

# **Eleven Days in the Life of Dr. King**

## **One Cause, Many Voices**



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|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Grades</i>            | 6 – 12  |
| <i>Core Content Area</i> | Language arts, social studies                           |
| <i>Themes</i>            | Historical eras, personal beliefs, fighting for a cause |
| <i>Materials</i>         | Paper, pencil, Day Six Poem “Spoken, Out of Turn”       |

### **Background**

In this activity, you will focus on an issue important to you and identify a contemporary or historical figure who is a champion of that issue. You will write/compile two sets of writing, one from the perspective of the public figure and one from your own point of view. Inspired by the 11 Days poem, “Spoken, Out of Turn,” you will arrange the two bodies of writing as a tandem spoken word piece.

### **Lesson Procedure**

#### **1.) Read “Spoken, Out of Turn”**

Read “Spoken, Out of Turn” from *Eleven Days in the Life of Dr. King*, included at the end of this lesson. How do the poets emphasize ideas and messages? Consider the use of beats (spaces of silence), solo sections, voicing in unison and repeated phrases.

#### **2.) Select an issue**

Select an issue or cause that relates to our shared social well-being (civil rights, gender equality, healthcare access, LGBTQ, immigration, Black Lives Matter, religious freedom, environmental causes, gun safety/rights, student/educational rights, animal testing, GMOs, college access affordability, voting rights, free speech/press, rights to safe water, etc.).

#### **3.) First Column**

Select a champion from a previous era or from today. The leader should have public comments – in the form of articles, speeches, blogs, letters, tweets – from which you can assemble statements into a poem-like list. As you assemble this first column of the tandem poem, look for quotes from the champion that speak to the issue, which identify the problem, which suggest solutions or courses of action. Try to use primary source material from your champion. But, if you chose a historic figure and a contemporary issue, you may need to imagine how that champion would respond today and write from their perspective. (For example, if you chose Fredrick Douglas and the issue of Black Lives Matter, you could use Douglas’ principles, but would need to extrapolate those ideas to the modern issue.)

#### **4.) Second Column**

Write the second column in your own voice. What are your personal feelings on the issue at hand? Why is this important to you and to the larger community? What are your own calls to action? All of these emotional and rational elements have a place in your own poetic column.

**5.) Revise & Finalize**

Revise and finalize the chosen writing from your champion and yourself. Re-examine the texts you have compiled and written. How might you use some of the same poetic devices used in “Spoken, Out of Turn,” to bring your message home and make your tandem poem more compelling?

**6.) Extension**

Take your written work to the next level by performing your tandem poems in a live setting.

# **Eleven Days in the Life of Dr. King**

## Day Six: Letter from a Birmingham Jail – *Spoken, Out of Turn*



**TACOMA  
ARTS LIVE**

*(Both columns to be read in tandem)*

### **VOICE OF THE PAST**

Teachers  
Leaders  
of our future  
let me speak

I sit at my desk  
I want to be called  
But you can't see me

I have witnessed unfairness  
In your class

When whites bully Blacks  
I must resist the hate

I must stand up for what is right  
and speak out with all my might

End the bullying  
Hear me  
See me

We have so far to go  
I must speak for those  
who cannot speak  
for themselves

Don't ignore me  
Call on me

### **VOICE OF THE PRESENT**

Teachers  
Leaders  
of our future  
let me speak

Some days you see me  
And some days you don't.

We are rising.  
The sky is calling.  
Our mothers and fathers  
made sure we would rise

I must stand up for what is right  
and speak out for what is right

End the bullying  
Hear me  
See me

We have come so far

Finally I can speak for myself

Don't ignore me

I have so much to tell you

When Blacks

Are treated unfairly  
Speak up  
Speak up

Listen

Listen to us

I was sentenced to detention.

when whites bullied Blacks  
I could not speak out  
so I wrote  
this letter  
from a Birmingham jail

I will rise

I write this letter

We write this letter

So life will be better

Adults and teachers

I have something to tell you

Read my letter

So Blacks

Will be treated fairly

And others

As I was taught to do

Listen to me

Listen to us

You can learn from me  
Hear me out

Don't sentence me  
I am trying to tell you something

I am looking forward  
I am still your child  
Against all odds  
I have made it here

We are rising  
The sky is calling  
Our mothers and fathers made sure  
Of that.

I write this letter

We write this letter

Adults and teachers

I have something to tell you

Read my letter

And others  
Help us to rise  
And reach for the skies.