“If I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of taking a kind of general and panoramic view of the whole of human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, ‘Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?’”

“I would take my mental flight by Greece and I would watch God’s children in their magnificent trek from the dark dungeons of Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the promised land. And in spite of its magnificence, I wouldn’t stop there.”

“I would move on by Greece and take my mind to Mount Olympus. And I would see Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Euripides, and Aristophanes assembled around the Parthenon. And I would watch them around the Parthenon as they discussed the great and eternal issues of reality. But I wouldn’t stop there. I would go on, even to the great heyday of the Roman Empire. And I would see developments around there, through various emperors and leaders. But I wouldn’t stop there.”

“I would even come up to the day of the Renaissance, and get a quick picture of all that the Renaissance did for the cultural and aesthetic life of man. But I wouldn’t stop there. I would even go by the way that the man for whom I am named had his habitat. And I would watch Martin Luther as he tackled his ninety-five theses on the door at the church of Wittenberg. But I wouldn’t stop there.”

“I would come on up even to 1863, and watch a vacillating President by the name of Abraham Lincoln finally come to the conclusion that he had to sign the Emancipation Proclamation. But I wouldn’t stop there.”

“I would even come up to the early thirties, and see a man grappling with the problems of the bankruptcy of his nation. And come with an eloquent cry that we have nothing to fear but fear itself. But I wouldn’t stop there.”

“Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, ‘If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the 20th century, I will be happy.’ Now that’s a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around. That’s a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.”

“Egyptian Gallery 107
Over 4,000 years of history are represented in this gallery. What do you think will last from our society today?”

“Greek/Roman Gallery 102-103
These galleries house grand examples of pottery and sculpture by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Dr. King mentions the leaders and great thinkers of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. How do you see leadership depicted in these galleries? How do these depictions differ from the way leaders are portrayed now?”

“Renaissance/Martin Luther Gallery 112, 114, 118
Renaissance artists valued realistic depiction. Compare the human figures in the Renaissance galleries to what you’ve seen in other galleries. Find the follower of Luther and see how her portrait was painted. What do you notice?”

“1863 American Gallery 207
Find the Power of Music. This artwork was painted before the Civil War and before President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation that was one of the steps to freedom for over three million slaves. What do you think is happening in this painting?”

“1930s Gallery 226a
Though the Depression made life difficult for many people, art was an outlet for the struggles of the age. What words would you use to describe the artworks in this gallery?”

“1960s Gallery 226b
Find Untitled (Rooftop View). Hughie Lee-Smith painted many urban scenes, often with a solitary figure. Which passage from Dr. King’s words connects with this image for you?”

“Cleveland Gallery 228b
Find Untitled (Rooftop View). Hughie Lee-Smith painted many urban scenes, often with a solitary figure. Which passage from Dr. King’s words connects with this image for you?”

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Printed in this guide are excerpts from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s sermon *I’ve Been to the Mountaintop*, delivered on April 3, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. Use this guide to take a journey through the museum’s galleries and imagine the eras described by Dr. King through the art made by the hands and minds of those who lived in that time.

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