

Spring Writing Assessment

While many believe that compassion is too small of an act to cure the tremendous inequality today, Naomi Shihab Nye and Martin Luther King Jr. seek to prove otherwise. In Nye's poem "Kindness", she highlights the numerous terrible difficulties one can experience and how kindness is longed for in those moments of adversity. In his Nobel Lecture, Martin Luther King Jr. contrasts humanity's great scientific advancements and social difficulties, revealing the inequality and discrimination in America. Naomi Shihab Nye's poem "Kindness" and Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Lecture use emotional appeal and juxtaposition to enable readers to empathize with the less fortunate, asserting that compassion is crucial to America's long-term prosperity.

Through similes and metaphors, Nye and King facilitate the reader's understanding of the significance of kindness. Describing the circumstances in which the necessity of empathy is realized, Nye writes, "Before you know what kindness really is / you must lose things, / feel the future dissolve in a moment / like salt in a weakened broth" (Nye). The simile of salt in a weakened broth, where it promptly dissolves and is no longer seen, illustrates the crushing weight one must feel to comprehend the power of kindness. The simile makes the hardships of the millions of less fortunate Americans quantifiable and concrete to the reader, allowing them to understand the need for empathy and compassion. Similarly, King uses metaphors about the natural world to establish the importance of striving to be kind as a nation, writing "With patient and firm determination we will press on until every valley of despair is exalted to new peaks of hope, until every mountain of pride and irrationality is made low by the leveling process of humility and compassion; until the rough places of injustice are transformed into a smooth plane

of equality of opportunity” (King 1). King uses the metaphor of peaks and valleys to depict the disparity in opportunity and compassion prevalent in not only America but around the world today. By “leveling” these peaks and transforming injustice into a “smooth plane of equality of opportunity”, King highlights how compassion is a core necessity for America to fulfill its promises. Through their similes and metaphors, Nye and King allow the reader to empathize with those who desperately need kindness in their lives and assert that the world must fight to become kinder, regardless of how difficult the obstacles may be.

Additionally, Nye and King use juxtaposition to highlight the irony of inequality and discrimination instead of compassion and understanding. Contrasting technological progress to social progress, King states, “The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers” (King 1). King emphasizes the stark difference between the astounding technological accomplishments of humanity and its continuing moral decay. This comparison makes it obvious to the reader that kindness is not just essential, but based on its scientific record, humanity is more than capable of achieving it. Likewise, Nye juxtaposes suffering and compassion, writing, “Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness / you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho / lies dead by the side of the road. / You must see how this could be you” (Nye). By contrasting the hope empathy brings with desolation and hardship, Nye encapsulates the imbalance in the quality of life and equality of opportunity that plague America today. Through juxtaposition, Nye and King describe the tremendous suffering many experience worldwide and highlight how compassion is the best way to aid them.

By allowing the reader to envision themselves in abysmal circumstances through similes and metaphors and revealing the discrepancy between humanity's technological progress and social ills through juxtaposition, Nye and King clearly demonstrate why kindness and compassion are the most effective ways to strive towards fulfilling America's promises of equality and opportunity. In the face of despair and hopelessness, a simple act of kindness can make a monumental change.