



## Module 1, Unit 1, Lesson Plan 1

### Life in Atlanta

#### (Grades 6-12)

#### Learning Targets/Objectives:

- Discuss Martin Luther King, Jr.'s relationship with his parents, Martin Sr. and Alberta Williams, and siblings, Christine and Alfred
- Describe the importance of the church in King's childhood through the lens of "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life" speech given in April 1967
- Analyze King's "Three Dimensions of a Complete Life" speech for text, context and subtext.
- Understand the contextual setting for which King grew up in Atlanta, Georgia

#### Success Criteria:

- Students should be able to argue the most influential dimension of King's childhood.

#### Anchor Text:

- (Excerpt) King, Martin Luther, Jr. "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life." April 9, 1967. Retrieved at <https://projects.seattletimes.com/mlk/words-life.html> and <https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/benedict-j-fernandez?all/all/all/all/0>

#### Supplemental Sources:

- *Rock Island Argus*. "Michael Luther King Jr.?" October 15, 2001. 14.
- Fernandez, Ben J. King Family Portrait found in *New York Times*. "Martin Luther King Jr.'s Original Obituary. April 5, 1968. Retrieved at <https://www.nytimes.com/article/martin-luther-king-jr.html>

#### Lesson Content Overview:

The second child and first son born to Martin Luther King, Sr. and Mrs. Alberta Williams King, Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. He grew up in a two-story home at 501 Auburn Road, part of an affluent neighborhood known as "Sweet Auburn." He had an older sister, Christine, and younger brother, Alfred Daniel (A.D.). His sister, Christine (Faris) became an Associate Professor at Spelman College, the Vice Chair and Treasurer of The King Center, an active public speaker, and author of a children's book about her brother, *My Brother Martin*. A.D. became an ordained minister.

As for Dr. King, his family and close friends fondly called him M.L. Originally named Michael Luther, he was known as an intelligent boy who was very healthy, curious, sensitive, and bright. When his father, Michael Luther, Sr., or "Daddy King," changed his name to Martin Luther, he also changed his son's name. Young King credits his positive home life and loving parents for why "it is quite easy for me to lean

more toward optimism than pessimism about human nature.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout his life, King’s strong family foundation gave him the blueprint he needed to reach his creative potential.

King dedicated his life to God between the ages of five and seven after joining his family church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, during the congregation’s spring revival of 1936.<sup>2</sup> Guest evangelist Rev. H. H. Coleman, from Detroit’s Macedonia Baptist Church and who led the revival, inspired King. On May 1, 1936, King was baptized. As he notes in *The Autobiography of Religious Development*, “The church has always been a second home for me. As far back as I can remember, I was in church every Sunday. My best friends were in Sunday school, and it was the Sunday school that helped me to build the capacity for getting along with people.”<sup>3</sup>

Just as the church greatly influenced his life, King also greatly impacted the church and congregations across the country. In his sermon, “Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,” King addressed the subject of completeness as it relates to one’s life.

*You know, they used to tell us in Hollywood that in order for a movie to be complete, it had to be three-dimensional. Well, this morning I want to seek to get over to each of us that if life itself is to be complete, it must be three-dimensional.*

*And there are three dimensions of any complete life to which we can fitly give the words of this text: length, breadth, and height. Now the length of life as we shall use it here is the inward concern for one’s own welfare. In other words, it is that inward concern that causes one to push forward, to achieve his goals and ambitions. The breadth of life as we shall use it here is the outward concern for the welfare of others. And the height of life is the upward reach for God. Now you got to have all three of these to have a complete life.*

King was succeeded in death by his mother, Alberta, who was killed by a gunman in June 1974 while playing the organ during church service. His father, Martin Luther, Sr., died ten years later of a heart attack after Church service, on Sunday, November 11, 1984. “Daddy” King’s funeral lasted nearly four hours. Present were former President Jimmy Carter, then-Vice President George H.W. Bush, Georgia Governor Joe Frank Harris, Rev. Jesse Jackson, and Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young. President Bush called “Daddy” King a “true American hero” with achievements that “will live in the hearts not only of the American people, but of all those who hunger for freedom and equality anywhere in the world.” He added that King Sr. spent his life “doing God’s work.”<sup>4</sup>

Rev. Jesse Jackson’s words were perhaps the most poignant. “[W]hen you hear the name Martin Luther King you think of justice, human rights, morality, love and character,” Jackson said. “He was a shepherd of a royal flock, father to a nation, not merely a family. From seeds of his body blossomed the flower that liberated a people and touched the soul of a nation.”

One of the last things King Sr. said serves as an affirmation to King Jr.’s claim that his family gave

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. “An Autobiography of Religious Development.” September 12, 1950 to November 22, 1950. Crozer Theological Seminary, Chester, PA.

<sup>2</sup> In “An Autobiography of Religious Development,” King claims he was five years old when he joined the Ebenezer Baptist Church. However, in King’s Crozer application, he mentions that he joined Ebenezer on May 1, 1936.

<sup>3</sup> King, Jr. “An Autobiography of Religious Development.”

<sup>4</sup> George H.W. Bush quoted in UPI, AP Reports. “Political elite and the unsung mourn King at funeral.” *The Sacramento Bee*. November 16, 1984. 3.

him the blueprint for nonviolent struggle. After living through the murders of his son and wife, King Sr. said, “I don’t hate either one,” about the two shooters. “There is no time for that and no reason. Nothing that a man does takes him lower than when he allows himself to fall so low as to hate anyone.”<sup>5</sup>

### Instructional Sequence:

- **Opener:**

Students will read a short article by the *Rock Island Argus* describing Dr. King’s birth name “Michael Luther King, Jr.” They should respond to the prompt: “Why did Dr. King’s birth name change from Michael Luther to Martin Luther?”

  - **SEL Connection, Discussion Activity:** What’s in a Name? Ask students to share the origins of their last name and ask if they would be willing to share some information about their family.
- **Discussion:**

The teacher should display Ben J. Fernandez’s “King Family Portrait” and facilitate a discussion about King’s parents and siblings using the Lesson Content Overview as a source of information.
- **Individual Work, Close Reading Analysis:**

Students will read an excerpt of King’s [“The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life.”](#) Students must summarize what King means by “length, breadth, and height” as the three dimensions of a complete life.
- **Small Group Discussion:**

In groups of three or four, students will discuss their analysis of King’s “Three Dimensions” speech and generate responses to several open-ended questions. Students should record responses to the following questions.

  - According to Dr. King, what are the three dimensions of a complete life?
  - Which of the three dimensions have you most developed at this point of your life? Explain.
  - Which of the three dimensions in your life needs improvement? Explain ways for which you can go about improving that dimension.
  - Based on what you know about the United States in the 1930s, if you could choose, would you prefer to grow up then or are you happy with the current era in which you live? Explain your response.
- **Large Group Discussion:**

Students will share their answers to the last prompt. The teacher should find themes among students’ answers. The teacher should provide analytical thought about those themes so as to establish the contextual setting of Dr. King’s early years.

### Formative Assessment:

---

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther King, Sr. quoted in Ibid.

- Students will write a five-sentence response to the following prompt: To what extent was the church the most influential object of Martin Luther King's childhood?

### **Adaptations for Student Needs**

#### IEP:

- Sizes of student groups range
- Students team up with a peer partner, while others would prefer to work individually.
- There is a variety of small-group work
- Chunking information
- Visual cues and wait time
- Visual supports (maps, images, PowerPoint slides, handouts)
- Assessments will be modified, and students given extra time

#### ELD

- Modified/simplified reading material
- Content-related lists/handouts of key terms
- Text is supported by visuals and connected to real-life experiences