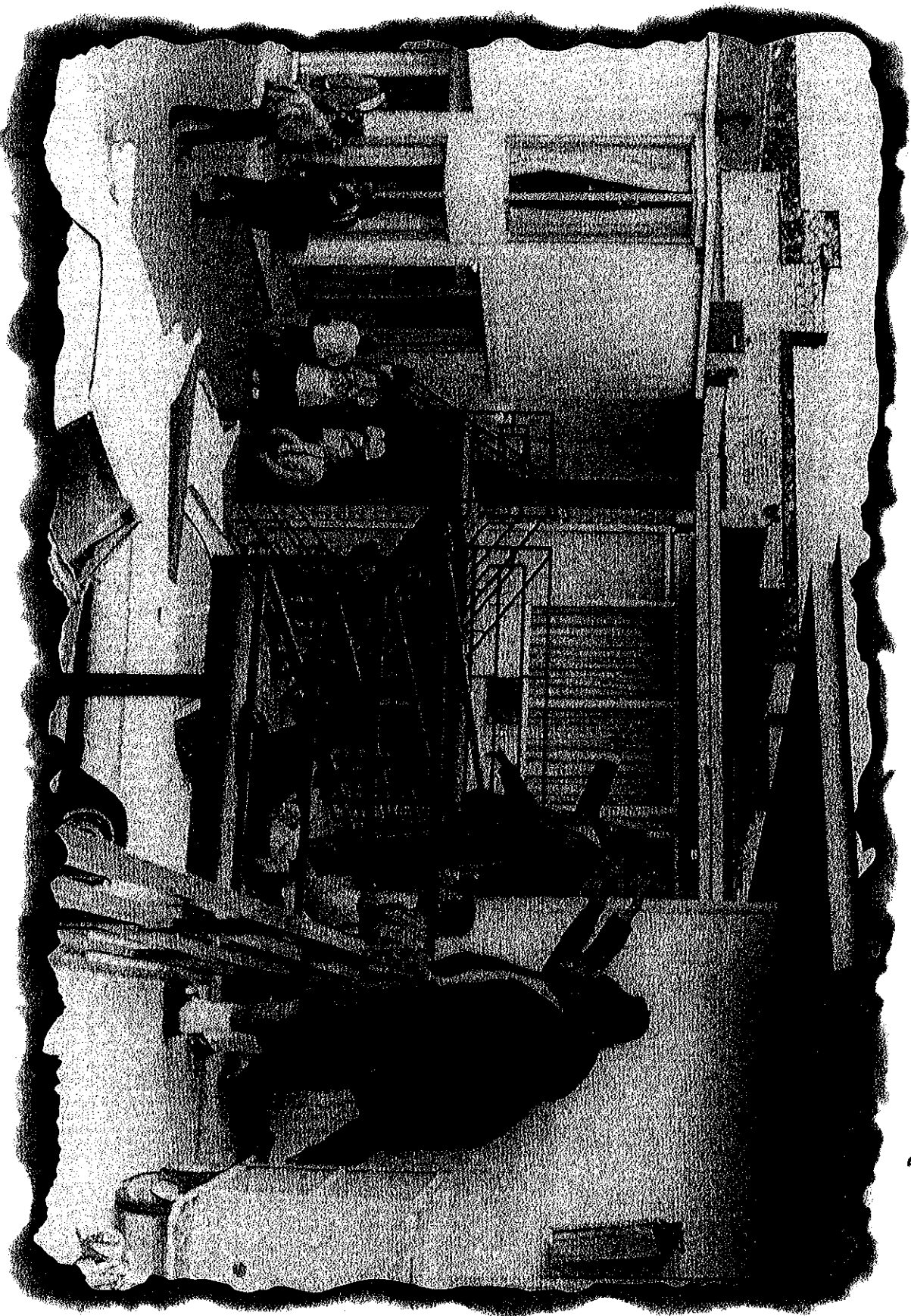


Crime

LESSON 10

**Assassin!**  
about MLK Jr



# On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., went to Memphis, Tennessee. He checked into the Lorraine Motel.

Early that evening, he strolled out onto the balcony. Some friends joined him there. Suddenly, from the shadows, someone fired a single rifle blast. A bullet smashed into Dr. King's neck. The bullet's force was so great that it ripped the necktie right off him. Within an hour, Dr. King was dead. The death of this great African-American leader shocked the nation. Police quickly began a massive search for the assassin.

*Grouped around Dr. Martin Luther King's body, his friends point to the source of the rifle shot that felled him. But the assassin had already fled.*

<sup>2</sup> The police figured out that the fatal shot had come from a nearby rooming house. The assassin had been sloppy. He had left his rifle near the scene. The police were able to get a clear fingerprint off this weapon. They traced the print to a small-time crook named James Earl Ray.

<sup>3</sup> James Earl Ray? Just the thought of Ray as an assassin baffled the police. What reason did he have to shoot Dr. King? He was not a known racist or King hater. In fact, James Earl Ray had never seemed like much of a threat to anyone. He had dropped out of high school after 10th grade. He had tried army life, but with no success. Eventually, he had turned to a life of crime.

<sup>4</sup> But Ray had not been very good at that, either. He once dropped his wallet during a robbery. That made it easy for police to prove he was the thief. Another time he was caught after falling out of a getaway car. His only "success" came in 1967. That year, he broke out of the Missouri State Prison. Even then, police were not exactly terrified. They put a puny \$50 reward out for his capture.

<sup>5</sup> And yet, *his* fingerprint was on the gun that killed Dr. King. So the police went looking for Ray. This time they set the reward at \$100,000. But for the first time ever, they had trouble catching him. The man who had botched most of his other crimes now acted like a real, professional criminal.

<sup>6</sup> First he fled to Toronto. There he obtained a Canadian passport. In those days that was easy to do. Ray simply paid \$8 and swore that he was a Canadian citizen. The name he used was Rannon Sneyd.

<sup>7</sup> Ray stayed in Canada for about a month. Then, on May 5, he used his phony passport to fly to England. He arrived in London on May 6. Soon after that, he flew to Portugal for five days. The reason for these trips has never been clear. Some people think Ray was just trying to elude police. Others think he was meeting someone who paid him to assassinate Dr. King. No one knows for sure.

<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, U.S. agents had picked up Ray's trail. They, too, knew how easy it was to get a Canadian passport. So they asked the police in Canada to sift through some 300,000 passport

applications. At last, one officer found Ray's photo on a form for Ramon Sneyd. Suddenly the manhunt heated up.

<sup>9</sup> Back in England, Ray bounced from one cheap hotel to another. He must have known that the police were closing in. Using the name Sneyd, he called several newspapers. He asked how he could join some white army group in Africa. Ray must have thought he would be safe there. "Foreign legions" were famous for not asking about a person's history. One newspaper reporter suggested that Ray go to Belgium. Some white army groups were recruiting new soldiers there.

<sup>10</sup> By now, however, the net had closed in on Ray. On June 8, "Sneyd" went to the airport. Just as he was about to board his plane to Belgium, the English police arrested him. They sent Ray back to the United States. He pleaded guilty and received a sentence of 99 years in prison. The day after he was sentenced, Ray changed his story. He tried to take back his plea, claiming that he had been forced to plead guilty. But it was too late. No one was listening.

<sup>11</sup> For many people, the sentencing of

James Earl Ray ended the story. But for others, questions remain. The most important one is this: Did Ray act alone? Agents for the U.S. government have always maintained that he did. But other people disagree. In 1978 a special panel studied the case. Panel members found a "likelihood" that other people were involved. James Earl Ray's own father said, "[James] couldn't have planned it alone. He wasn't smart enough for that."

<sup>12</sup> If Ray did not act alone, then who helped him? Who told him what to do? Who planned—and paid for—his escape? No one knows. Some believe that a group of racists masterminded the killing. Others think U.S. leaders were behind the plot. According to this theory, the leaders did not like Dr. King. They did not like the way he stirred up the African-American community.

<sup>13</sup> If Ray did take directions from someone, why did he do it? What could have persuaded him to kill Dr. King? Many think his motive was simple. He wanted money. All the other crimes he had committed had been for money. According to one rumor, Ray was paid \$50,000 for the murder. But

like the other theories, this one has never been proven.

<sup>14</sup> Many years have now passed since the assassination. James Earl Ray died in prison on April 23, 1998. The whole may never be known. But one fact remains. No one else has been charged in the murder of Dr. King. James Earl Ray is still the only one who ever served time for the assassination.



*If you have been timed while reading this article, enter your reading time below. Then turn to the Words per Minute Table on page 101 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 102.*

**Reading Time: Lesson 10**

Minutes \_\_\_\_\_ Seconds \_\_\_\_\_

**A Finding the Main Idea**

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea    B—Too Broad    N—Too Narrow

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Details about the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., by James Earl Ray remain a mystery.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Certain crimes fascinate and puzzle people long after the court decision has been made.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. James Earl Ray was able to get a Canadian passport just by swearing that he was a Canadian citizen.

\_\_\_\_\_ Score 15 points for a correct M answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ Score 5 points for each correct B or N answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Score: Finding the Main Idea

**B Recalling Facts**

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

- 1. Dr. King was killed by a blast from a
  - a. rifle.
  - b. handgun.
  - c. machine gun.
- 2. James Earl Ray's education had ended after
  - a. the eighth grade.
  - b. one year of college.
  - c. the 10th grade.
- 3. Police went after James Earl Ray because
  - a. they knew he was a racist and a King hater.
  - b. his fingerprints were on the weapon they had found.
  - c. he looked guilty and ran away.
- 4. Ray first fled to Canada, then to
  - a. England.
  - b. France.
  - c. Portugal.
- 5. English police arrested Ray just as he was about to
  - a. assassinate the prime minister of England.
  - b. go back into his hotel in London.
  - c. board a plane for Belgium.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ Total Score: Recalling Facts

### C Making Inferences

When you combine your own experience and information from a text to draw a conclusion that is not directly stated in that text, you are making an inference. Below are five statements that may or may not be inferences based on information in the article. Label the statements using the following key:

C—Correct Inference      F—Faulty Inference

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Police were not very interested in finding the assassin of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The police had probably kept their eyes on James Earl Ray even before the assassination because they expected him to try to kill Dr. King.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. U.S. agents felt that they could count on help from the Canadian police.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. James Earl Ray felt safe and comfortable during his stay in England.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. To get a Canadian passport in 1968, you needed a photograph of yourself.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Total Score: Making Inferences

### D Using Words Precisely

Each numbered sentence below contains an underlined word or phrase from the article. Following the sentence are three definitions. One definition is closest to the meaning of the underlined word. One definition is opposite or nearly opposite. Label those two definitions using the following key; do not label the remaining definition.

C—Closest      O—Opposite or Nearly Opposite

- 1. They put a puny \$50 reward out for his capture.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. generous
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. very small
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. puzzling
- 2. The man who had botched most of his other crimes now acted like a real, professional criminal.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. ruined
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. planned
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. successfully performed
- 3. "Foreign legions" were famous for not asking about a person's history.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. having to do with laws
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. having to do with your own country
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. having to do with another country
- 4. Some people think that Ray was just trying to elude police.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. dodge
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. seek out
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. help

5. Agents for the U.S. government have always maintained that he did.

- a. recalled
- b. declared to be true
- c. denied

\_\_\_\_\_ Score 3 points for each correct C answer.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Score 2 points for each correct O answer.  
\_\_\_\_\_ **Total Score: Using Words Precisely**

Enter the four total scores in the spaces below, and add them together to find your Reading Comprehension Score. Then record your score on the graph on page 103.

Score	Question Type	Lesson 10
_____	Finding the Main Idea	
_____	Recalling Facts	
_____	Making Inferences	
_____	Using Words Precisely	
_____	<b>Reading Comprehension Score</b>	

### Author's Approach

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

1. The authors use the first sentence of the article to
  - a. inform the reader about Dr. King's assassination.
  - b. describe the qualities of Dr. King.
  - c. compare Dr. King and his friends.

2. The main purpose of the first paragraph is to
  - a. prove that James Earl Ray assassinated Dr. King.
  - b. show how quickly the search for Dr. King's killer began.
  - c. present details about Dr. King's assassination.

3. Which of the following statements from the article best describes James Earl Ray after the assassination?
  - a. In fact, James Earl Ray had never seemed like much of a threat to anyone.
  - b. The man who had botched most of his other crimes now acted like a real, professional criminal.
  - c. Another time he was caught after falling out of a getaway car.

4. Judging by statements from the article "Assassin!" you can conclude that the authors want the reader to think that
  - a. everyone agrees that James Earl Ray acted alone when he killed Dr. King.
  - b. many people suspect that James Earl Ray was taking orders from someone else when he shot Dr. King.
  - c. James Earl Ray didn't really kill Dr. King.

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of correct answers  
Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 104.