

## A EULOGY TO DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



BY ROBERT F. KENNEDY

*On April 4, 1968, hundreds of African Americans gathered for what they thought would be an exciting political event. A presidential candidate, Robert Kennedy, was coming to speak to them. Before he was to deliver his speech, however, Kennedy was informed that Martin Luther King, Jr., had been assassinated earlier that day. He nevertheless went to the rally, where he found the people upbeat in anticipation of his appearance. Realizing that they were unaware of the tragic event, he began his speech with the following words.*

I have bad news for you, for all of our fellow citizens, and people who love peace all over the world, and that is that Martin Luther King was shot and killed tonight.

Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice for his fellow human beings, and he died because of that effort.

In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it is perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in. For those of you who are black—considering the evidence there evidently is that there were white people who were responsible—you can be filled with bitterness, with hatred, and a desire for revenge. We can move in that direction as a country, in great polarization—black people amongst black, white people amongst white, filled with hatred toward one another.

Or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand and to comprehend, and to replace

## Reading for Information

Has a teacher, a coach, a politician, or a community leader ever given a speech that inspired you? If so, he or she may have used some of the **rhetorical techniques**—ways of using language persuasively—that Kennedy used in this address.

### PERSUASIVE RHETORIC

Kennedy sensed that there might be an intense reaction to the news of the assassination. In his speech, he used certain rhetorical techniques to persuade the crowd to remain calm.

**YOUR TURN** Use the questions and activities below to help you explore Kennedy's persuasive techniques.

1 The **ethical appeal** is a persuasive technique in which the speaker appeals to the audience's sense of right, justice, and virtue. For example, Kennedy says:

"We can move in that direction as a country, in great polarization—black people amongst black, white people amongst white, filled with hatred Or we can make an effort to understand and to comprehend, and to replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed with an effort to understand with compassion and love."

Kennedy is appealing to the audience's sense of ethics in order to persuade them to his point of view. What does Kennedy say in the next paragraph that may reveal how he identifies with the situation?