did those traits differ from the way most people remember or memorialize him? In Camae, how did Hall show how our human traits might make us “better angels”? Discuss how these characters lent themselves to a potential theme of the play. What do you think Hall’s theme is?

DIALOGUE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

How would you describe your previous image of Dr. King?

What knowledge or resources contributed to that image?

What is a martyr?

What are the pros and cons of that label?

What do his achievements in American justice and civil rights tell us about ourselves?



PHOTOS BY JOAN MARCUS

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

siddity—slang term for pretentious or conceited
“You can call me siddity all you like, I want me a Pall Mall.”
—KING, to Ralph Abernathy (offstage)

square—in this context, a slang term for a tobacco cigarette
“You ain’t gone leave me here to work through the night wit nothin’ to smoke on. ... All I got is one square left.” —CAMAE, to King

bougie—derived from bourgeois; aspiring to be from a higher class
“That right, y’all bougie black folk call it Independence Day. I can’t seem to quite call it that yet.”
—CAMAE, to King

martyr—a person who is killed while defending a principle, belief or cause
“You’ll be a man-made martyr. No, better yet! A saint!”
—CAMAE, to King

★ TAKING THE STAGE ★

1. Based on your viewing of “The Mountaintop,” work as a class to list the traits that Katori Hall gave to the character of King. Consider his voice and words, his emotions, his actions, his interactions with others, and his view of his country.

2. In pairs or small groups, compare Hall’s image of Dr. King with his image from other print and Internet resources. These online resources will help you:

The Official Website of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial
www.mlkmemorial.org

The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change
www.thekingcenter.org

The Official Website of the Nobel Prize—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Biography
www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html

Biography Network—Martin Luther King Jr. (including quotes, photos and video)
www.biography.com/people/martin-luther-king-jr-9365086

3. Within your pairs or groups, discuss what you’ve found. How do the images of King as a martyr and an inspirational leader compare to the one that Hall has created? How do they compare with each other? Who do you think is the “real” Dr. King? Why?

4. Share your findings with the other groups. How do your images of the “real” Dr. King compare? What process did each group use to construct that image?

5. Within your groups and using a variety of media, construct a physical “portrait” of Dr. King that you think best defines his role as a leader in the civil rights movement. Your portrait could take the form of a short, one-person show; a mosaic of found images; a poster announcing one of his appearances; a painting or a speech. Share your portraits in a multimedia “gallery” for an outside audience.

LESSON 2

Evolution, Not Revolution

“God’ll strike you down if you move ’round too much. That what my mamma used to say. When it storm like this my mamma say, ‘Be still!’” —CAMAЕ, to King

SETTING THE STAGE

In “The Mountaintop,” the character of Camae speaks the line above in reference to a storm raging outside Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel. But she also could be speaking about the danger all civil rights workers encountered—particularly in the turbulent 1950s and 1960s. Standing up meant the possibility of being struck down. In addition to Dr. King, there were many other people—well-known and unknown—who worked toward America’s goal of “justice for all.” Change did not come at once. It came in a succession of setbacks and small victories.

With Lesson 2, you will answer these essential questions:

What is the history of the civil rights movement?

What was Dr. King’s role in the civil rights movement?

How can you help others understand the importance of past events?

ASIDE NOTES ON THE PLAY // SYMBOLS

One of the strengths of “The Mountaintop” is Katori Hall’s use of visual symbols to convey a theme. They are as obvious as the moving images of modern historical moments toward the end of the play. They are contained in the elements that rage outside the motel-room door. They are also represented in the knot in King’s tie, his “stanky” shoes, his missing toothbrush and Camae’s full name. Symbols are a type of shorthand that allow us to understand larger concepts. Using print or Internet resources, research the possible meanings of the following literary symbols and share your findings. How does your understanding of them deepen your appreciation for the play?

rain	snow	fire	lightning	thunder
square	mountain	shoes	knots	door

DIALOGUE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What do you consider the civil rights era?

What historical events mark that era?

Which were alluded to in the play?

What was the result of those events?

What do you still need to know about the movement?



PHOTOS BY JICAN MARCUS

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

injunction—a judicial order requiring people to act or refrain from acting

“The city said it was seeking the injunction as a means of protecting Dr. King. ...” —KING, reading from a newspaper report

Panther—a reference to the Black Panther Party, an African-American revolutionary group active from 1966 until 1982

“So are you an honorary Panther?” —KING, to Camae

Larry Payne—16-year-old youth shot by Memphis police when violence erupted during a march in support of striking sanitation workers

“[Violence] just gives these police an excuse to shoot innocent folks. Like that boy ... that 16-year-old boy they shot ... Larry Payne. Larry Payne. Larry Payne. I’ll never forget his name.” —KING, to Camae

continued ...

★ TAKING THE STAGE ★

1. As a class, review the events of the civil rights movement that are mentioned in “The Mountaintop.” Indicate your level of knowledge about the events, and what additional details you would like to know.

2. In groups, use print or Internet sources to research the chronology of the civil rights movement in America. The following resources can help:

The Leadership Conference—Civil Rights 101

www.civilrights.org/resources/civilrights101/chronology.html

PBS African American World—Timeline of the Civil Rights Era

www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/civil_01.html

Teaching Tolerance—“A Time for Justice” Civil Rights Timeline

www.tolerance.org/supplement/time-justice-civil-rights-timeline

3. Within your group, share what you’ve learned and answer the following questions:

In which events was Dr. King directly involved?

In which events did he serve as an inspirational leader?

What happened before he took a leadership role?

What occurred following his assassination?

What are the names of other people within the movement?

What were their contributions?

4. Inspired by the play’s moving images showing moments in modern history, work together to create a multidimensional timeline of civil rights-era events. Choose events that best demonstrate both potential setbacks and the forward movement of justice. Your timeline can take the form of a computer-software presentation, an oral presentation using several actors, a short video or a Facebook-based image timeline.

5. Share and review each group’s timelines. Which techniques were most effective in communicating this important history? Plan ways you can share them with younger audiences—either within your school or in your community.

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

diatribe—a forceful and bitter verbal attack

“Not too many maids spouting off well-formed diatribes like that.”

—KING, to Camae

Malcolm X—an African-American Muslim minister, public speaker and human rights activist; he was assassinated in February 1965

“I know God liked Malcolm X. And you woulda liked him, too. He didn’t drink. Smoke. Cuss.”

—CAMAE, to King

Poor People’s Campaign—organized by Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to address the issues of economic justice and housing for America’s poor

“The plan. It’s all in the works. The Poor People’s Campaign!”

—KING, to Camae

LESSON 3

Pick Up the Baton

“You in a relay race, albeit the fastest runner we done ever seen’t. But you ’bout to burn out, superstar. You gone need to pass off that baton.” —CAMAE, to King

SETTING THE STAGE

At the end of the play, King says that “this baton is no longer the burden my image can bear.” He begs us to grab it and “pass, pass, pass it along” in the multigenerational relay toward the goal of equal rights and equal respect for all. He sees a world without rich and poor, without hunger and war. For now, however, we still wrestle with these and other issues. Within their communities, students can accept King’s baton and make changes in ways small and large.

You have seen and researched examples of what others have done before you. Now what will you do to help the nation reach “the mountaintop”?

With Lesson 3, you will answer these essential questions:
 What civil and equal rights battles remain to be resolved?
 What might be the most effective ways to resolve them?
 What can you do right now to further the goal of equal rights?

ASIDE NOTES ON THE PLAY // THE FOURTH WALL

When the main character begins to speak directly to the audience, he is breaking what is known as the “fourth wall” (the other three walls are represented by the box-like set within the theater). The fourth wall is the imaginary boundary between the actors and their audience. What do you think the playwright intended by having King speak directly to that audience? In what ways was it effective?

DIALOGUE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What inequities directly affect students in your school?
 What inequities directly affect the citizens of your community?
 What is the status of those inequities in comparison to the rest of the nation? To the rest of the world?
 What can you learn from those who already are working to correct those inequities?



Martin Luther King Jr. would recognize some of today’s issues, and some might seem new to him. The photos above show some contemporary situations that call for someone to pick up the baton. What issues today call on us to take a stand?

GETTY IMAGES, AP PHOTOS

★ TAKING THE STAGE ★

1. As a class, use the questions above to start a discussion about justice and equal rights within your school and community—and how the status of those rights compares to the status of the rest of the nation. For instance, what essential resources are available in your community to those who can afford it, while the poorest among you do without? How do bullying and marginalization affect your gay and lesbian peers? What support do the nation’s newest residents need to keep learning and for them to thrive? Where does misunderstanding and distrust get in the way of communication among the cultures reflected in your community?

2. Divide into groups, and choose an issue with which you feel you can make a difference. Share what you’ve chosen with the rest of the class. If any group’s issue overlaps with another group’s, consider joining forces to divide responsibilities or to broaden your scope of responsibility into the community or nationwide.

3. Within your group, divide the following responsibilities: further research into the issue on a local level; interviews with those currently working to resolve injustices linked to that issue; and investigation into possible avenues for ending the injustices.

4. Meet to share your findings. Based on your information, create an action plan for what your group can do to make a difference—either on your own or in coordination with existing, outside organizations. Your plan should include benchmark goals and the steps that will be taken to try to reach them. Remember, not all members of the group need to be “marchers.” Support also comes in the form of creativity, technological skills and communication.

5. Update your peers on a regular basis to share your successes and setbacks, either with oral presentations, school newspaper articles or social-media updates.

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

pedestal—in this context, a position of high regard or adoration
“Cause in this country a pulpit is a pedestal and we all know that, in America, the tall tree is felled first.”
 —KING, to Camae

baton—during a race, a hollow rod that is passed from one member of a relay team to another
“I know I have dropped this baton so many times over this race.”
 —KING, to Camae

St. Augustine—a 5th century Catholic bishop who confessed to many weaknesses, but continued to pursue truth; he is the patron saint of, among other things, theologians
“Hey St. Augustine. What up? Yeah ... Can I speak to God?”
 —CAMAE, on the phone

Promised Land—in the Bible, the land promised by God to Abraham; also, a place or situation believed to hold ultimate happiness
“I have plans. Lots of plans in my head and in my heart and my people need me. They need me. I need to see them to the Promised Land.”
 —KING, to God

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THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER is a nonprofit organization that combats hate, intolerance and discrimination through education and litigation.

TEACHING TOLERANCE, a project of Southern Poverty Law Center, is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children.

The program provides free educational materials to educators for use by millions of students. *Teaching Tolerance* magazine is sent to 450,000 educators, reaching every school in the country, twice annually. Tens of thousands of educators use the program's film kits and more than 5,000 schools participate in the annual Mix It Up at Lunch Day program.

Teaching Tolerance teaching materials have won two Oscars, an Emmy and more than 20 honors from the Association of Educational Publishers, including two Golden Lamp Awards, the industry's highest honor.

The generosity of the Southern Poverty Law Center's supporters makes our work possible.

TEACHING THE MOVEMENT

The civil rights movement is one of the defining events in American history—a bracing example of Americans fighting for the ideals of justice and equality. Teaching the civil rights movement is essential to ensuring that American history is relevant to students in an increasingly diverse nation.

Teaching Tolerance undertook a comprehensive review—the first of its kind—of the coverage accorded the civil rights movement in state educational standards and curriculum frameworks. The results of that review are set out in *Teaching the Movement: The State of Civil Rights Education in the United States 2011* (splcenter.org/get-informed/publications/teaching-the-movement). It provides a national report card on the state of civil rights education in our country. Most states, unfortunately, received a failing grade.

*“... Until justice rolls down like water
and righteousness like a mighty stream.”*

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

TEACHING 
TOLERANCE

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