Georgia Standard of Excellence:

SSSocIC1 Analyze forms of social inequality.

I Can Statement:

I can analyze, describe, and summarize Dr. King’s reasons for opposing the Vietnam War.

Bell Ringer:

Write down any facts that you know about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the bubble map below.



Read Paragraph #1 and summarize the first reason that Dr. King was opposed to the war in Vietnam.

(PARAGRAPH # 1)

Now, since I am a preacher by calling, I suppose it is not surprising that I have seven major reasons for bringing Vietnam into the field of my moral vision. There is...a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I and others have been waging in America. A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed that there was a real promise of hope for the poor, both black and white, through the Poverty Program. There were experiments, hopes, and new beginnings. Then came the build-up in Vietnam. And I watched the program broken as if it was some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war. And I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money, like some demonic, destructive suction tube. And you may not know it, my friends, but it is estimated that we spend $500,000 to kill each enemy soldier, while we spend only fifty-three dollars for each person classified as poor, and much of that fifty-three dollars goes for salaries to people that are not poor. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor, and attack it as such.

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Read Paragraph #2 and summarize the second reason that Dr. King was opposed to the war in Vietnam.

(PARAGRAPH # 2)

Perhaps the more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hope of the poor at home. It was sending their sons, and their brothers, and their husbands to fight and die in extraordinarily high proportion relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with a cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same school room. So we watch them in brutal solidarity, burning the huts of a poor village. But we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago or Atlanta. Now, I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.

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Read Paragraph #3 and summarize the third reason that Dr. King was opposed to the war in Vietnam.

(PARAGRAPH # 3)

My third reason moves to an even deeper level of awareness, for it grows out of my experience in the ghettos of the North over the last three years--especially the last three summers. As I have walked among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men, I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through non-violent action; for they ask and write me, "So what about Vietnam?" They ask if our nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without first having spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government. For the sake of those boys, for the sake of this government, for the sake of the hundreds of thousands trembling under our violence I cannot be silent. Been a lot of applauding over the last few years. They applauded our total movement; they've applauded me. America and most of its newspapers applauded me in Montgomery. And I stood before thousands of Negroes getting ready to riot when my home was bombed and said, we can't do it this way. They applauded us in the sit-in movement--we non-violently decided to sit in at lunch counters. The applauded us on the Freedom Rides when we accepted blows without retaliation. They praised us in Albany and Birmingham and Selma, Alabama. Oh, the press was so noble in its applause, and so noble in its praise when I was saying, be non-violent toward Bull Connor ;when I was saying, Be non-violent toward [Selma, Alabama segregationist sheriff] Jim Clark. There's something strangely inconsistent about a nation and a press that will praise you when you say, be non-violent toward Jim Clark, but will curse and damn you when you say, "Be non-violent toward little brown Vietnamese children. There's something wrong with that press!

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(PARAGRAPH # 4)

Now, let me tell you the truth about it. They must see Americans as strange liberators. Do you realize that the Vietnamese people proclaimed their own independence in 1945 after a combined French and Japanese occupation? And incidentally, this was before the Communist revolution in China. They were led by Ho Chi Minh. And this is a little-known fact, and these people declared themselves independent in 1945. They quoted our Declaration of Independence in their document of freedom, and yet our government refused to recognize them. President Truman said they were not ready for independence. So we fell victim as a nation at that time of the same deadly arrogance that has poisoned the international situation for all of these years. France then set out to reconquer its former colony. And they fought eight long, hard, brutal years trying to re-conquer Vietnam. You know who helped France? It was the United States of America. It came to the point that we were meeting more than eighty percent of the war costs. And even when France started despairing of its reckless action, we did not. And in 1954, a conference was called at Geneva, and an agreement was reached, because France had been defeated at Dien Bien Phu. But even after that, and after the Geneva Accord, we did not stop. We must face the sad fact that our government sought, in a real sense, to sabotage the Geneva Accord. Well, after the French were defeated, it looked as if independence and land reform would come through the Geneva agreement. But instead the United States came and started supporting a man named Diem who turned out to be one of the most ruthless dictators in the history of the world. He set out to silence all opposition. People were brutally murdered because they raised their voices against the brutal policies of Diem. And the peasants watched and cringed as Diem ruthlessly rooted out all opposition. The peasants watched as all this was presided over by United States influence and by increasing numbers of United States troops who came to help quell the insurgency that Diem's methods had aroused. When Diem was overthrown, they may have been happy, but the long line of military dictatorships seemed to offer no real change, especially in terms of their need for land and peace. And who are we supporting in Vietnam today? It's a man by the name of general Ky [Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky] who fought with the French against his own people, and who said on one occasion that the greatest hero of his life is Hitler. This is who we are supporting in Vietnam today. Oh, our government and the press generally won't tell us these things, but God told me to tell you this morning. The truth must be told.

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Read Paragraph 5 and summarize the fifth reason that Dr. King was opposed to the war in Vietnam.

(PARAGRAPH # 5)

The only change came from America as we increased our troop commitments in support of governments which were singularly corrupt, inept, and without popular support and all the while the people read our leaflets and received regular promises of peace and democracy and land reform. Now they languish under our bombs and consider us, not their fellow Vietnamese, the real enemy. They move sadly and apathetically as we herd them off the land of their fathers into concentration camps, where minimal social needs are rarely met. They know they must move or be destroyed by our bombs. So they go, primarily women, and children and the aged. They watch as we poison their water, as we kill a million acres of their crops. They must weep as the bulldozers roar through their areas preparing to destroy the precious trees. They wander into the towns and see thousands of thousands of the children, homeless, without clothes, running in packs on the streets like animals. They see the children degraded by our soldiers as they beg for food. They see the children selling their sisters to our soldiers, soliciting for their mothers. We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have destroyed their land and their crops. We have cooperated in the crushing of the nation's only noncommunist revolutionary political force, the United Buddhist Church. This is a role our nation has taken, the role of those who make peaceful revolutions impossible but refusing to give up the privileges and the pleasures that comes from the immense profits of overseas investments. I'm convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, militarism and economic exploitation are incapable of being conquered.

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Read Paragraph 6 and summarize the sixth reason that Dr. King was opposed to the war in Vietnam.

(PARAGRAPH # 6)

Let me say finally that I oppose the war in Vietnam because I love America. I speak out against this war, not in anger, but with anxiety and sorrow in my heart, and, above all, with a passionate desire to see our beloved country stand as the moral example of the world. I speak out against this war because I am disappointed with America. And there can be no great disappointment where there is not great love. I am disappointed with our failure to deal positively and forthrightly with the triple evils of racism, economic exploitation, and militarism. We are presently moving down a dead-end road that can lead to national disaster. America has strayed to the far country of racism and militarism. The home that all too many Americans left was solidly structured idealistically; its pillars were solidly grounded in the insights of our Judeo-Christian heritage. All men are made in the image of God. All men are bothers. All men are created equal. Every man is an heir to a legacy of dignity and worth. Every man has rights that are neither conferred by, nor derived from the State--they are God-given. Out of one blood, God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth. What a marvelous foundation for any home! What a glorious and healthy place to inhabit. But America's strayed away, and this unnatural excursion has brought only confusion and bewilderment. It has left hearts aching with guilt and minds distorted with irrationality.

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Please summarize why Dr. King opposed the Vietnam War.

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