

LESSON: More Than Words: How Do Speeches Incite Collective Action?

WHAT'S ON AND WHY

In this lesson, students will consider 3 speeches that incite(d) groups to take bold, often violent, action: President Donald Trump's January 6th address, Antony's funeral speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, 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.

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, Mark Antony and Henry V, from Shakespeare (attached below)

WHAT TO DO

1. If you and your students want and need to do so, let students talk about what happened at the US Capitol on January 6th, 2021. Tell the class that they are going to read 3 speeches. Do NOT tell them anything about these speeches, including their common effect of inciting action. Students will discover this for themselves.
2. Ask students to read the first speech 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 poem, 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.)
3. Follow step #2 for Antony's, Trump's, and Henry V's speeches.

4. After doing the choral reading/debrief exercise for each of the 3 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 6th, 2021. 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.
5. Ask students to work in pairs to make a 3-circle Venn Diagram showing the similarities and differences among these 3 speeches. If time permits, let students share their observations and cite textual evidence.
6. The final step of this lesson asks 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 Venn Diagrams as a starting point, have students write a short essay analyzing how these 3 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.

HOW DID IT GO?

Did every student speak the language of these 3 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? If so, it’s all good.

THE THREE SPEECHES

#1

ANTONY

Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up
To such a sudden flood of mutiny.
They that have done this deed are honorable.
What private griefs they have, alas, I know not, 225
That made them do it. They are wise and honorable
And will no doubt with reasons answer you.
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
I tell you that which you yourselves do know,
Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb
mouths,
And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus,
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony 240
Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue
In every wound of Caesar that should move
The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.

ANTONY

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 Hear me with patience.

PLEBEIANS Peace, ho! 260

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 any one you want, but 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. At the request of David Perdue. He 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. Her last week 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, but 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 6th, 2021, on the National Mall in Washington, DC

#3

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. Then shall our names,
Familiar in his mouth as household words,
Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter, 55
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered.
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*