Name:

Welcome to 8th Grade: A Starter Kit

Mr. Donelson's English & Social Studies Classes

Dear students and families,

Welcome to 8th grade! I'm looking forward to working with each of you for another year. You have already grown so much as 7th graders, and I expect to see even more growth between now and when you cross the threshold of graduation.

My main hope for your summer is that you have lots of time to rest, unplug, and enjoy quality time with your friends and family. The transition from seventh to eighth grade is a big one, and it's my hope that these activities will serve as a preview of what you can expect from your classes in the fall.

The tasks in this Starter Kit are carefully designed to get you ready to hit the ground running in September. This work is meant to be done at whatever pace works for your family, but it will be due on the first day of the new school year. **The completion of this packet will be your first graded task of the school year, so do your best work on each element!**

For parents: the one thing I'll need directly from you is a **signature** after all of the components are completed. Please preview these tasks with your student, and support them as they complete them. For the reading log, the book can be anything your student wants to read. My one rule on this end is that it has to be a hard copy or Kindle, not on a phone or computer.

See you all September!

Mr. Donelson

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What's In This Kit

1. **Article: "Goodbye, Telephone"** All about the importance of reading *primary sources.*
2. **Primary Source: "The Letter From Birmingham Jail".** MLK's passionate argument in favor of bold action in response to racial injustice.
3. **Independent Reading Record.** A log of what you read this summer.
4. **A Goal for the Year.** One academic, one personal.

1. Article: “Goodbye, Telephone”

INSTRUCTIONS:
Carefully read and annotate the following article, and complete the questions that follow.

TEXT:
Most of us have played the game of telephone, where a message passes down a line of people and arrives at the end barely recognizable, the original words reshaped by each successive interpretation.

The transmission of historical knowledge works in a similar way. Someone reads an original text. Someone else writes about what they read. A textbook condenses what was taught. By the time you encounter the idea, you are four or five layers removed from the source, holding something that has passed through enough hands to be fundamentally changed.

Secondary sources like textbooks exist for a good reason, and there is value in what they offer, but something gets lost in that process, and it matters more than we tend to acknowledge.

When you read a summary of an argument, you might walk away with an understanding of the “big idea.” What you almost never get is the texture: the specific way the original writer thought, the particular examples they chose, the moments of uncertainty embedded in their prose, the places where the argument strains and the places where it soars. A summary can tell you what someone concluded but rarely shows how they got there, and the *how* is often where the real thinking lives.

Primary sources tend to be more vivid and more alive than their reputation suggests. Historical documents carry an assumption of dryness and formality, and some earn it. But many were written by people trying urgently to persuade, to explain, to justify, to accuse, to defend, by people who believed the stakes were high enough that the writing still carries the weight of that belief.

What also changes when you read an original text is your relationship to the interpretation. When you encounter a secondary source, someone has already decided what matters, where the logic succeeds and where it fails, and you receive their verdict as a given. When you read the original, that “so what?” moment is left for you to figure out. You have to determine what the argument actually is, which is a harder job and also, more importantly, the actual work of *thinking for yourself*.

Reading original texts builds something that secondhand accounts cannot fully provide: a tolerance for complexity, a resistance to the oversimplification that summaries require, and a sense that most important arguments are more interesting up close than from a distance. That capacity comes from practice, from sitting with documents written by people who believed something strongly enough to write it down and asking yourself whether you believe it too.

Accepting the invitation to wrestle with primary sources can be demanding, but the demand is precisely the point. The argument is yours to sit with, to judge, and to carefully consider.

Short Answer Questions

Answer each in 3-5 sentences.

In your own words, what are primary sources, and why are they worth reading?

Reading Primary Sources presents a number of challenges: unfamiliar vocabulary, different writing styles, and complicated historical context. What mindsets and reading strategies can you use to get the most value out of working with this kind of document?

2. Primary Source: "The Letter From Birmingham Jail"

INSTRUCTIONS:
Carefully read (and reread) Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Parts of this reading will be challenging for you. Don't be discouraged—that's exactly why I'm assigning it!

Remember Frederick Douglass's quote: "If there is not struggle, there is not progress."

Annotate both the Historical Context the letter *thoroughly*. Look up words or terms that you don't know, and keep working with it until you have a deep understanding of his arguments.

I am assigning this text because it addresses so many themes that we will discuss in both English and Social Studies as 8th graders: Justice, Power, and what it looks like when we fully live into the truth that every person is created in the Image of God.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:
In April 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. was in Birmingham, Alabama, leading nonviolent protests against racial segregation. On April 12, he was arrested and held in solitary confinement. That same day, a group of eight white Alabama clergymen published a statement in the local newspaper. These were not extremists. They were considered moderates, and several of them opposed segregation. But they called the protests "unwise and untimely" and urged patience. They asked the movement to wait.

King wrote his response in the margins of that newspaper and on scraps of paper smuggled in by supporters. He addressed it directly to those eight men, but he was writing for anyone who had ever counseled patience over justice.

The Letter from Birmingham Jail is a carefully built argument. King responds to specific objections, draws on philosophy, theology, and the founding documents of the United States, and makes a case for why some things cannot wait. As you annotate, pay attention to what he is arguing, how he builds his case, and where his words pull at you. He is asking something of his reader.

TEXT:

My Dear Fellow Clergymen,
While confined here in the Birmingham City Jail, I came across your recent statement calling our present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom, if ever, do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas … But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I would like to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

I think I should give the reason for my being in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the argument of "outsiders coming in." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every Southern state with

headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some 85 affiliate organizations all across the South … Several months ago our local affiliate here in Birmingham invited us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented.

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: 1) collection of the facts to determine whether injustices are alive; 2) negotiation; 3) self-purification; and 4) direct action. We have gone through all of these steps in Birmingham … Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of police brutality is known in every section of the country. Its unjust treatment of Negroes in the courts is a notorious reality. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any city in this nation. These are the hard, brutal, and unbelievable facts. On the basis of these conditions Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation.

Then came the opportunity last September to talk with some of the leaders of the economic community. In these negotiating sessions certain promises were made by the merchants—such as the promise to remove the humiliating racial signs from the stores. On the basis of these promises Reverend Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to call a moratorium on any type of demonstrations. As the weeks and months unfolded we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. The signs remained. As in so many experiences in the past, we were confronted with blasted hopes, and the dark shadow of a deep disappointment settled upon us. So we had no alternative except that of preparing for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and national community. We were not unmindful of the difficulties involved. So we decided to go through the process of self-purification. We started having workshops on nonviolence and repeatedly asked ourselves the questions, “are you able to accept the blows without retaliating?” “Are you able to endure the ordeals of jail?”

You may well ask, “Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn’t negotiation a better path?” You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue.

My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without legal and nonviolent pressure. History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and give up their unjust posture; but as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups are more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly I have never yet engaged in a direct action movement that was "well timed," according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This "wait" has almost always meant "never." It has been a tranquilizing Thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter.

I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say wait. But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize, and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your 20 million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see the tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking in agonizing pathos: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?" when you take a cross country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" men and "colored" when your first name becomes "nigger" and your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title of "Mrs." when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tip-toe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the

stride toward freedom is not the White citizens' "Councilor" or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direst action" who paternistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

You spoke of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist. I started thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency made up of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, have been so completely drained of self-respect and a sense of "somebodiness" that they have adjusted to segregation, and a few Negroes in the middle class who, because of a degree of academic and economic security, and at points they profit from segregation, have unconsciously become insensitive to the problems of the masses. The other force is one of bitterness and hatred and comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up over the nation, the largest and best known being Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. This movement is nourished by the contemporary frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination. It is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incurable "devil."

The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations. He has to get them out. So let him march sometime; let him have his prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; understand why he must have sit-ins and freedom rides. If his repressed emotions do not come out in these nonviolent ways, they will come out in ominous expressions of violence. This is not a threat; it is a fact of history. So I have not said to my people, "Get rid of your discontent." But I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled through the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action.

In spite of my shattered dreams of the past, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership in the community would see the justice of our cause and, with deep moral concern, serve as the channel through which our just grievances could get to the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed. I have heard numerous religious leaders of the South call upon their worshippers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers say follow this decree because integration is morally right and the Negro is your brother. In the midst of

blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churches stand on the sideline and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard so many ministers say, "Those are social issues with which the Gospel has no real concern," and I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely other-worldly religion which made a strange distinction between body and soul, the sacred and the secular.

I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader, but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all of their scintillating beauty.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,
L. King Jr.

Short Answer Questions

Answer each in 3-5 sentences.

Who is MLK's intended audience for this letter, and what specifically prompted him to write it? What does he tell us in the letter about the circumstances in which it was written?

Explain MLK's distinction between a “just law” and an “unjust law.” What examples does he use, and how does this distinction become the foundation for his larger argument?

What is MLK's specific criticism of the "white moderate"? Why does he consider this group a greater obstacle to justice than openly violent opponents?

What does MLK mean by "creative tension," and why does he argue it is necessary? In your own words, explain what he is asking his audience to do.

Essay

In your best writing, answer the following questions, filling the provided space below. Thoughtfully plan your response before you start writing. Be sure to answer all underlined sections of the prompt below.

MLK's letter is a call to action, and challenges his audience to change their minds.

- What virtues does he challenge his readers to practice, and how does he make that argument?
- Where does that challenge apply to you today: your school, your family, your neighborhood, your parish…what would it look like for you to answer that call?

3. Independent Reading Record

Read a book this summer. Any book. Fiction, nonfiction, fantasy, history, biography, mystery, humor, poetry, graphic novel. It should be new to you (not a reread!) and something that you expect to enjoy.

One rule from me: it must be a hard copy or a Kindle. Not on a phone, tablet, or laptop screen.

You'll log six focused reading sessions over the summer; each must be at least 30 minutes. Each entry is short. A parent signs at the end to confirm the reading happened.

I would highly recommend reading much more than is required here. Taking even 10 minutes per day to build a habit of reading a great way to set yourself up for success.

Book Title: _____

Author: _____

How I picked this book:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Session 1

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

_____

_____

Session 2

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

_____

Session 3

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

Session 4

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

Session 5

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

Session 6

Date: _____ Pages: ____ to ____ Minutes: ____

One sentence on what happened, or what you learned, or what struck you:

AFTER READING

Did you finish the book? Yes / No

Would you recommend it to another 8th grader? Yes / No / Sort of

In one sentence, why or why not:

4. A Goal for the Year

Two short answers. Three sentences each, maximum. We will come back to these in the fall.

One thing I want to get better at in school this year, and how I will do that:

One thing I want to get better at outside of school this year, and how I will do that:

See You Soon!

Bring this completed “Starter Kit” with you on the first day of school. We will go through it together.

Parent or Guardian Signature, confirming that you have reviewed your student’s work for completeness and accuracy, including their Reading Log. Thank you for your support!

_____ _____

Parent/Guardian’s Name (Printed) Signature

Date: _____