



# Reasoning with Ethics

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A Project of The School for Ethical Education | [www.ethicsed.org](http://www.ethicsed.org)

*Ethics in action creates character.*

Use this blog to:

1. Lead class discussions in social studies, civics, ethics or advisory classes.
2. Teach students skills to analyze cases with core ethical values.
3. Recognize skills in support of SEE's Tri-Factor Model of ethical functioning.

[Visit the online Ethics Blog.](#)



## ***Dr. King and the Ethical Analysis of Law***

With the celebration of Martin Luther King Day on Monday, January 20, students can be reminded of one of Dr. King's greatest written legacies. In his 1963 *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, Dr. King provides the ethical analysis needed to support the nonviolent, civil disobedience campaign he was leading to undo Jim Crow laws in the south. These laws supported the policies of segregation and humiliation of blacks.



Dr. King studied the strategy of nonviolent protest to achieve social change from the example of Gandhi and his efforts to win India's independence from Great Britain. Leading nonviolent protests and marches upset some southern religious leaders who wrote Dr. King and asked him to stop the civil disobedience protests and seek to negotiate change. King's reply, written while under arrest in Birmingham, Alabama, argued that not all laws are just and makes a clear case for determining the difference between just and unjust laws.

The arguments require more space than this blog allows, but students are encouraged to use the Blog's website links to read the excerpted letter, listen to student reading excerpts and respond to the following questions. What factors does Dr. King suggest define a just or unjust law? What core values would be demonstrated if you participated in one of King's civil disobedience protests? If you were 18 years old in Birmingham, Al in 1963, would you have participated in a civil rights protest?

Regarding this archived case, SEE welcomes students to review relevant links and video.

At the Newseum in Washington, D.C., students from Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School read excerpts from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" on the 50th anniversary of its publication. -

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujmibAbxvma>

Synopsis of what drove King to write the letter and then at 1:22 a speaker reads a passage regarding Moral Law. -

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSPKtK1sm3w>

Documents associated with Letter from a Birmingham

Jail- [http://www.ethicsed.org/uploads/8/9/6/8/89681855/mlk\\_documents.pdf](http://www.ethicsed.org/uploads/8/9/6/8/89681855/mlk_documents.pdf)

Excerpt from Letter from a Birmingham

Jail- [http://www.ethicsed.org/uploads/8/9/6/8/89681855/excerpt\\_of\\_ml\\_k\\_ltr\\_for\\_rwe\\_1-21-20.pdf](http://www.ethicsed.org/uploads/8/9/6/8/89681855/excerpt_of_ml_k_ltr_for_rwe_1-21-20.pdf)