

# MIDDLE SCHOOL

## The Dream Today (Lesson Choice B)

*In this lesson, students analyze a political cartoon, and in discussing its meaning, also have a conversation about equal rights. For use in the classroom, a handout-ready version of the cartoon below, as well as a download-ready PowerPoint® presentation that includes the cartoon, are available for free download at [www.lawday.org](http://www.lawday.org).*



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## Activity

Project or distribute handout copies of the cartoon to students. Ask the students to describe what they see in the cartoon.

*Students will likely describe the billboard, the face of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the words on the sign. Other items in the photo that might be observed include the spotlights, ladder, paint cans, and paintbrushes, as well as the sky and the tree. Depending on the students' background, an explanation that this is a political cartoon, which is meant to convey an idea, rather than provide amusement, might be appropriate.*

Ask students to discuss the cartoon with the following questions:

- What is happening in the cartoon? In what season do you think the cartoon is set?
- Who is on the billboard? Have you heard these words before? Where do they come from?
- What do you think the “dream” is?
- What do you think the cartoonist was trying to suggest with this cartoon? Why?
- Are there other messages that you think the cartoonist is trying to convey?
- Do you think that the ladder, paint can, or paintbrushes are significant? Why?
- Do you think that the spotlights are significant? Why?
- Do you agree with the messages that the cartoonist might be sending? Why or why not?

*The cartoon refers to King's 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech, in which the “dream” serves as a powerful metaphor for justice and racial equality. The word “dream” can have different meanings, but generally, for King, referred to an aspiration, a promise, a vision of what might or should be in the future, but is not yet in the present. The cartoonist, in depicting an unfinished billboard with reference to Dr. King's speech, might be conveying multiple messages. He might be suggesting that King's dream for racial equality is not yet finished, like the billboard. In displaying the ladder, paint cans, and paintbrushes, the cartoonist may be suggesting that the tools to “complete” the dream are available. He may also be suggesting that a painter, potentially a path to “completing” the dream, was once working, but has stopped. Or, perhaps the painter was painting over the billboard. As viewers, we are unsure of the circumstances surrounding the painter's work and absence—why, how, and length of time. Encourage students to consider all of these possibilities, and the ideas that they convey.*

Lead students into a conversation about Dr. King's dream, and discuss the following questions:

- In what ways do you think that Dr. King’s dream has been realized? What policies and laws can you think of that have made this possible?
- Do you think that it is important, as King proclaimed, for the nation to “rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed,” that “all men are created equal?”
- What makes “equality” possible?
- In what ways do you think that Dr. King’s dream has not been realized, or is unfinished?
- Do you think our country faces new or different challenges than the ones that Dr. King mentioned? What challenges or problems does our nation face today?

Wrap up discussion by exploring ways that students might work to ensure equality for everyone in their communities.

Ask a student to read or watch the “I Have a Dream” speech and research its significance and impact. Then ask them to explain—e.g., through writing, cartoons, poems, videos— a dream that might eliminate a problem facing our nation today.