**Writing a Claim by Asking “Why?”**

**Overview**

In this assignment, you will read passages from Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” For each of them, you will have to proceed through steps 1-7 below.

**Your job consists of the following:**

1. Read and annotate the passage. Throughout, REACT to it. Ask questions, make judgements, talk back to him.
2. Second, ask, “What is he trying to get me to do, to think, to believe?”
3. Then ask, “What is he DOING in order to achieve that? What “moves” is he making here?”
4. Then LABEL those moves. Call them something. “The ‘X’ tactic.” “The ‘Y’ maneuver.”

NOTE: You do not have to use official terms or language. To know the word “polysyndeton” is useful, but not necessary. It is more important that you LABEL IT as something, even if it’s just “over-use of ‘and’.”

1. Then ask, “What other tactics did he use?” Try to find at least two.
2. Then ask, “Which one was more successful? Why would it work or persuade me?”
3. Write a claim sentence in the following template:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**CLAIM TEMPLATE**

In [TAG], [author’s last name] **[ACTIVE VERB GOES HERE]**  [summary of the tactics you found] **in order to** [answer what you understand to be the author’s larger-picture purpose or message].

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”**

**Context**: In this selection, King, who had been arrested for demonstrating for civil rights, was answering an open letter in a Birmingham newspaper which essentially accused him of being an “outside agitator,” a person from outside the community who came only to stir up trouble and who had no moral right to be there.

**Selection One**:

My dear fellow clergymen…

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Selection Two**:

I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against "outsiders coming in." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Frequently we share staff, educational and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago the affiliate here in Birmingham asked us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promise. So I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here.

­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Selection Three:**

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.