

HOW DOES OUR WORLD SHAPE US AND OUR OPPORTUNITIES?

From President Lyndon B. Johnson's

Commencement Address at Howard University: "To Fulfill These Rights"

Vocabulary Warm-Up

Section A

1. I think having indomitable determination means never giving up or that no one can defeat your determination. These young men and women would have needed great determination to succeed in graduating from college as they may have encountered substantial racism and may have had to overcome economic hardships as well.
2. Treating people equitably might mean giving people some "unfair" advantages to make up for past discrimination; this could be equitable but unequal. Treating everyone equally or the same might make sense if everyone started out with equal opportunities, but it might not be equitable if some people have greater needs than others, particularly if those needs are based on past discrimination.
3. I think the court found that discrimination based on race was very much not in alignment with the Constitution. If the Court ruled the law to be void, it overturned the law.

Section B

1. a
2. b
3. c
4. c
5. c
6. d

Section C

1. If something is freighted with meaning, it carries a great deal of meaning and importance. Getting into a good college or finding the love of your life are things freighted with meaning.
2. Hope eroding means that it is wearing away or becoming diminished. Repeated setbacks and constant obstacles beyond my control might cause my hope to erode.
3. Being lacerated by prejudice would mean being injured by it. Perhaps recognition of the injustice might help heal from such an injury; perhaps being in a position to prevent another's injury through prejudice might heal the original laceration.

Section D

1. Commencement addresses are given at school graduations. It is called a commencement address because the graduates are beginning the next stage of their lives.
2. My teachers would likely refuse to liberate me from my homework because they think it is important for me to do it to make sure that I have learned what they have taught.
3. I think American students are a diverse group, and it doesn't make sense to generalize in this way. But I do think academic skill and confidence are not always equally or evenly matched.
4. My school is usually a place of equity, but I find some aspects of it to be unfair. Students are generally treated equitably when a conflict arises. However, our sports teams are allowed to

practice every day for as long as they need to, while non-athletic activities can only meet until 5pm on certain days.

5. I needed indomitable determination to finish my 15-page research paper; I had never written anything that long before. I was very interested in my research topic, which helped keep my determination strong. I would remind someone who was struggling with the benefits that success will bring them that their struggle is making them stronger.

6. I would judge my school somewhat favorably based on how it treats the poor and dispossessed. Students generally treat each other well regardless of economic status, but some treat certain students poorly because they deviate from expectations of appearance and behavior based on race, ethnicity, or gender.

7. Prejudice and greed are repugnant to me because they fuel the mistreatment of others.

Section E

1. a
2. c
3. b
4. c
5. a

Check for Understanding

1. b
2. b
3. b
4. a
5. b
6. a
7. c, g, h
8. b
9. d
10. e, f, g

Writing and Discussion

Section A: Why these words in this time and place?

1. Table A-1: Johnson's audience

Johnson's audience	Reaction to Johnson's address	Key passages in Johnson's address
Dr. Nabrit, former civil rights lawyer and president of Howard University	Dr. Nabrit might have been pleased that Johnson recognized the contributions of African Americans in a range of arenas from the streets to the courtrooms to the struggle for civil rights and to legislative victories like the voting rights bill.	"The American Negro, acting with impressive restraint, has peacefully protested and marched, entered the courtrooms and the seats of government, demanding a justice that has long been denied."
Members of Howard	The graduates might have felt	"This graduating class at Howard

<p>University's 1965 graduating class</p>	<p>honored that the president would speak at their graduation, proud of their accomplishments and of his recognition of their accomplishments, and eager to seize the opportunities afforded by the greater freedom Johnson references; they might also have felt compelled to use the professional and economic opportunities available to them by virtue of their academic achievements to pursue justice and equality for all African Americans.</p>	<p>University is witness to the <i>indomitable</i> determination of the Negro American to win his way in American life.”</p> <p>“The number of Negroes in schools of higher learning has almost doubled in 15 years. The number of nonwhite professional workers has more than doubled in 10 years. The median income of Negro college women tonight exceeds that of white college women. And there are also the enormous accomplishments of distinguished individual Negroes--many of them graduates of this institution, and one of them the first lady ambassador in the history of the United States.”</p> <p>“These are proud and impressive achievements.”</p>
<p>Members of Congress</p>	<p>Members of Congress may have viewed Johnson's address as a message that he was making passage of the voting rights bill a priority and that he would pursue further action to address racial inequity. Those who supported Johnson's efforts would have been pleased for his support, while those representatives and senators who did not might have been angry that he chose to speak at Howard's commencement ceremony at all.</p>	<p>“Thus we have seen the high court of the country declare that discrimination based on race was repugnant to the Constitution, and therefore void. We have seen in 1957, and 1960, and again in 1964, the first civil rights legislation in this Nation in almost an entire century.... The voting rights bill will be the latest, and among the most important, in a long series of victories. But this victory--as Winston Churchill said of another triumph for freedom—‘is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.’”</p>
<p>Activists involved in the Civil Rights movement</p>	<p>They might have been pleased by Johnson's forthright acknowledgment of the work that still needed to be done to achieve equity for all races but frustrated at the slow rate of progress and government action.</p>	<p>“So, it is the glorious opportunity of this generation to end the one huge wrong of the American Nation and, in so doing, to find America for ourselves, with the same immense thrill of discovery which gripped those who first</p>

		<p>began to realize that here, at last, was a home for freedom.</p> <p>All it will take is for all of us to understand what this country is and what this country must become.</p> <p>The Scripture promises: ‘I shall light a candle of understanding in thine heart, which shall not be put out.’</p> <p>Together, and with millions more, we can light that candle of understanding in the heart of all America.</p> <p>And, once lit, it will never again go out.”</p>
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2. Table A-2: Johnson’s use of figurative language

Example of figurative language	Your understanding of what Johnson means	Your interpretation of the power and/or effect of Johnson’s use of figurative language here
<p>“You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please.”</p>	<p>Johnson argues here that suddenly giving African Americans equal rights doesn’t immediately erase the effects of 200 years of oppression.</p>	<p>Using the phrase “scars of centuries,” Johnson acknowledges the deep and lasting injuries inflicted by racism and slavery upon African Americans. But attributing the cause of those scars to a period of time (“of centuries”) rather than any particular group of people avoids assigning blame.</p>
<p>“You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.”</p>	<p>Johnson acknowledges here that simply removing the legal barriers to freedom and prosperity for African Americans does not fully address the injustices that white Americans have inflicted upon them.</p>	<p>Johnson combines the image of an individual being “hobbled by chains,” which at least until the end of slavery was a literal reality, with the figurative image of “the starting line of a race” to illustrate how much redress is still required to enable African Americans to compete with all Americans on a level playing field. By pointing out that persisting inequity that he intends to address, Johnson also touches upon the fear that many whites still held, that they would actually have to compete with African Americans to in pursuing their own success.</p>

<p>“Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates.”</p>	<p>Johnson argues again that more work is required to assist African Americans in accessing the resources necessary for success that have been denied them for so long.</p>	<p>By referring to the “gates of opportunity,” Johnson again acknowledges the obstacles African Americans have faced even during the 100 years since slavery ended, but rather than prescribe any particular form of redress, he returns to the idea of fairness by saying that “all our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates.” Some white Americans might have been reassured that Johnson apparently did not mean to go so far as to offer African Americans extra support at their expense, while others probably still resented the idea of African Americans being equal citizens with them.</p>
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3. Table A-3: Johnson’s use of quotations

Quotation	Context for the quotation	Your understanding of the quotation	Your interpretation of what Johnson means by using this quotation and what effect his use of it adds to his address
<p>Winston Churchill: “is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”</p>	<p>Johnson is talking about the passage of civil rights legislation and the proposal of the voting rights bill.</p>	<p>The quotation means that even though much has already been done or endured, the ultimate goal lies a long way off.</p>	<p>Johnson uses this quotation to make it clear that while progress has been made, achieving true equality for African Americans will require a great deal more effort. In using the quote, Johnson aligns himself with another great leader who had the ability to see the full view of a long struggle.</p>
<p>Scripture: “I shall light a candle of understanding in thine heart, which shall not be put out.”</p>	<p>Johnson is talking about what it will take to achieve real freedom for all Americans.</p>	<p>The quotation means that once someone achieves an understanding deep in his heart, perhaps influenced by God’s will, that understanding will last forever.</p>	<p>Johnson uses this quotation from the Bible to suggest that embracing the understanding that all individuals should enjoy the full rights and privileges of freedom is something sanctioned by God.</p>

4. Students may discuss how Johnson makes a strong statement in favor of full equality for African Americans by being forthright about how much work still has to be done. He laid the groundwork for further efforts by his administration by shattering any illusions that the passage of the Voting Rights Act would be the end of this work. By speaking at Howard University’s graduation, Johnson likely rallied the new graduates to assist in this work by pursuing their own success as well as that of African Americans who had not yet achieved the opportunities they

had. At the same time, Johnson diffuses opposition by framing the struggle for civil rights as the true realization of the principles of freedom and equality that America had been founded upon and by evoking the language of the Bible and of Churchill, one of the greatest wartime leaders, to give credibility to his enterprise.

Section B: How are men and women shaped by their world?

Table B-1: How, for Johnson, men and women are shaped by their world

Evidence/example from Johnson	Your understanding of the example	Your opinion/discussion
<p>“You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you are free to compete with others.’”</p>	<p>A person whose life has been shaped by years in chains (like slavery) will not be able to compete well in a race with those who have not suffered the same experience of bondage.</p>	<p>Some people might argue that we are shaped by our experiences in a variety of ways and that being hobbled and repressed can actually spur people to strive and achieve more.</p>
<p>“Men are shaped by their world. When it is a world of decay, ringed by an invisible wall, when escape is arduous and uncertain, and the saving pressures of a more hopeful society are unknown, it can cripple the youth and it can desolate the men.”</p>	<p>A person’s potential can be crippled by isolation in poor living conditions that are very difficult to escape and by the lack of hope for a better life.</p>	<p>Some people might argue that when someone grows up in blighted conditions and doesn’t know anything else he or she is bound to become hopeless, while others might argue that people can always overcome their circumstances if they resolve to remain hopeful.</p>
<p>“There is also the burden that a dark skin can add to the search for a productive place in our society. Unemployment strikes most swiftly and broadly at the Negro, and this burden erodes hope. <i>Blighted</i> hope breeds despair. Despair brings indifference to the learning which offers a way out. And despair, coupled with indifference, is often the source of destructive rebellion against the fabric of society.”</p>	<p>African Americans are often deprived of employment by racist discrimination. This discrimination can undermine any hope for the future someone might have and cause them to turn away from resources like education that might help them and instead turn toward violence and crime.</p>	<p>Some might argue that people have a choice whether they give in to despair or not and that they should always pursue education even if they can’t fully see the success that they might eventually achieve. Others might argue that people turn to violence and crime because society has denied them the opportunity to do anything else.</p>
<p>“There is also the <i>lacerating</i> hurt of early collision with white hatred or prejudice, distaste or condescension. Other groups have felt similar intolerance. But success and achievement could wipe it away. They do not change the color of a man's skin. I have seen this</p>	<p>The pain of facing racist hatred or discrimination is often encountered by nonwhite Americans from an early age and stays with them, not just in memory, but in the threat that it could arise at any time, no matter what level of success they have achieved.</p>	<p>Some might argue that this reality forces nonwhite Americans to work twice as hard to achieve success because they always have to be both hyper-vigilant about not giving anyone the opportunity to undermine them out of racism and able to endure and overcome any racist</p>

uncomprehending pain in the eyes of the little, young Mexican-American schoolchildren that I taught many years ago. But it can be overcome. But, for many, the wounds are always open.”		attacks that might come their way.
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2. Table B-2: Shaped, stretched and stunted?

List some of the things in your life that stretch you.	List some of the things in your life that stunt you.	List some of the things in your life that both stretch and stunt you.
Expectations and encouragement of my teachers Role models that I see around me in my life	Lack of extracurricular activities at my school My friends who distract me from my school work	Expectations of my parents and relatives Not having enough money for college People in my life who don't think I can make it

Pick one of these things from your three lists above and write a quick paragraph below about how this thing has shaped you into the person that you are.

A student might write about how not having enough money for college has both stretched and stunted her. While her family's financial situation may limit which colleges she can go to, it may also inspire her to work hard to win scholarships that will enable her to attend the school of her dreams.

3. Table B-3: How are the characters in *Raisin* shaped by their world?

Character	Example	Textual evidence	Discussion
Travis	Travis has to deal with rats when he is playing with his friends.	“Mama, you should of seen the rat ... Big as a cat the janitor, Mr. Barnett, got him with a stick ... and he was still jumping and bleeding like everything too – there's rat blood all over	While this episode is exciting and entertaining to Travis, it's not so nice to play in an environment where there are rats or rat blood all over. Clearly, Travis feels excited about this episode, but it can't make him feel very good or proud of the world he lives in.

		the street.”	
Walter	Walter feels like his future is empty and meaningless.	<p>“Sometimes it’s like I can see the future stretched out in front of me—just as plain as day. The future, Mama. Hanging over there at the edge of my days. Just waiting for me—a big, looming blank space—full of <i>nothing</i>. Just waiting for <i>me</i>. But it don’t have to be. Mama—sometimes when I’m downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking ‘bout things ... sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars ... sometimes I see guys don’t look much older than me”</p>	Walter has become full of despair about his life, frustrated that he hasn’t had a chance to make his own mark in the world, that he’s stuck being a driver for another man, rather than making his own fortune.
Mama	Mama looks at the apartment that was just supposed to be a temporary stop on the way to the life she and her husband had dreamed of and realizes how rundown it has become over the years they’ve been stuck there.	<p>“‘Rat trap’—yes, that’s all it is. I remember just as well the day me and Big Walter moved in here. Hadn’t been married but two weeks and wasn’t planning on living here no more than a year. We was going to set away, little by little, don’t you know, and buy a little place out in Morgan Park. We had even picked out the house. Looks right dumpy today. But Lord, child, you should know all the dreams I had ‘bout buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back— And didn’t none of it happen.”</p>	While Mama realizes that her dreams haven’t come true, she hasn’t given up hope completely. She doesn’t think of the apartment as a “rat trap” until Ruth points it out. To her, it’s the apartment where she lived with her husband and now with her children.
Ruth	Ruth realizes that things have started to decline	“Honey ... life don’t have to be like this. I	Though Ruth sees that things are bad and that they are on the verge

	between her and Walter due to their living circumstances.	mean sometimes people can do things so that things are better ... You remember how we used to talk when Travis was born ... about the way we were going to live ... the kind of house ... Well, it's all starting to slip away from us"	of losing their dreams, she hasn't given up hope and believes that they could turn things around if they tried.
Beneatha	Beneatha insists that she is going to be a doctor.	"first I'm going to be a doctor, and George, for one still thinks that's pretty funny. I couldn't be bothered with that. I am going to be a doctor and everybody around here better understand that!"	Beneatha has had the opportunity to explore her interests and to pursue a college education. She is determined to realize her career goals, even if it means defying the expectations of others.
George	George tells Beneatha that learning is just about acquiring knowledge, not finding oneself.	"It's simple. You read books—to learn facts—to get grades—to pass the course—to get a degree. That's all—it has nothing to do with thoughts."	George sees education as purely utilitarian. His goals are material, and because his family is wealthy, he doesn't seem to have broader goals that involve transformation through education.
Joseph Asagai	Joseph Asagai explains to Beneatha how he sees himself in relation to his village and its future.	"In my village at home it is the exceptional man who can even read a newspaper ... or who ever sees a book at all. I will go home and much of what I will have to say will seem strange to the people of my village. But will teach and work and things will happen, slowly and swiftly."	Asagai understands that he has had opportunities far beyond what most members of his village have experienced, and he realizes that he must be patient, hopeful, and willing to contribute his efforts even if he doesn't immediately or ever see the results he would like.

4. Students can discuss how the different characters in *Raisin* react to their given circumstances in different ways. Some, like Walter and Ruth, are on the verge or already succumbing to despair, while Beneatha, perhaps due to the relative freedom and opportunity she has enjoyed within the family, is determined to overcome her circumstances. Though Mama has not seen her dreams fulfilled, she is still able to do something about it – even though it involves risk – when given the resources to do so. The different outlooks represented by George and Asagai are very much shaped by the worlds in which they have lived.