

An Ideal for Which I am Prepared to Die

Grades 9-10

In this lesson for high school ELLs, students will discuss the language used in Nelson Mandela’s 1964 Court Speech “An Ideal for Which I am Prepared to Die.”

The featured activity focuses on academic vocabulary from early portions of the speech, highlighted in the student glossary below.

EXCERPT

“I admit immediately that I... felt that without violence there would be no way open to the African people to succeed in their struggle against the principle of white supremacy. All lawful modes of expressing opposition to this principle had been closed by legislation, and we were placed in a position in which we had either to accept a permanent state of inferiority, or to defy the government. We chose to defy the law.

“We first broke the law in a way which avoided any recourse to violence; when this form was legislated against, and then the government resorted to a show of force to crush opposition to its policies, only then did we decide to answer violence with violence...”

STANDARDS AND OBJECTIVES

This list highlights one of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts featured in this lesson, as well as a lesson objective and a version of the objective written in student-friendly language.

Reading (Informational Text)

Standard: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper). (RI 9-10.4)

Lesson Objective: Students will determine the meaning of key words and phrases in the text.

Student Objective: I will determine the meaning of key words and phrases in the text. I will analyze why the author chose certain words.

ACQUIRING AND USING VOCABULARY

The following student glossary featuring words from the above excerpt can be used to help preview, teach, and review vocabulary words. It includes a student-friendly definition, a Spanish-language cognate or definition, and the excerpt where it appears in the text. In addition, students can write their own sample sentences using these words to check comprehension.

Word	Definition	Spanish cognate or definition	Example from Text	Picture or Phrase
Supremacy	The quality or state of having more power, authority, or status than anyone else	supremacía	"...their struggle against the principle of white supremacy"	
Legislation	A law or set of laws made by a government	legislación	"...this principle had been closed by legislation"	
Inferiority	Low or lower in rank	inferioridad	"permanent state of inferiority"	
Recourse	An opportunity or choice to use or do something in order to deal with a problem or situation	recurso	"...avoided any resource to violence"	
Resort	To do or use (something) because no other choices are possible	recurrir	"the government resorted to a show of force"	
Principle	A basic truth or theory; an idea that forms the basis of something	principio	"...their struggle against the principle of white supremacy"	

DISCUSSING PHRASES AND CONNOTATIONS

The following discussion of a phrase from the text provides an example of how to help students understand a phrase's connotation and its use by the author to achieve a particular purpose.

Question: What does the expression “crush opposition” mean in the following text? What does the connotation of this meaning suggest to you?

We first broke the law in a way which avoided any recourse to violence; when this form was legislated against, and then the government resorted to a show of force to crush opposition to its policies, only then did we decide to answer violence with violence...

Possible student answers:

“Crush opposition” means to put down those who do not agree with you.

It suggests to me that it has a negative connotation about the political atmosphere of South Africa at this time.

Question: Why does Mandela use this language to describe what is happening between the government and his people?

Possible student answers:

Mandela wanted to express how demoralizing the government's treatment was of the people who disagreed with its policies, and to show that he had no other choice about how to respond to the situation.

Note: This unit follows previous lessons on Martin Luther King, Jr., and Gandhi in which Miss Bohringer's students had significant exposure to the concept of “demoralizing.”