

Discussion Questions - "Letter from Birmingham Jail," "Letter to Deng Xiaoping," and
The Emancipation Proclamation

1. In "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King Jr. invokes passages from "The Gettysburg Address," *The Declaration of Independence*, and the *Bible*. Why do you think he references these sources? How do these sources help make his letter more powerful?
2. Many critics of the Civil Rights movement urged Negroes in the U.S. to wait for their rights to be recognized. In "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," how does Dr. King answer these critics? Why does Dr. King believe that waiting is not the answer?
3. How does Dr. King make use of Gandhi's notion of non-violent civil disobedience? Does Dr. King, like Gandhi, believe that non-violence needs to be an active process, or does he believe that non-violent civil disobedience must be passive?
4. What is the tone of Wei Jingsheng's "Letter to Deng Xiaoping"? Does Wei intend the letter to be sarcastic? Do you believe that Wei is resigned to accepting his fate passively? Why or why not?
5. Why does Wei call Deng Xiaoping small-minded? Why does he believe that Deng Xiaoping is so dangerous; is it because he is small minded, or is it a combination of small mindedness with other qualities?
6. Why do people mistakenly believe that *The Emancipation Proclamation* freed all slaves? Does it matter that the document only freed slaves of the states that were in rebellion against the Union? Does the intent of the document somehow transcend the words on the page, and extend freedom to all slaves?
7. If you could have a conversation with Abraham Lincoln, what would you say to him about the effects of *The Emancipation Proclamation*? Does this document have any special meaning for you, and if so, what is the meaning?