

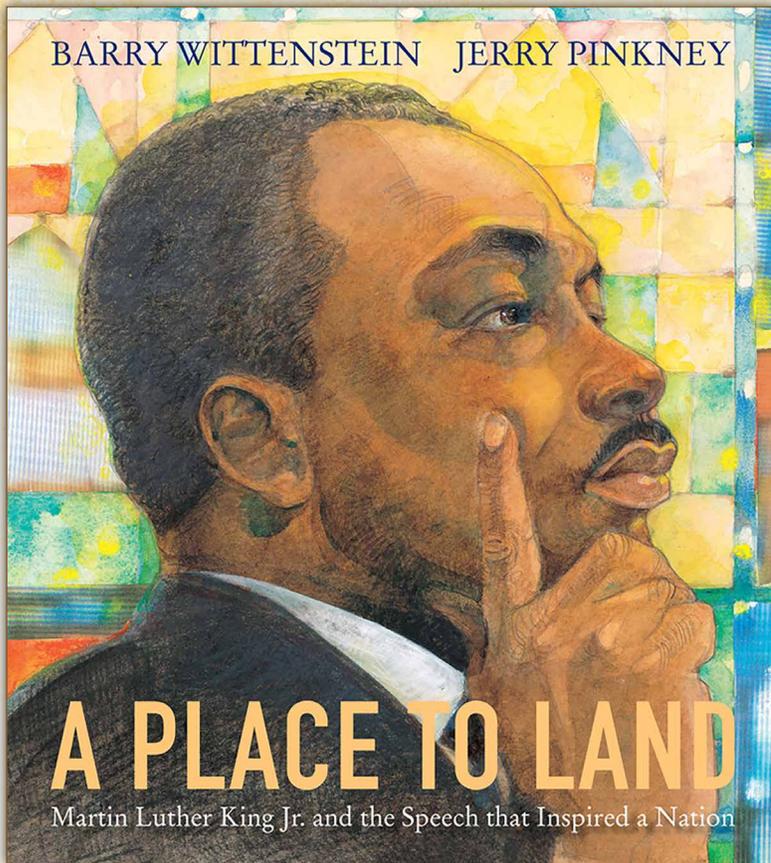
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EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

A PLACE TO LAND

by Barry Wittenstein, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney



Ages 7–10 • 978-0-8234-4331-4 • E-book available

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About the Book

Much has been written about Martin Luther King Jr. and the 1963 March on Washington. But there's little on how he came to write his legendary "I Have a Dream" speech.

Martin Luther King Jr. was once asked if the hardest part of preaching was knowing where to begin. "No," he said. "The hardest part is knowing where to end. It's terrible to be circling up there without a place to land."

Barry Wittenstein teams up with legendary illustrator and Caldecott Medalist Jerry Pinkney to tell the story of how, against all odds, Martin found his place to land.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Read aloud Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech ([archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf)). It's clear that the first part of the speech was written using the advice of his advisors, who were prominent civil rights activists. How does the last part of the speech, when King talks about his dream, reveal his background as a preacher? Remind students that a metaphor is an indirect comparison of two things. How does King use metaphor in the "I Have a Dream" portion of the speech? Ask students to write a paragraph that explains the mountain metaphor.



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GROUP DISCUSSION

Barry Wittenstein writes:

**Painting with a preacher's fine brush,
a light shade of wisdom here,
a darker shade of frustration there.**

Ask readers to discuss how Pinkney uses a “fine brush” to illustrate wisdom and frustration from the beginning of the book to the end. Take a look at the hands in the illustrations. Explain how Pinkney uses line to depict motion. Study the illustration that accompanies the first page of text. Then look at the illustration when Mahalia Jackson shouts for the second time, “Tell them about the dream, Martin.” What do King’s hands reveal? How do you know that King’s words are coming from his very soul? Discuss the symbolism of the splash of bright yellow around King’s head as he gives the speech.

Explain what Wittenstein means, “Martin stepped up to the lectern, and stepped down on the other side of history.” How does King give the crowd, and people all over America, hope? Discuss his role in history. Explain how Shirley Chisholm, John Lewis, and Barack Obama represent the other side of history. Discuss the importance of including cameo portraits of them at the end of the book.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

As Martin Luther King Jr. was preparing his speech, he thought of Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, and the children of Birmingham. Why were these people in King’s thoughts? Ask readers to find out the role of each of these people in the civil rights movement. Write a one-page sketch of one of these personalities to share with the class. Include a concluding paragraph that speaks of the heroism of the person. An interesting note from the artist is that people depicted with closed eyes are martyrs of civil rights.

Jerry Pinkney uses watercolor and collage to interpret the words of Wittenstein in *A Place to Land*. Study the quotations engraved on the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington D.C. (nps.gov/mlkm/learn/quotations.htm). Think about the relevance of these quotes to today’s society. Create a collage that interprets one of the quotes for 21st century America.

This guide is aligned with Instructional Standards. For an extensive downloadable guide, visit HolidayHouse.com.

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

