

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE'S BLUEPRINT?

Dr. King offers life-changing advice to teens in this inspirational speech

VOCABULARY PREVIEW: As you read, look for context clues to learn these words:
dignity • stigma • increasingly • sociological • plight

Martin Luther King Jr. delivered some of the most famous, most eloquent speeches in American history. His best-known speeches, though, were given on a national stage, about national issues. This speech is different. In it, Dr. King speaks directly to teens just like you, and he offers very personal advice. The speech was delivered to teens at Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia on October 26, 1967—less than six months before Dr. King was assassinated.

I want to ask you a question, and that is: What is in your life's blueprint? This is a most important and crucial period in your lives. For what you do now and what you decide now at this age may well determine which way your life shall go. Whenever a building is constructed, you usually have an architect who draws a blueprint, and that blueprint serves as the guide for those who are to build the building. A building is not well erected without a good, sound, and solid blueprint.

Now, each of you is in the process of building the structure of your lives, and the question is whether you have a proper, a solid, and a sound blueprint.

I want to suggest some of the things that should be in your life's blueprint. Number one in your life's blueprint should be a deep belief in your own **dignity**, your own worth, and your own **somewhatness**. Don't allow anybody to make you feel that you are nobody. Always feel that you count. Always feel that you have worth, and always feel that

your life has ultimate significance. Now, that means that you should not be ashamed of your color. You know, it's very unfortunate that in so many instances, our society has placed a **stigma** on the Negro's color.

Secondly, in your life's blueprint, you must have as the basic principle the determination to achieve excellence in your various fields of endeavor. You're going to be deciding as the years unfold what you will do in life—what your life's work will be. Once you have decided what it will be, set out to do it, and to do it well.

And I say to you, my young friends, that doors are opening to each of you—doors of opportunities that were not open to your mothers and to your fathers—and the great challenge facing you is to be ready to enter these doors as they open.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great essayist, said in a lecture in 1871 that if a man can write a better book or preach a better sermon or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, even if he builds his



Dr. King's most famous speech was delivered at the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. Do you know the name of that speech?

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house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door.

That hasn't always been true—but it will become **increasingly** true, and so I would urge you to study hard, to burn the midnight oil; I would say to you, don't drop out of school. I understand all of the **sociological** reasons why we often drop out of school, but I urge you in spite of your economic **plight**, in spite of the situation that you're forced to live—stay in school.

And when you discover what you are going to be in your life, set out to do it as if God Almighty called you at this particular moment in history to do it. Do that job so well that the living, the dead, or the unborn couldn't do it any better.

If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures. Sweep streets like Beethoven composed music. Sweep streets

like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived a great street sweeper.

If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill, be a shrub in the valley. But be the best little shrub on the side of the hill. For it isn't by size that you win or you fail. Be the best of whatever you are.

Finally, in your life's blueprint, there must be a commitment to the eternal principles of beauty, love, and justice. Don't allow anybody to pull you so low as to make you hate them. Don't allow anybody to cause you to lose your self-respect to the point that you do not struggle for justice. However young you are, you have a responsibility to seek to make life better for everybody. And so you must be involved in the struggle for freedom and justice. ■

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THINK ABOUT IT

Discuss these questions as a class or answer them on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Summarize the three principles that Dr. King says are important to have in your life's blueprint.
2. Why do you think Dr. King refers to a lecture made by Ralph Waldo Emerson? In your own words, paraphrase what Emerson said. How does this fit into Dr. King's blueprint for life?
3. A **metaphor** is a literary device where something is described in terms that are unlike that thing. Dr. King is using an **extended metaphor** in this speech. He compares a life plan to an architect's blueprint. On your own, extend the metaphor even further. What would the bricks, wood, and steel of your own life be?

WRITE NOW

Dr. King's speech asks: What is in your life's blueprint? Answer that question in a short personal essay. Include a main idea and details about your plans for the future.

WORD MATCH

Match the words below to their definitions.

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|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. dignity | a. blemish; stain |
| 2. stigma | b. dilemma; hardship |
| 3. increasingly | c. a relation to society |
| 4. sociological | d. honor; respect |
| 5. plight | e. becoming greater or larger |