Martin Luther King Jr. had been born on January 15, 1929. At that time, laws did not treat black and white people the same. Martin’s dad did not buy the shoes. They left the store and walked away upset. Martin did not like these laws.

Martin felt thrilled. His dad took him to get new shoes. They sat in the store and waited. But the store clerk saw that their skin color was not white. He said that he was not going to help Martin and his dad unless they moved to the back. Martin felt that was not fair.
Martin lived in Atlanta, Georgia, with his parents, his brother and sister, and his grandparents. Martin and a white boy played all the time when he was little. Then, they turned six years old. It was time to start school. The law said white and black children could not go to the same school. One day Martin’s friend said, “My father says not to play with you.”

Martin’s parents told him that segregation meant that white and black people had to stay apart. The laws said that separate was equal. But Martin knew separate was not equal. Martin did not like that law and felt it was not fair.
As he grew up, Martin was not free to go where he wanted. He played in a separate park. He swam in a separate pool. He drank from a separate water fountain. He ate at a separate restaurant. On the bus he sat in the back, separate from the white people who sat up front.

Martin had a loving family. His father, Martin Luther King Sr., was a pastor. The family went to church on Sundays. His parents led him to love God. They told him that God had made all people equal. Martin knew God wanted him to love everyone.
Martin’s dad preached, “Treat others the way you want to be treated. Respect everyone.”

But Martin felt sad about how black people were treated. At times, he felt like he was not as good as others. His mother, Alberta, told him, “You are as good as anyone.”

Section 2
A Contest and a Bus Ride

Martin faced segregation every day. He rode a bus to school. Some days the front seats were empty. Martin wanted to sit there, but he had to sit in back. He hoped and dreamed about sitting where he wanted. He said to himself, “One day, I’m going to put my body up there where my mind is.”
In high school, Martin wrote a speech. It was about how black people were treated. His speech was called, “The Negro and the Constitution.” Mrs. Bradley, his teacher, entered it into a contest. She and Martin rode the bus to Dublin, Georgia, to go to the contest. Martin read his speech. He won the contest!

After the speech, Martin and Mrs. Bradley sat down on the bus to ride 90 miles back to Atlanta. Soon, some white people got on the bus. The bus driver made Martin and Mrs. Bradley give up their seats. Martin felt angry. He wanted to say, “No, it’s not fair. I was here first.”
Mrs. Bradley looked sad and maybe a little scared. She begged Martin to give up his seat and stand in the back. “Come on, Martin, we have to obey the law.”

They stood for that long trip back home. Martin did not like the segregation laws that allowed for many black people to be mistreated.

Section 3
Dreaming of Change

One summer, Martin worked in a factory. Both blacks and poor white people worked there. He saw that the poor white people were mistreated too. He was just a young teenager, but he knew the laws were not fair. They needed to change. Martin knew God wanted all people to be treated the same.
When he was 15 years old, Martin worked on a farm in the state of Connecticut. His skin color did not matter there. He ate at any restaurant. He sat where he wanted on the buses and trains. Martin preached in a church to both black and white people. He became their leader. They all listened to him!

Martin went back home to the South. Again, he sat in the back of trains and buses. He did not like the segregation laws in the South. He wanted the black people there to have the same freedom as blacks in the North. He knew the laws in the South had to change.
Martin started college when he was just 15 years old. His teachers talked about how to solve the segregation problems. Martin was thrilled! He was happy to find some white students who wanted to see changes too. Martin joined groups that wanted to make the laws fair.

Martin had watched his dad work for what was right and fair. His dad was calm and did not fight. In college, Martin read about how to make changes in a peaceful way. He believed that was the way to change the segregation laws. He started to dream of ways to help change the laws.
Section 4  
"I Have a Dream"

Martin Luther King Jr. became a preacher like his dad. He married Coretta Scott and moved to Alabama. There, he studied the Bible and peaceful ways to change laws.

One day, a lady named Rosa Parks did not give up her bus seat to a white man. She was put in jail. Martin told black people, “Stop riding the buses.”

To boycott something means to stop supporting it. Martin’s plan to boycott the buses worked! One year later, a new law said black people did not have to sit in the back of the bus anymore! That was a law that Martin liked.
Martin Luther King Jr. worked hard to change the segregation laws. He gave speeches. He wrote books. Sometimes he was put in jail. But he did not stop.

On August 23, 1963, Martin led a march in Washington, D.C. People marched to show they wanted the laws to change. Martin gave his famous speech called “I Have a Dream.”

Then, he worked to get laws passed to give poor people better jobs. He worked to help people get better houses and go to better schools. One year after his famous speech, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. It was a law to end segregation. That was a law that Martin really liked!

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

- Martin Luther King Jr.