

## **Trump, T’Challa, and Shakespeare: How Do Speeches Incite Collective Action?** A Folger Shakespeare Library Lesson Plan

### **WHAT’S ON AND WHY**

The insurrection at the US Capitol has shaken our world. And it calls on every one of us to consider the real—sometimes terrifying, sometimes uplifting—power of language and the values we want our country to embody.

In this lesson, students will consider 4 speeches that incite(d) groups to take bold, sometimes violent, action: President Donald Trump’s January 6<sup>th</sup> address, Antony’s funeral speech in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, King T’Challa’s United Nations address in *Black Panther*, and Henry V’s St. Crispin’s Day Speech in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. Students will use their voices and minds to analyze how these speeches work, which techniques they use to influence the crowds they are addressing.

They will also reflect on the real-world impact of political speeches and imagine what *they* might say if given the chance to influence a national and global audience.

Now more than ever, our young people need our help understanding the power of language and the tools at their disposal as audiences and rhetors.

### **TEXTS**

Speeches by President Donald Trump and fictional characters: King T’Challa from *Black Panther* and Mark Antony and Henry V from Shakespeare (attached below)

### **WHAT TO DO**

1. First, if they need and want it, give your students space to talk about what happened at the US Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
2. Tell the class that they are going to read 4 speeches. Do NOT tell them anything about these speeches, including their common effect of inciting action. Students will discover this for themselves.
3. Ask students to read the first speech (Antony) together as one chorus, using the following riff on the Folger Essential Practice called “Choral Reading”:
  - a. CHORAL READ 1: Ask the whole class to read the speech chorally—all together—as quickly as they can, and as loudly as they can.
  - b. CHORAL READ 2: The class next reads the speech sequentially—singly, one speaker after another, changing readers at the end of each complete thought. Ask that each student read aloud from the beginning of their line to an end punctuation—a period, semicolon, question mark or exclamation point. (Read right through a comma.) And begin. After the first student reaches an end punctuation, the next person picks it up and reads to the next end punctuation. Remember not to correct pronunciation. We want students to feel comfortable and confident with new language.
  - c. CHORAL READ 3: Ask the whole class to read the speech again, this time in a whisper.

- d. DEBRIEF: After each speech, ask every student to finish the following prompt (either speaking or in the chatbox):
  - i. What does the speaker WANT? (Use non-directive-questioning to draw out the fact that each speaker wants the crowd to DO SOMETHING. Maybe even something destructive or violent or dangerous. See what students notice about what each speaker wants the crowd to do.)
4. Follow step #2 for Trump’s, T’Challa’s and Henry V’s speeches.
5. After doing the choral reading/debrief exercise for each of the 4 speeches, students will now zoom out and think about these speeches as a whole. Ask your class, “Do you think these speeches were effective? What makes you say this?” Briefly discuss how Trump’s speech led to the siege of the US Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Ask students how they imagine the audience at the United Nations felt after T’Challa’s call for unity. Explain that Antony sowed the mischief he was hoping for and formed an alliance against Brutus. Ask students what happened at Agincourt; see if a student can explain that Henry’s speech leads the English to victory on the fields. Invite students to probe the effects of words on audiences.
6. Ask students to work in pairs to make a compare/contrast chart or a 4-circle Venn Diagram showing the similarities and differences among these 4 speeches. If time permits, let students share their observations and cite textual evidence.
7. Invite students to consider HOW these speeches pulled it off. What did these speeches do? Do they share common tones and/or techniques? Now is your students’ chance to see the real-world relevance of all those fancy literary and rhetorical terms you’ve been teaching them. Using their graphic organizers as a starting point, have students write a short essay analyzing how these speeches use the tools of language to move crowds to action. Make sure that your students consider the “so what?” of their essay—the underlying reason why what they are writing is important.
8. Finally, in class discussion and/or in student writing, ask your students to respond to this crucial prompt:

If given the chance to address the people of the United States, with the whole world watching on, what would **you** say? What would you want your audience to feel, think, wonder, and—most importantly—**do** as a result of your speech? What decisions and actions would you want your words to inspire? Why?

## HOW DID IT GO?

Did every student speak the language of these speeches? Did they comment on the visceral power of these words? Did they notice specific similarities and differences across the speeches and support their answers with textual evidence? Did they analyze how the speeches worked on their intended audiences? Do they care about how public figures use speeches to influence and manipulate them? Are they thinking about the civic functions of language? Are they thinking about how to use their own voices in the world? If so, it’s all good.

**THE FOUR SPEECHES**

**#1**

ANTONY

Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up  
 To such a sudden flood of mutiny.  
 I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts.  
 I am no orator, as Brutus is,  
 But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man                   230  
 That love my friend, and that they know full well  
 That gave me public leave to speak of him.  
 For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,  
 Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech  
 To stir men's blood. I only speak right on.                   235  
 Here is the will, and under Caesar's seal:  
 To every Roman citizen he gives,                               255  
 To every several man, seventy-five drachmas.

SECOND PLEBEIAN

Most noble Caesar! We'll revenge his death.

THIRD PLEBEIAN O royal Caesar!

ANTONY

Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,  
 His private arbors, and new-planted orchards,  
 On this side Tiber. He hath left them you,  
 And to your heirs forever—common pleasures  
 To walk abroad and recreate yourselves.                   265  
 Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?

FIRST PLEBEIAN

Never, never!—Come, away, away!  
 We'll burn his body in the holy place  
 And with the brands fire the traitors' houses.  
 Take up the body.   270

SECOND PLEBEIAN Go fetch fire.

THIRD PLEBEIAN Pluck down benches.

FOURTH PLEBEIAN Pluck down forms, windows, anything.

*Plebeians exit with Caesar's body.*

ANTONY

Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot;                   275  
 Take thou what course thou wilt.

- Mark Antony (and the crowd of Romans) in Act 3 of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*

## #2

Republicans are constantly fighting like a boxer with his hands tied behind his back. It's like a boxer, and we want to be so nice. We want to be so respectful of everybody, including bad people. We're going to have to fight much harder and Mike Pence is going to have to come through for us. If he doesn't, that will be a sad day for our country because you're sworn to uphold our constitution. Now it is up to Congress to confront this egregious assault on our democracy. After this, we're going to walk down and I'll be there with you. We're going to walk down. We're going to walk down [...] I think right here. We're going walk down to the Capitol, and we're going to cheer on our brave senators, and congressmen and women. We're probably not going to be cheering so much for some of them because you'll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong.

[...] You have one of the dumbest governors in the United States. And when I endorsed him, I didn't know this guy. [David Perdue] said, "A friend of mine is running for Governor, what's his name." And you know the rest. He was in fourth place, fifth place. I don't know. He was way... He was doing poorly. I endorsed him. He went like a rocket ship and he won. And then I had to beat Stacey Abrams with this guy, Brian Kemp. I had to beat Stacey Abrams and I had to beat Oprah, used to be a friend of mine. I was on her last show. [She] picked the five outstanding people. I don't think she thinks that anymore. Once I ran for president, I didn't notice there were too many calls coming in from Oprah. Believe it or not, she used to like me. I was one of the five outstanding people.

[...] And I had a campaign against Michelle Obama and Barack Hussein Obama against Stacey. And I had Brian Kemp, he weighs 130 pounds. He said he played offensive line in football. I'm trying to figure that. I'm still trying to figure that out. He said that the other night, "I was an offensive lineman." I'm saying, "Really? That must've been a really small team." But I look at that and I look at what's happened, and he turned out to be a disaster. This stuff happens.

[...] Our exciting adventures and boldest endeavors have not yet begun. My fellow Americans for our movement, for our children and for our beloved country and I say this, despite all that's happened, the best is yet to come.

So we're going to, we're going to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue, I love Pennsylvania Avenue, and we're going to the Capitol and we're going to try and give... The Democrats are hopeless. They're never voting for anything, not even one vote. But we're going to try and give our Republicans, the weak ones, because the strong ones don't need any of our help, we're going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country.

So let's walk down Pennsylvania Avenue. I want to thank you all. God bless you and God bless America. Thank you all for being here, this is incredible. Thank you very much. Thank you.

- President Donald Trump, January 6, 2021, on the National Mall in Washington, DC

**#3**

Wakanda will no longer watch from the shadows. We cannot. We must not.

We will work to be an example of how we as brothers and sisters on this earth should treat each other. Now, more than ever, the illusions of division threaten our very existence.

We all know the truth: more connects than separates us. But in times of crisis, the wise build bridges, while the foolish build barriers. We must find a way to look after one another as if we were one single tribe.

- King T'Challa, played by Chadwick Boseman, *Black Panther* (2018)

**#4**

This day is called the feast of Crispian.  
 He that outlives this day and comes safe home  
 Will stand o' tiptoe when this day is named 45  
 And rouse him at the name of Crispian.  
 He that shall see this day, and live old age,  
 Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors  
 And say "Tomorrow is Saint Crispian."  
 Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars. 50  
 Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,  
 But he'll remember with advantages  
 What feats he did that day.  
 This story shall the good man teach his son,  
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,  
 From this day to the ending of the world, 60  
 But we in it shall be rememberèd—  
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
 For he today that sheds his blood with me  
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
 This day shall gentle his condition; 65  
 And gentlemen in England now abed  
 Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,  
 And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
 That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

- Henry V in Act 4 of William Shakespeare's *Henry V*