



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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## **Speak up! Presidential Rhetoric in the Modern Era**

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### **Overview**

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"The President is at Liberty, both in law and conscience, to be as big a man as he can." Woodrow Wilson, 1907

This curriculum unit will enable students to understand the importance of Presidential rhetoric in the modern era. Civics, American History or Communication courses may benefit from the activities in this unit. Students will have the opportunity to apply the knowledge gained from rhetorical analysis to American History, the Presidency and the language of the Chief Executive. Activities in the unit may be adapted for eighth grade U.S. History or English Language Learners.

The role of the President will be reviewed, and then rhetorical tools will be applied to Presidential speeches which will offer the opportunity for students to write and speak. The ability of the President to persuade in a democracy will be a key focus in the lesson, giving students a chance to build their analytical skills. Students will examine formal and informal Presidential speeches to ascertain the power of the President in a historical context. To complete this task students will first identify the rhetorical techniques developed by Cicero: invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. Aristotle's framework from his *Art of Rhetoric* will allow for analysis. Finally, Jay Heinrichs' *Thank You for Arguing* revises traditional arguments but adds a modern twist that will interest a younger audience. For Heinrichs, rhetoric is more than the dictionary definition of using speech to persuade; he encourages arguing for argument sake and engaging in social discourse. Students ought to follow the practice of our Founding Fathers, he says, to keep democracy alive. For the purpose of this unit, rhetoric will be defined as speech used to persuade. Speeches from Presidents Kennedy, Carter, Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, Clinton and G.W. Bush will be the foundation from which students will derive a specific rhetorical style for their own speeches.

The goal is to guide students through the writing process while encouraging critical thinking. Through an examination of Presidential language, style and tone, the importance of rhetoric will be stressed. Although rhetoric may appear a dead practice of Aristotle and Cicero, learning basic communication skills is a necessity for high school students. As students become aware of how an argument is constructed they are able to break it apart and make significant counter claims effectively. By deconstructing Presidential speeches students will learn words, style and historical context to evaluate leadership characteristics. Exposure to traditional practices used by modern presidents will allow students to draw conclusions about the impact of rhetoric on

the executive's power to persuade and still maintain a balance in our representative democracy.

As this unit is going to press, there is talk that the current President, Barack Obama, overstepped his bounds in the field of rhetoric. Some have suggested that what he did was so outrageous as to warrant impeachment: He went where no president has gone before — on the television show "The View"! Though my tone is sardonic, the conservative talk-radio circuit truly is mad. Never before has a sitting president joined a daytime talk show to connect so directly with the American people. It is seen by some as beneath the office. This controversy echoes one that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century when President Andrew Johnson tried to gain popular support for his policies by giving spirited speeches to large crowds. Jeffery K. Tulis explains, "President Andrew Johnson's popular rhetoric violated virtually all of the nineteenth-century norms..." <sup>1</sup> People thought Johnson was often drunk since his words and actions were far from the norm. His intent in his "Swing around the Circle" tour was to amass public opinion (not Congress) in support of his legislation, a presidential strategy that is commonplace today but was new and controversial then. <sup>2</sup> The question remains, should the president end or modify his interaction with the public once he stops campaigning and moves to the White House? What is appropriate contact once the president has taken the oath of office? What the current president can or cannot do will be checked by popularity polls and measured, not by the U.S. Constitution but with the next election.

## Rationale

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The purpose of this curriculum unit is to have students learn reasoning through writing. A prerequisite to learn reasoning should be to learn rhetoric, as most people speak before they learn to write. Many writers referenced in this curriculum unit will argue that making a public address is a skill equally important to prolific writing, and both are critical to successful leadership. Students will evaluate speeches of presidents to assess their rhetorical styles and executive leadership ability. This unit will fit into the scope and sequence of the AP US curriculum by modeling a simple practice that may be used with any speech, presidential, muckraker or average citizen. Students should practice reading primary sources from prominent Americans to increase their exposure to documents they may come in contact with throughout the year on various standardized exams. It is also a distinctive way to connect social, cultural and political aspects of American History.

### Standards from the Pittsburgh Public Schools

The president is the voice of America. When the president speaks everyone listens. Why is this the case? Are Americans obliged to listen to the leader of their nation? Do they do more than listen to the words? Is it our civic duty as Americans to follow the Presidential rhetoric and if so to what end? There is a growing curiosity around the office of the President since Obama's inaugural that has inspired the previously distracted student toward media coverage of the White House. This unit will address the nature of Presidential power as reflected in Presidential rhetoric.

Students speak to each other frequently, but can they recognize an argument and do they have the skills to engage others in thoughtful discourse? Using the utterances from the highest office of the land, students will discover what makes an acceptable speech in our representative democracy. This framework will continue throughout the year with various subjects from patriotic strains to expansion of the nation and sectional tensions. Students will learn the art of rhetorical analysis that can be used with national leaders or common

speakers in any era of history. The aim is to teach students how to examine rhetoric, deconstruct the message then mirror the style in their own work. Jay Heinrichs in *Thank You for Arguing* says rhetoric awakens you to the arguments all around you. I say we must learn to control arguments so they do not control us! As teachers not only do we have to teach content but we must also instruct students in methods of delivering arguments. Open your eyes to the possibility of merging history, government and various trends in social studies with rhetoric. The spoken word can entice, excite and elucidate.

Speeches from John F. Kennedy will provide a foundation for the art of rhetoric. JFK is seen by many as the pinnacle in presidential rhetoric because his words were thoughtful, his delivery was impeccable and his ego checked enough to bounce ideas off of the best speechwriters available at the time, Ted Sorensen and Arthur Schlesinger. Michael Kazin calls JFK "the model of how a leader should act." Kazin not only sees JFK as one of the most important presidents full of wit, idealism, and grace but also a leader who can make dreams come alive again. <sup>3</sup> Examining Kennedy's rhetoric will allow students to recognize ancient rhetorical techniques such as chiasmus, which appears in the famous statement, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country," from his first inaugural address. This idea was not new to the presidency as others before JFK had made similar appeals to the American public, but none had Kennedy's polished technique.

Speeches from Presidents Carter (1977-1980) to George W. Bush (2000-2008) will be used for the bulk of the class activities. To sustain the goals of the Pittsburgh Public Schools, literacy tools will be employed throughout the unit. (Penn Literacy) For many teachers of AP US History it is a challenge complete enough material and teach the current decade before the AP US Exam in May. Using six American Presidents, this unit will cover rhetorical styles early in the year and set up a framework for students to use when studying the Founding Fathers and other leaders. Charts included in the Appendix will provide a framework for speech analysis.

## Background Information

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### The Presidency

The role of the President is outlined in Article II of the U.S. Constitution. The Chief Executive has the responsibility to carry out laws, make appointments, command the military, negotiate treaties and govern the land to maintain a Republic. When one takes a close look at the U.S. Constitution, Article II seems intentionally vague, leaving powers open to interpretation by the person in the office. The first five Presidents had to shape the office as the implied powers of the Presidency far outweigh the enumerated duties. They met this challenge by relying on the Revolutionary rhetoric of John Locke, Cicero and Aristotle. <sup>4</sup> Article I: 8 clearly lists powers and duties of the Congress, even major limitations, however the description is not the same for the executive in Article II. The first Presidents had to establish a Cabinet, acquire land, make Native American treaties, use diplomacy to avoid war, and maintain domestic tranquility.

The early Presidents performed their duties with very little public discourse; they only had to sway Congress to support their agenda or exercise the veto and claim executive privilege. Power came more from the executive office than from individual personalities. It is stated in the U.S. Constitution that the President must address Congress once a year, however, the supreme law of the land lists nothing about making a state of the union speech to the people. One might consider if the early Republic was less of a representative democracy or

more of an oligarchy due to the exclusive nature of its inception. It was truly amazing that the United States survived the first years with the outstanding leadership of George Washington then his Vice President, John Adams and even the stressful transition to Thomas Jefferson of the opposition party. These Presidential trailblazers rarely addressed the public except in very formal occasions such as their inaugurations. Speaking or interacting with the common people was seen as beneath the office of the President, and even harmful to his future ability to persuade. <sup>5</sup>

The foundational Presidents feared a strong central authority since the colonies had recently spilt from the king of England. It was these men who wielded power broadly. George Washington set the tone of the office. He made strong executive decisions and left after two terms setting a remarkable precedent that would distinguish the office from any other in the world at the time. The struggle to maintain a balance of power is evident with Thomas Jefferson's decision to buy the Louisiana territory and reverse his strict constructionist view of the Constitution with a loose stance he gave himself. Having been schooled in the art of rhetoric, the first Presidents practiced societal norms in eighteenth century America. As the times and technology changed, Presidents became less concerned with pomp and more aware of the people. Many scholars believe this shift occurred with Andrew Jackson as he expanded upon Thomas Jefferson's notion of 'democracy for all,' it is assumed that he built a great following by addressing the citizens directly. History shows Jackson was a great orator but not with large crowds; he mastered skills one on one with simple statements to insure he was the boss. When Jackson addressed the people regarding the process of nullification he did so in a formal proclamation. <sup>6</sup> Who can forget Jackson's argument with Biddle over the Bank of the U.S. charter or his defense of Peggy Eaton? Jackson made some dynamic statements and took risks that led his opponents to create the Whig party; the anti-Jackson platform. It was not until Theodore Roosevelt broke from the Republican party to campaign as a Bull Moose that Americans viewed their President engaging in truly popular campaigning while in office. (His 90 minute speech stopped a bullet yet he continued to talk before seeking medical help as he was intent on addressing the public.) Taft and Wilson may have been more accepted in the public arena as they were in office during the Progressive Era. Harding was the first president to have an official speech writer who was known as a "literary clerk". He handled all media to mask Harding's poor writing skills. Harding's election was the first event announced over the radio to a few thousand receivers in Pittsburgh. Four years later there would be six hundred stations competing to broadcast all aspects of the election. <sup>7</sup> President Eisenhower was the first to use television as a campaign tool but he still kept his distance from the people. Kennedy is remembered for 'looking better than Nixon' in the 1960 televised debates and yet Nixon has successfully used this new media to present his 'Checkers' speech several years earlier. As radio, television and the internet presented new challenges for the White House, the number of staff grew and responded with appropriate rhetoric for the American public.

## **Rhetoric**

The Yale National Initiative Seminar *Persuasion in Democratic Politics* began with an analysis of Abraham Lincoln's dynamic oratory and then covered techniques of Aristotle, Cicero and Gorgias to show how rhetoric became ingrained in democratic society. Although times have changed, lessons from ancient leaders can be carried into today. Free speech is a critical aspect of a democratic society. The speaker with the best persuasive techniques wins the most power. This is true of ancient Rome or America today. With close inspection, Aristotle's rhetorical techniques can be found in modern speeches. In my research, vast resources on the craft of rhetoric were difficult to locate. Books on public speaking or winning over a crowd were often classified in 'Self-Help' rather than English or Communications. Few lessons for High School students cover the art of rhetoric as persuasive communication, but rather leave it to English Literature. Adolescents can clearly benefit from tools on how to speak or argue well, yet these skills are not a part of most Secondary curricula.

Bryan Garsten, Yale National Initiative seminar leader, revived the classical approach to the art of rhetoric in his book, *Saving Persuasion*. Persuasion is a necessary aspect of a democratic citizen's education, he argues, as deliberation leads to a healthy political life. If politicians have the skill to resolve conflict with words instead of weapons they may prevent war. Garsten states, "Persuasion is worthwhile because it requires us to pay attention to our fellow citizens and to display a certain respect for their points of view..."<sup>8</sup> This very point is something most educators have been trying to achieve for the past decade, to get students to be responsible for their learning while working in a group. This idea can be seen in state standards for education that list 'cooperation' and 'respect for others' but also goes to the heart of our democratic system. How can we have a system with political participation from the citizens if they are not able to communicate with each other or the elected leaders?

Philosophers like Plato have mastered skills well beyond those needed to produce a logical argument, what they called the dialectic. Aristotle saw rhetoric as the companion to the dialectic. He thought a great deal of pandering was a natural consequence of rhetoric but the greater good would win out. Aristotle was a proponent of rhetoric to seek out the truth with speech and reason to get the average person to see the truth the speaker must be skilled. (Book1, Ch1, 1355a) He spoke of three kinds of speeches: those about the past, those about the present, and those about and future. Aristotle made this distinction to ascertain the type of speech needed to win over a particular audience. He referred to speaking about the past in a judicial or forensic fashion to show blame or praise. The epideictic, or present, sort of speech should be used in a ceremonial fashion to unite a group or single out the enemy. Deliberative speech about the future may be the most effective form of persuasion. Switching to the future tense in an argument allows for the question "what is the next advantageous step?" This opens the debate up for suggestion and may shift the tone from blame to cooperation.

Cicero (106BC to 43CE) was a lawyer, orator and politician in ancient Rome. He set the five canons for rhetoric; invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. Invention, as the first step, compels the speaker to consider all persuasive techniques before taking the stage or stepping up to the podium. Arrangement is the organization which includes establishing credibility, choosing strategies, presenting arguments and creating desired emotions. The style is the level of vocabulary and figures of speech suitable to the audience. Presenting a clear argument can greatly enhance the speaker's credibility. Memory and delivery of a speech may not be apparent to the listener but they can certainly detract from the overall presentation if these steps are not mastered.

Aristotle recommends going through the three proofs of ethos, pathos, logos before moving out of the invention phase. With every speech there is a presenter, an audience, and some form of text. The ethos of the speaker allows the audience to trust the words that are presented as they are coming from a practical person with sound judgment. A good ethos can be conveyed with knowledge and common sense. Showing concern for others above selfish interest may give the audience the quickest route to gain the trust of the speaker. Without gaining the trust of the audience, it is difficult for any speaker to move on with information or persuasion. Logos requires a speaker to consider what they want from the audience and set appropriate goals. Deciding what emotion to elicit in the audience, pathos, is the last part of invention. Using anger to move people to act has is a common technique used by Aristotle and current talk-radio hosts since they figured out how to tap into beliefs that cause people to get enraged and want to change their current situation.

Arrangement is a critical phase of speech writing. The order of the presentation may be lost if credibility is not established before arguments are presented. The style may also enhance credibility if a speaker presents their intelligence with proper decorum. The speaker should know their audience and use appropriate dress,

language and tone to convey their message. Memorizing the text of the speech gives the speaker a sense of familiarity and may seem 'off the cuff' if that is the deliverer's intent. By practicing delivery, a speaker may work on hand motions and eye contact to enhance nonverbal communication. Sometimes what a speaker does not say is as important as how they convey their message.

Ultimately, any speaker must look to their audience, assess the needs of the listeners, and balance what they want to say with what the audience needs to hear to be persuaded.

## **Presidential Rhetoric**

The President's effectiveness as a public communicator is one of the key qualities that bears on presidential performance. Fred Greenstein puts oratory at the top of his list followed by organizational capacity, political skill, vision, cognitive style and emotional intelligence. <sup>9</sup> Theodore Windt describes Presidential rhetoric as "a study of how Presidents gain, maintain or lose support of the public" <sup>10</sup> Much of the study of presidential rhetoric comes from the work of Harold F. Harding, though the field is still young. Windt talks of presidential power coming from three areas; the Constitution, the role of party leader and amassing public support. The President of the United States has a unique rhetorical power and with this influence comes responsibility as he must maintain a strong image to make use of other powers yet balance the Republic.

### *John F. Kennedy*

John Fitzgerald Kennedy is perhaps the most popular United States President, one who may be better known for his death than his public service, but one who left a legacy of hope with the American people. He transformed the White House into Camelot with his charming wife and two young children at the heart of the Cold War. Kennedy lived a comfortable life in Massachusetts, was educated at the top schools in the nation and served valiantly in World War II. He learned rhetoric at an early age, remembered the importance of history and used his experiences to shape his character. He worked his way up through the Democratic Party from a member of the House of Representative in 1946, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts in 1952 and Presidential candidate in 1960, at the young age of forty-three. Kennedy published his undergraduate thesis on Appeasement in Europe under the title *While England Slept* then *Profiles in Courage* sixteen years later. There is some speculation whether he had help with his publications since they transformed his political career, but he did not have a paid speechwriter on staff until after 1952 when Ted Sorensen joined his staff. It seems that JFK was concerned with his image enough to hire people to do research for his speeches but he always has the final edit. He knew enough about the history of democracy to understand the importance of rhetoric in a Republic. Kennedy used the developing media of television to squeak by Nixon in the 1960 election with 49.9% of the vote. Most television viewers of the debates pegged Kennedy as the winner while many radio listeners of the same debates thought Nixon had won. "Kennedy's speechmaking helped him transform his razor-thin election victory into the highest average public support for any twentieth-century modern chief executive." <sup>11</sup> Kennedy seemed born for public life, with eloquence, wit and style. The John F. Kennedy Library has drafts of speeches showing his notations and evidence that he practiced not only the language by the poise and delivery. He sought advice for his inaugural address from politicians, economists and family a month before the scheduled event. Kennedy was worried that he may have used some of his best lines in his farewell to the Massachusetts legislature on January 9, 1961 as that speech was filled with Sorensen's ideas. <sup>12</sup> The vitality and political shrewdness with which Kennedy set up the campaign allowed him to lay out a powerful ethical appeal for his New Frontier.

Kennedy begins his inaugural address, January 20, 1961 with a comment on the party change, from eight



years of a Republican President to a Democrat, a look back to "our forebears" and reverence to the "hand of God." This **antithesis** style is common for Kennedy as he likes to pair opposites, "friend and foe alike". The vision that he built through years of public service showed his lack of selfish interest, so he swiftly gained the trust of the audience. His **ethos** continues to grow throughout the speech not only with his words, but also placement and tone, making Kennedy's inaugural one of the few to make the best speech category. Waldman shows three versions of the address in *My Fellow Americans* thanks to Kennedy's writer, Ted Sorensen. The final text is refined to use a few words as possible with a tone of cooperation and strong emotion. The choice of words and the placement reflect Kennedy's skill. He raises his voice for emphasis. "We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom" went through a religious then political evolution. By evoking a "celebration" he relates change to renewal of past traditions and the idea of natural rights from God not the political entity. This **enthymeme**, a common belief that all school children would have learned in the U.S., allows Kennedy to remind the audience "the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe." Kennedy uses **forensic rhetoric** to honor the "heirs of the revolution" then lets its presence be known to the world. His timing, or what ancient Greeks called **kairos**, is Lincolnian. Kennedy's vision of hitting the intended target early in the speech when he said, "the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans," beckoning younger Americans to listen and perhaps act on his words. He persuades on his own terms by defining Americans as "born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined...proud...unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed." He gains the high ground and takes a solid stance in favor of human rights so he can move from pathos to logos. Kennedy uses **anaphora**, or repetition, with the word "let" so he can control the argument, remove himself and keep the audience hanging on the words to follow. He kept his words simple and the speech short not only for the audience standing in the snow but also because of the tradition associated with the speech.

He drives his message home to all Americans at the end with "ask not what your country can do for you- ask what you can do for your country." Kennedy used **chiasmus** so effectively that thousands of Americans joined the Peace Corps to fulfill JFK's vision.

Kennedy had a forte for public communication and the charm to hide much of his private excess. "A less publicly persuasive chief executive would have been unable to maintain public support in the face of such setbacks as the Bay of Pigs and the Berlin Wall." <sup>13</sup>

### *Jimmy Carter*

Jimmy Carter, the first peanut farmer to become Chief Executive, the second President from the Southeast and the third After serving in the Georgia State senate in 1966, Carter was steered towards the U.S. House of Representatives but chose to run for governor and lost the election. Six years later he would make a successful run for governor of Georgia that would lead him to be the nominee for Democratic Party in their time of need. Ford gave Carter a competitive run during the 1976 election but his pardon of Nixon was not enough for Americans to believe that Ford would be a good president on this merit. Ford's promise, "the long national nightmare is over" was an effective speech though he was reluctant to present the key lines. Ultimately, Ford was unable to get the American people to trust a Republican president in 1976; Watergate and Vietnam were too recent.

The American electorate valued Carter's honesty and his promise to restore faith in moral leaders. He led people to believe he would address their problems by purging the sins of Vietnam and Watergate from the American conscious. He used the fact that he was a 'Beltway outsider' to get elected then criticized the active

members of Congress, some from his own party. Carter had excellent pre-election **decorum**; he met the expectations of his audience with his good character. His **ethos** was impeccable as he acted in a way that was widely accepted in the bicentennial year. His southern Baptist religion was reflected in his politics but he was unable to make much of an impact on the American system since he was hesitant to take action. He was an apt campaigner with a conservative suit and a big smile. He liked baseball and apple pie. Carter was trustworthy on many levels. He was a veteran of the U.S. Navy, a Southerner raised with African-American friends, and a self-proclaimed Christian. Carter used **aporia** to get the inside of the heads of his audience during the campaign. Cicero believed a speaker should try to get their audience to be attentive, trusting and willing to be persuaded. Carter was able to get a Watergate-weary crowd to listen. His wife and daughter walked more than a mile to the White House to act as common folk during the inaugural. Carter portrayed himself as a common man, perhaps too much. His ideas were set well before the campaign for president. "America did not create human rights, human rights created America," he said, but his soft voice and low pitch could not carry the message. Americans were more receptive to Carter the candidate than to Carter the president.

Carter's *Address to the Nation on the Energy Policy* on July 15, 1979, is seen as his best public speech. He had put off the speech to work on the **invention** stage as he felt he needed to meet with Americans face to face to get a feel for their needs. Carter was warned of a great loss of faith in the nation's institutions and he wanted Americans to trust themselves first then the government. His concern for others can be clearly seen in the way he listened to Americans from all backgrounds but his credibility could have been stronger with more emphasis on key words and gestures. It seems that he was afraid to act strong in the wake of Watergate, so conversely he embodied the 'strong, silent type'. By saying, "our people are losing faith, not only in government...but the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate rulers and shapers of our democracy" he may have attempted to heal previous wounds but he distanced those who were serving his political party. He seems to fade out with "paralysis" and "stagnation" in the middle of the speech but he quickly reverts to a metaphor of choosing the correct path. Carter sets his energy goals before the American viewing audience then professes his Presidential authority to use quotas as a way to enforce his targets. When he offers solutions to the energy crisis he has yet to build a solid argument. In the final segment, he evokes patriotism. Although his speech focuses on energy resources, Carter reminds his listener of the greatest resources — "America's people, America's values and America's confidence" — to evoke the emotion of pride and build unity. Carter's religious background afforded him the confidence to speak loud and clear. He was a believer in 'practicing what you preach'. The speech was a success in raising Carter's. Exercising poor timing, Carter asked most of his cabinet members to resign within a few days of delivering what the press called the 'malaise speech.' His **kairos**, timing and delivery, was off. The public lost faith in Carter from his actions not solely his words.

Jimmy Carter is the only President to win a Nobel Peace Prize after leaving the office. This award reflects his commitment to human rights by advancing peaceful solutions to international conflicts. He accomplished more after leaving the presidency than any other president, but he was unable to fulfill his vision from within the White House. Carter failed to stay on good terms with Democratic Party congressional leaders. He was criticized for not working with his party yet his legacy is one of social justice. After the capture of Americans on Iran on November 4, 1979 Carter played into the hands of the terrorists by calling it a 'crisis' and the media ran stories on his inability to solve his own 'crisis'. The hostages were freed the day after Ronald Reagan took office, some say to spite Carter.

*Ronald Reagan*



Known as the Great Communicator, Reagan gained much of his oratory skills from his years as an actor and spokesperson for General Electric. He was a long-time Democrat who switched to the Republican Party in the early sixties. His exciting speech in praise of Barry Goldwater for president in 1964 included humor like "we pay twice as much for welfare than Harvard, I am not saying Harvard is the answer to our problems." While governor of California, (1967-74) Reagan was ridiculed for not supporting SDS and earned a shout-out during Woodstock. He responded with humor when a reporter asked if he would make a bloodbath of protestors, Reagan calmly replied, "No I do not advocate violence, though some of these hippies could use a bath."

The Republican Party slotted Reagan for the Presidency in 1980 because he was an electable nominee who had been loyal to the party for over twenty years. It was his turn. His promise to "make America great again" with George H.W. Bush as his Vice President made the voters forget the 'imperial presidency' of the past Republican. Reagan is seen by many today as the father of the conservative movement calling for decreased government, and increased individual freedoms. In his inaugural address January 20, 1981, he thanks President Carter then quickly shifts to "the business of our nation goes forward" and tears apart previous fiscal policies. He is smart to talk in the present tense and look ahead. He uses proper decorum to fit the audience's expectation of a trustworthy leader. Although he mentions past economic problems he offers a prompt solution: "we must act today in order to preserve tomorrow." He reminds his audience that they, "Americans, have the capacity...to preserve...the last bastion of freedom." He uses several tricks when he boldly announces, "...government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." He calmly takes control of the White House. This **prolepsis** anticipates the audience's objection to another concentration of power in the executive like Nixon, and redefines government as 'hands off' using **synchrisis** to reframe the argument. His stance and timing cause the audience to clap then remain attentive.

Reagan reminds Americans that they must be capable of governing themselves to build unity, then answers his own question with "all must bear the burden." This **hypophora** technique allows Reagan to anticipate the audience's objection and stop it. He prefaces his intentions of a government restructure with "so there will be no misunderstanding, it is not my intention to do away with government" which really make no sense as he is the government, at least one branch. Unity is achieved again when he evokes Cold War images against the "enemies of freedom" he can remind Americans how great they are.

Reagan's language of individualism is stark when he announces, "we are a nation that has a government - not the other way around" a **paradox** that reverses previous attitudes of federalism. Since he formed a solid ethos by this point in the speech, Reagan's **logos**, or logical argument, can overemphasize state's rights without too much angst. Reagan uses the narrative of a World War One veteran, Martin Trepteau, to show how one individual persevered. Breaking into this man's story switches the emotion and allows Reagan to downplay the current troubles in comparison, a good **pathos**. He ends his tale of greatness with a forward looking notion that Americans can believe and achieve.

Reagan exhibits skillful rhetoric in what Aristotle calls **phronesis**, or street savy, on June 12, 1987. With a short speech at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin, East Germany, he reminds the crowd of Kennedy's talk then speaks of freedom. Instead of droning on about the lack of liberty in the East he simply said, "Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" The Berlin Wall was down two years later and The Soviet Union dissolved its grip on Eastern Europe by 1991. It is thought by many that Reagan set these historic actions in play with five key words.

On January 28, 1986 the Challenger space shuttle exploded on live television. Since there was a teacher on board many children were watching the launch in school. President Reagan postponed his planned State of

the Union Address to give a ceremonial talk that he saw as the role of the chief executive. He delivered a traditional eulogy giving assurances that the space program will continue. Reagan's aid, Peggy Noonan had only a few hours to draft the speech so she used emotion and reverence in classical form. She kept the words simple and the tone somber. Reagan appeared deeply hurt but able to carry on with his duties. He read the names of the seven "pioneers" to honor them as heroes. He makes a point to address the kids who may be watching. "It's all part of the process of discovery," he said, "The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave."

What is interesting in this classic eulogy is the overt mention of Cold War politics with, "we don't hide our space program...that's the way freedom is." He makes it seem like NASA stands for freedom while also implying that Americans are great. The Challenger seven were likened to Sir Francis Drake, dedicated to the frontier. Reagan had a keen ability to quote from others, even his movie characters, and make the words seem original to him. The final line of the Challenger ode comes from a poem "High Flight" by John Magee. This is a commonplace reference to something well known by Reagan's generation to honor the dead. "We will never forget them...as they prepared...waved goodbye...and 'slipped surly bonds of earth' to 'touch the face of God'" This speech eased school-age students like myself and made us respect the president for rising to the task and doing something very presidential. His style, memorization and delivery calmed the nation. Reagan seemed to know just what to say for every unique occasion, his staff clearly worked on *kairos*- seizing the moment.

### *George Herbert Walker Bush*

The Presidency of George H.W. Bush was shaped by his own ambition. He put off college to become the youngest aviator for the U.S. Navy during WWII then graduated Yale in only two years. A millionaire by the age of 40, Bush clearly had an interest in political service but could not get a high-level position. He seemed to take whatever his Republican superiors would offer; chair of RNC, CIA director and Vice President. In all positions Bush was incredibly loyal but lacked his own clear ideology. Jay Heinrichs thinks George H.W. Bush worked his way into the White House by writing thoughtful personal notes over the years; he boosted his **ethos** and **kairos** to build the perfect **decorum**.<sup>14</sup>

As Vice President under Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush gained vital executive experience over eight years. Bush was able to avoid any potential blame for the Iran-Contra Scandal since Reagan made a speech and took "full responsibility" for the actions of his subordinates. The media had been hard on Vice President Bush calling him a "preppy" and a "wimp." He was clumsy with words and impatient with Congress. Bush turned to one of Reagan's best writers, Peggy Noonan to change the code and frame the debate in terms for his favor. Bush's campaign acceptance speech in New Orleans on August 18, 1988 boosted his image in the polls and set the Republicans up for a win in November. His choice of words and mastered delivery changed the course of history; Reagan's endorsement also helped. Bush admitted copying Nixon's style, an uplifting vision but tough on enemies. He was a president with war training at the end of the Cold War.

George H.W. Bush was not a refined public speaker so he rode Reagan's coattails with a "kinder, gentler" approach. Both candidates in 1988 had political experience, elite educations and high-society connections. Bush had to make his views known to win over core Republican voters so he professed his beliefs on the individual and family in a rather lengthy speech. Meanwhile the party ran ads showing his opponent, Michael Dukakis, soft on crime. The speech set up a sharp contrast between the way Bush wanted voters to see him and the way he wanted them to see his opponent. (Campaign workers call this a *message grid*)<sup>15</sup>

Bush used a rhetorical device of asking then answering his own question, "When will this campaign begin...tonight is the night." He reminds the audience that he was a loyal servant of the Republican Party under Reagan and gains the high ground. His persuasion was not masked as he made his **stance** known early, "I am the Republican candidate for president of the United States." He continued with "just the facts" and tried to make his opponent's claims seem less important or irrelevant. <sup>16</sup> Bush calls his opponent's vision one of "long slow decline" while his belief is "America is a rising nation." He presents his argument in a logical way that cannot be denied, "I seek the presidency to build a better America" and he touts his party's proven track record. He turns his opponent's claim that the election is about competence into a sham by redefining competence as a "narrow ideal." Bush poses questions to the audience with the idea of change, "but will it be change that moves us forward? or change that risks retreat?" He even adds a bit of Reagan style humor, when you "change horses midstream, doesn't it make sense to switch to the one who's going the same way?" Obviously, he does not want the audience to think he is a horse, but uses this analogy to stress his conservative beliefs honed under Reagan. At the core of Bush's philosophy is the statement "I want a kindler, gentler nation" for families. Another of his core beliefs he spelled out several times in a fake story, "my opponent won't rule out raising taxes, but I will." He continues the narrative then interrupts himself with a loud proclamation "read my lips, no new taxes." This works for George H.W. Bush the candidate but as president he did eventually raise taxes. The speech ends with Bush's promise to "keep America moving forward" with a phrase left dangling "a thousand points of light." This becomes a key point of mockery on late night television.

### *William J. Clinton*

Bill Clinton drastically changed American politics in his eight years as president despite his share of arguments and failures. He was elected shortly after the break up of the USSR. America had had success in pushing Iraq out of Kuwait and the nation was feeling strong. He was one of the most intelligent presidents but the second to be impeached by the House of Representatives. Many biographers have called Bill Clinton an enigma with several layers yet to peel back. His public appearances give him a celebrity status while his writing continues to be criticized. He had a unique ability to shift from a poor boy from Hope, Arkansas to an Ivy-leaguer; from a passionate advocate for individual responsibility to a poster boy for self-indulgence; from a dedicated opponent of international terror to a man asleep at the switch. He became a chameleon, Dick Morris said, *because he could*, in a book by the same name.

Clinton's family and friends expected him to run for president in 1988 as they knew he had great potential, but he held out until 1992. He supported Michael Dukakis in 1988 at a time when the Democratic Party could have used some "Clinton charm" in the campaign to gain a strong hold of the White House. Al Gore, who would become Clinton's vice president, lost several primaries to Dukakis, then Dukakis lost the election to George H.W. Bush. The Democratic Party was entrenched in the Congress but only won one of six presidencies since Lyndon Johnson in 1968. Growing up poor, he learned to be a natural conciliator. Clinton's ability to persuade got him Al Gore on the ticket even though it was seen as a political faux pas to have both candidates from the same region. They ended up working together well, as each one made the other a better politician. Clinton's education at Georgetown, Oxford and Yale Law gave him knowledge, not an air of betterment. He would frequent popular barbecue restaurants or fast food places during the election for the networking prospects and mingle with common folk.

Bill Clinton was seen by many Americans as a competent public speaker not only in the campaign but also with difficult topics. His speech to the Church of God visitors in Memphis, Tennessee on November 13, 1993 is seen as prime example of Clinton's stellar ability to speak with a crowd using only minimal notes. He started by showing respect for the place and the people in attendance then thanked them for their support. A mention

of faith preceded his talk of economic progress, then he hits the emotion. In this mainly improvised talk to religious leaders, Clinton channeled the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, jr. to say "you have done a very good job" with political and economic equality. "But he would say" Clinton pretends Dr. King is listening "I did not live and die to see the American family destroyed...I fought for freedom." The inspiration for this tactic came from a news story that a teenager gunned down a nine-year-old with an automatic weapon and no remorse. Clinton showed a great deal of street smarts and courage when he speaks for Dr. King, " I did not fight for the right of black people to murder other black people with reckless abandon." He tells a similar story he heard from the mayor of Washington, D.C. and one from Florida. Clinton deals with the reality in a way that captures the emotion but also offers hope as he rallies support for the Brady bill. He concluded with a story of a time when families and communities worked together in Anacostia then he says "we have to make our people whole again." Clinton remembered where he was in his last lines and quotes scripture. He asks for help as he sees the problems greater than what the government can solve alone, all the while using "we" instead of "I". Clinton's concluding tribute to Dr. King and "somehow, by God's grace, we will turn this around," echoes Dr. King. This speech may be the reason Bill Clinton was called "the first Black president" by many in the media.

### *George W. Bush*

The country may have seen "George W" as a clumsy, lucky, spoiled Bush during the election of 2000, but the events of September 11th proved he could act presidential. He stepped up to the plate at a time when the country was scared and confused and he delivered a grand slam.

On Sept 11, 2001 two airplanes struck the World Trade Center in New York City, and one hit the Pentagon Building. When the imminent threat was over, George W. Bush stood on the rubble of the fallen twin towers and said "those who did this will pay!" Few people remember what Bush said at that tense moment, but everyone knows the president was at Ground Zero. He was most likely trained to work on his **kairos**- timing and measure. When he addressed Congress nine days later the dust had not yet settled, but duty called. His "State of the Union" acted like both a eulogy and a call to action. Bush's writers sought balance between anger and revenge, as those were the common feelings of many Americans. The speech begins with the story the American people lived through the past nine days, with no mention of 'crisis'. He recognizes the wife of a heroic passenger on flight 93, acknowledges the relentless rescue workers, and notes the unfurling of flags. He delivers this phrase "My fellow citizens, for the last nine days, the entire world has seen for itself the state of our Union - and it is strong!" to a rousing applause. This event does not need an introduction but Bush makes it dramatic. His pathos shifts to expectation, "our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution," as the words flow in perfect harmony.

With some reassurance to other nations that our response would be measured, Bush clearly calls the attack an act of war. He frames America's enemy as a "fringe form of Islamic extremism," careful not to say just Islam. Bush, who never experience war himself, declared "war on terror" as an act fit for the Commander in Chief. In his logical delivery, he listed the role of Taliban and likened them to Nazis, fascists, totalitarian dictators, all hated by freedom-loving people. Bush **went to the edge** with his belief, "freedom itself is under attack" yet the American people were holding similar ideas. Bush's security strategy was simple "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists." This Bush Doctrine was well received at the time, when emotions were high but he soon lost support. Flipping between normal conversation and eloquent words addressing the nation in a presidential stance. Only at the end did he speak in personal terms, he vowed "I will not yield. I will not rest. I will not relent. Speaking in a rhythm like Winston Churchill, and holding a badge of a dead NYPD officer. Bush was met with approval from Supreme Court justices, applause and hugs from Democrats after the speech. There was no central prolific line like FDR's "day of infamy" however the act itself showed great

statesmanship. The public supported Bush in his quest for justice.

## Objectives

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The main objective is to give students the tools to read critically, draw conclusions, and to incorporate their reasoning into an original speech. This goal correlates with the Pittsburgh Public School Social Studies standards; students read a variety of texts, analyze writing then take a position and defend their argument. Students will identify rhetorical practices of Cicero, Aristotle and other classical orators who gave inspiration to modern speechwriters and Presidents. Analysis of the thought process involved in speechwriting will yield trends in speech writing to satisfy political needs. Once students analyze the speeches of several Presidents they will have a better understanding of the steps necessary to write an effective persuasive speech. Students will have the option to become a speechwriter for their favorite President. They will have to decide if there is a critical issue, state of the nation or a message to Congress.

## Strategies / Activities

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The Pittsburgh Public Schools uses an inquiry approach for many Social Studies courses. Students are encouraged to discover material on their own, and share their findings with a group. This collaboration yields questions for further investigation while encouraging the learner to be responsible for their education. Students may need to practice the procedure of reading a document, recording key aspects and drawing conclusions before they get comfortable with this approach.

It is important to have students break down the elements of speech in order to understand the president's argument, clarify or refute the argument presented and create their own rebuttal. Upon completion of this unit students will be able to write a Free Response Essay dealing with presidential rhetoric and the power of the executive. The Free response or FRQ is two of three essays students taking the AP US History exam will have to master. Students will need to use only their knowledge of the presidents and rhetorical styles to write a concise essay that addresses the complex nature of the prompt. Their response should include analysis of the words and style of each president along with their use of rhetoric to sway public opinion for their initiatives. Grades should not depend on length or language style but mainly on the content each student uses to answer the question. Appendix 2 is a student handout for the essay. In the past I have given a hint to the topic or directed students to review their notes from the in class document analysis, Appendix 1.

Teachers may want to start with a basic review of the executive branch so they are able to assess what their students know about the role of the president. By this assessment, teachers are able to model lessons to fit the class. The content listed earlier in the unit may be useful. Ranking the presidents on their speech techniques may allow students a chance to learn what makes a good persuasive speech while they assessing presidential leadership. My students often rank presidential greatness using the CNN poll, Schlesinger's ratings and other sources to create their own rubric. The level of skill necessary to make judgments will fall well beyond a basic skill set. Ranking presidents will challenge students to remember rhetorical techniques they can use to convince others of their preference, while sharing general knowledge. Depending on the time



available, allowing students to argue their favorite president will encourage them to 'stay on task.'

As an introduction to presidential rhetoric, JFK's inaugural address is a great way to get students interested in words, delivery and leadership style. It is available from many sources, including the Kennedy Library, in audio and video format. Depending on the students' interests teachers may want to look at drafts of speeches to discuss various changes. Students can consider Kennedy's credibility or *ethos*, his emotional appeals, *pathos*, and the claims he makes, *logos*. Posing questions to the class may spur a creative talk. Kennedy followed a war-hero President, Eisenhower. Did the political shift or the nature of the times make him nervous? Is Kennedy's inaugural more emotional than ones from recent memory? How does he present his arguments? Does he connect past, present and future? Do you think he spent much time arranging sentences and key phrases? Is the choice of vocabulary above a ninth grade level? (JFK learned from Lincoln to use one syllable words and few). Was he speaking to the audience present in D.C. or the greater televised audience? How does the speech make you feel?

Listening to the President's voice will enhance the students' understanding of timing, pauses, tone and other elements. Students may want to look over the print version and take notes while the audio plays. Teachers can revert back to the rationale section for content information pertaining to each President to give background information. Students can edit speeches by adding material or taking words away as a speechwriter or the President would to meet their intended goal of persuasion.

Students should read the speech from a hardcopy on their desk with a notes or a guide on rhetoric conventions(see Jay Heinrich's book). Instead of giving a short lecture to fill in the history, teachers may want to link sources to create a visual presentation with speeches and events from the era. By using technology, teachers can integrate an audio version of the speech with text or images explaining the history behind the speech. Depending on the reading level of the class and the length of the speech, students may need to read the document for homework. They can also research the time period associated with the speech for general information. Sometimes it is refreshing to have students look at a document for the first time in class and get their initial reaction then have them read critically for the next class and gather more historical background independently. Give students questions: What do you see/hear in the speech that evokes power? leadership?

If a Smart Board is available, students will be able to master technology in the classroom. For this device, a computer and LCD projector with the proper cables will also be necessary. I recommend checking that the proper software is installed and all equipment functions properly. Download speeches to the computer that will be connected to the Smart Board. Use the software to open the speech and enlarge the text to a size viewable by the class. Have students work in groups to find rhetorical tools. Each group can be responsible for a section of the speech or they can all use the entire speech. To avoid the problem of someone taking 'their idea' encourage all students to seek out as many cool words and rhetorical tools as they can. The prize for the group with the most findings can be last place in the exercise, then they will be the most remembered! They may also win a small token like an extra sticker or ink stamp. Since the Smart Board only has three colors and there may be five groups, encourage each group to pick a symbol. One member from each group should step up to the board and mark a word or section. Don't spend too much time getting volunteers, just tell them all kids will have a chance to work with the technology. Their group can give them direction, but only their group. Other groups (not just individuals) will lose points or a turn if they are disruptive by yelling or acting out of order. Once one representative from each group has made a discovery, the group members who did not go to the board can give their justification. These procedures may be practiced with each speech. Ask the groups several questions; Why did they pick the lines or words from the speech? What do they think the speaker used to get the attention of the audience? Students may discuss which section of the speech is more significant.



Another round of marking the text can ensue. This process can be done on an ELMO by placing a copy of the speech on the device and the students tagging the projected image with sticky notes. The beauty of the Smart Board technology is that the students will have their own group's work at their seat but the computer will have a digital compilation from the entire class that can be saved and emailed to students for future use.

To increase literacy skills, students are encouraged to highlight passages and take notes. Large paper may be used for each group to write their findings and then share with the class. In some ways, this may be more effective for individual student learning. If the papers are left around the room for several days students will feel a sense of accomplishment seeing their work and they may even memorize lines more easily.

Each presidential speech should be considered in its own right before making comparisons, but it may be appropriate to allow students to compare Carter to Reagan, then Reagan to Bush, and so on, consecutively. After students have been exposed to all the speeches, a grand comparison may lead to a ranking of presidents based on their rhetoric and leadership skills.

As a final project, students can act as a speechwriter for their favorite president. A crisis scenario may be created such as a national disaster or a foreign policy dilemma. Each student can utilize the rhetorical tools of the presidents used in this lesson for examples of when to speak, what to say and which words to choose. Showing an example from a popular film (*Dave*, *The American President*) or West Wing episode may give students insight to the process. Students should work individually to prepare their ideal address. The teacher may want to act as the president, edit the speech and send it back to the writer for final consideration. Students should know the personality of the president they chose to model their speech to enhance his strengths. Allowing for several drafts will give the students time to learn the writing process before the oral presentation.

## Speeches

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John F. Kennedy, January 20, 1961 "Ask Not What Your Country Can Do For You"; Inaugural Address

Jimmy Carter, July 15, 1979 "A crisis of Confidence" speech on energy and national goals

Ronald Reagan, January 20, 1981. First Inaugural Address. "Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem"

Ronald Reagan, January 28, 1986 "Slipped the Surly Bonds of Earth" after Challenger explosion

George H.W. Bush August 18, 1988 "A Kinder and Gentler Nation" acceptance speech at Republican Convention

Bill Clinton November 13, 1993 "What Would Martin Luther King Say?" Remarks to the Church of God in Christ, Memphis

Bill Clinton April 23, 1995 "In the Face of Death, Let us Honor Life" Eulogy for the victims of the Oklahoma city bombing.

Bill Clinton January 27, 1998 State of the union - one day after "I did not have sexual relations with that woman" The speech is called "Let that be our gift to the 21st century" Clinton does an excellent job of shifting the American people's focus to saving our treasured American documents and creating a "more perfect union"

George W. Bush September 20, 2001 "Freedom and Fear, Justice and Cruelty Have Always Been at War"; Address to Congress after the Attacks of September 11

George W. Bush March 17, 2003 "The Day of Your Liberation is Near"; Address on Iraq

## Appendix 1:

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Student Handout : *Print in Landscape to better fit more data*

### Presidential Rhetoric Comparison Chart

(Adapted from Neustadt's *Presidential Power* chapter 9, Appraising a President)

President

(list brief biographical details with dates in office)

Words/Speech

(What stands out as interesting, persuasive or dynamic)

Rhetorical Tools

(Ethos, Pathos, Logos)

Leadership style

(Historical relevance, goals, understanding of era, ability to deal with pressure, legacy)

RANK

## Appendix 2:

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Free Response Question

Student Handout

Students will have thirty minutes to complete the following task. Answer the question using knowledge acquired from the previous lesson. The Presidential Rhetoric Chart may be used as a study guide in preparation for this task. Notes or books should not be used during this assessment as the goal is to measure what was learned about presidential rhetoric. High scores will be given for essays that discuss rhetorical styles used by three presidents to strengthen their individual leadership and the presidency. Students will not lose points for grammar though the structure of the essay should allow the reader to follow a clear argument.

**In what ways and to what extent did rhetoric influence the leadership style of the presidency? Discuss specific persuasion techniques that support significant public issues with THREE Presidents.**

**Jimmy Carter Ronald Reagan George H.W. Bush Bill Clinton George W. Bush**

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