



## **Persuasively Speaking: Teaching Persuasive Writing through Great American Speeches**

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Rhetoric is "the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion."

- Aristotle

Although it is believed that actions speak louder than words, it is often that words are what call us to action in the first place. Time and again before tackling a big task or embarking on a great journey, we refer to letters of inspiration or passages of Scripture that touch a deeper part of ourselves resulting in a stronger resolve to do something great or revolutionary. It is the belief in the power of words and the motivation behind them that is the basis for the curriculum unit, *Persuasively Speaking: Teaching Persuasive Writing through Great American Speeches*.

Persuasive writing is a staple of Language Arts classrooms. With the inception of the CMT and the CAPT test, we are not only encouraged but almost required to have some element of persuasive writing within our curriculum. This curriculum unit will be a tool to help students develop their own persuasive voice by listening, reading and analyzing great speeches and writings that can be said to have changed the perspective of America. College professors often tell high school teachers that students come into English 101 lacking some basic skills, one being the ability to take a stance and write persuasively. They often stand in the middle and give the pros and cons of both sides of an issue, never really letting the reader know where *they* stand. The ability to persuade really is natural to young people. How often do teenagers ask parents and teachers for something that elicits a "no" but through carefully thought out arguments, that young person can get the "yes" he or she was looking for. They hold skills to do this in formal writing and may not even be aware of it.

Rhetoric is thought to have begun with the Sophists during the fifth century B.C. and become legendary under Plato, Aristotle and Socrates. By definition from those same philosophers, rhetoric is defined as a "system with the built-in assumption that one first finds knowledge and then puts it into words" <sup>(1)</sup>. This process is clearly something teachers of English employ in their classrooms; we hope that students find knowledge or information and then write about it in their own words. The Aristotelian model has been the greatest influence on rhetoric and sets up standards and procedures for argument development, in the hopes of avoiding fallacies and inaccuracies in either writing or speaking.

## The Curriculum Unit

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**Persuasively Speaking: Teaching Persuasive Writing through Great American Speeches** is born from the idea that knowledge is first to be acquired through the study not only of the mechanics of speech writing and in turn, persuasive writing but also in the study of where the inspiration of those words came from. This sets up a unit that has dual purposes: first exploring the techniques and strategies used in writing speeches or other types of persuasive writing, secondly, using the 1950's and 1960's as a decade to acquire great speeches from. The decade is sandwiched between World War II and the beginnings of the Vietnam War and can be viewed as a catalytic time of change.

The unit will begin with the basics of rhetoric and persuasion. Historically, students will learn about the classic roots of persuasion and how the Greeks utilized it in their early discussions and their early writings. Breaking down the process of creating effective speeches and writing allows students to view this as a process of creating something great as opposed to just another writing assignment. The deliberate act of choosing the right words and the appropriate support for their arguments takes writing to a more personal level.

Analysis of fallacies and illogical thinking seems to be necessary in evaluation of persuasive writing and effective speaking. The need for this analysis is twofold. First, in evaluating what can be deemed effective Can a speech or an argument based on faulty thinking be labeled effective or revolutionary? In knowing the various types of fallacies, students can seek to identify them in the writings of others. Secondly, students can transfer the skills of finding and/or correcting fallacies in their own writing. It is hoped the student will increase his/her amount of research or support for his/her own arguments. Lessons designed to teach this particular area can be as simple as asking a student to create an argument to convince the principal to allow a school dance to a complex argument legalizing drugs for medicinal purposes. Students can peer conference and utilize the information they have to help others create quality arguments and begin writing strong persuasive essays.

The transition from mechanics to content can happen once the students are familiar with the structure and necessary elements of a persuasive piece of writing, whether it is a speech or an essay. Being well versed on what makes persuasion effective will help students read and assess speeches from the 1950's and 1960's. Background information on the time period will set a stage to look at the reasons and the need behind great speeches. Transitioning to the time period will allow us to begin listening to some of the speeches to be featured and talk a little bit about delivery and how that influences the audience. It is also a given that we will discuss audience and how the writer/speaker must keep his/her audience in mind. The speech makers of the 1950's and 1960's knew their audience and how to reach them; this is something that the students will take into account.

When researching speeches by decade, the 1950s and 1960s produce some extremely well known orations by some of the world's greatest leaders. Some of the most well known are Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" and John F. Kennedy's inaugural address. However, there are great speeches that may not have received historical notoriety but still had great impact. For example, in 1950, William Faulkner received the Nobel Prize and delivered a speech saying, "I feel that this award was not made to me as a man, but to my work -- a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before." His words can be used to inspire students to explore their own calling and their own "life's work" <sup>(11)</sup>.

At the end of the unit, students will write their own piece of persuasive writing. Students will explore topics that appeal to them and to their audience (who will be their classmates). Peer conferencing and editing will take place so others will have an opportunity to read what has been written. Delivering speeches is certainly an option and is at the discretion of the teacher.

As a teacher at Hill Regional Career Magnet High School, I designed this unit to utilize as much of the 82 minute block class as possible. Career is a magnet school where students follow either a business/computer track or a health/medical track. The tracks are like a "major" with specific requirements for graduation. The make up of Career High School is that of African American, Latino, Asian, Caucasian and many other ethnicities. Students are from New Haven as well as the suburbs surrounding New Haven.

## Rationale

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The objectives for this unit are:

- Students will write before, during and after reading the provided speeches;
- Students will develop their own definition rubrics and assessments to evaluate their own writing and the writings of others;
- Students will be given opportunities to learn and discover the changing times of the 1950's through a variety of speeches and orations.
- Students will write pieces that express their own voice and their own experiences in life while modeling great works of famous writers and speakers.

While teaching this curriculum unit, lessons should include background information as well as reading and writing activities. Teachers can decide what parts of history are necessary (e.g. whether to focus on the Greek models or Roman). The classic roots of rhetoric lend themselves to creating rubrics based on these traditional models. In looking at the history of rhetoric as well as the benefits and strategies for teaching persuasive writing, teachers can move into using speeches from the 1950's and 1960's to drive home the point *and* teach history and literature.

By definition, rhetoric is a form of expression through speech making, influence and/or oratory. Persuasion, whether it be in writing or orally, is the highest form of rhetoric. Often it is defined by calling the use of rhetoric or the ability to persuade an art and terming it as art makes it much more creative and important.

This unit aligns with the standards and objectives set forth by the City of New Haven as well as the National Council of Teachers of English. The City of New Haven sets forth Five Bold Goals that seek to move students ahead within the next five to seven years. One such Bold Goal has 95% of students meeting state and national literacy standards. Some of the city standards that this unit will address are looking at the process of

constructing meaning through reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and researching. Students will read and write about famous speeches from the 1950's (and some from the early 1960's) and will listen or view those said speeches to gain more insight into their influence during the time period. Furthermore, this unit address standards set out by the National Council of Teachers of English in that it encourages lifelong learning, work and enjoyment of language arts as well as encouraging students to construct meaning and use their language and voice to get their points across.

## History of Rhetoric

Formal rhetoric began in the 5th Century B.C. in ancient Greece. The Greeks utilized and formed the functions of rhetoric and discourse. Although modern teachers may use terms like persuasion and argument, the Greeks were addressing the same issues just using terms like rhetoric and discourse. The idea of rhetoric grew out of the idea that oration was the means by which philosophy was developed and disseminated. Oration was the main medium because written texts were not the norm. In fact, the great works of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle became written text because students and followers wrote them down. In ancient Greece, the belief was that through rhetoric and discussion one could clarify and discover truth <sup>(1)</sup>.

The Sophists were a major group in early Greek rhetoric as were the teachings of Isocrates (486-338). Sophists were a group of orators who traveled from city to city attempting to attract students of public speaking and rhetoric, for a small fee (this small fee often comprised their credibility). Their basic belief was that "excellence" in speaking and living could be taught. Isocrates also taught public speaking but believed the speaker would need some talent and desire in order to be effective. However, he did feel speaking about important questions and themes could make the *speaker* a better person, a truly novel idea at the time. Isocrates established the first formal school in Athens, even before Plato *and* Aristotle <sup>(1)</sup>.

Plato and Aristotle are two names synonymous with rhetoric and thought. Plato's largest rhetorical contribution was distinguishing between true and false rhetoric. More specifically, he criticized the Sophists for essentially telling audiences what they wanted to hear and not making an effort to search for and examine truth. This in turn translated into the Sophists not attempting to better themselves or the audience.

Aristotle made greater strides and established norms and created treatises that are respected and used even today. Aristotle began by challenging that rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic within the first lines of his "The Art of Rhetoric". He basically asserted that when discussing matters of civil law, there is a need for rhetoric instead of dialectic <sup>(1)</sup>.

Aristotle identified three types of rhetorical evidence to effectively get a point across or persuade another. Those types are ethos, pathos and logos. Ethos is where one convinces another by establishing that he/she is fair, honest and informed. This type of evidence values credibility and its necessity in persuading others. Pathos is an argument strengthened by an appeal to another's emotions. Once the speaker taps into someone's emotional bank, the ability to persuade may become easier. Lastly, logos is the use of inductive or deductive reasoning. Concrete data or examples are used to support assertions. Clearly these three rhetorical proofs carry over into modern writing and can be used for students to analyze and evaluate arguments <sup>(1, 3)</sup>

Aristotle also defined three types of civic rhetoric: forensic, deliberative and epideictic. Forensic is used in legal scenarios where there is a prosecution and defense. Deliberative is more often used in political arenas where a speaker may be for or against change. Lastly, epideictic speeches are those made at occasions, such as funerals, conventions and inaugurations <sup>(2)</sup>.

Roman rhetoric also had significant contributions in modern academic circles. Quintilian (35-100 A.D.) established five rhetorical canons of study. The first canon would be *inventio* or invention. Essentially, it is the process of developing ones argument. Next, *dispositio* or arrangement of the argument so it is most effective. The next steps are *elucutio* and *pronuntiatio* or style and presentation respectively. *Memoria* (memory) and *actio* (delivery) play major roles. in the speaker's presentation of the argument. Teachers today can easily create a rubric using this model to evaluate student writing and/or delivery <sup>(1)</sup> .

Current rhetorical study is greatly influenced by research. Whether it be results, statistics or theories, research plays a major role. This is obvious in how much emphasis we put on proof and research based assignments. <sup>(2)</sup>  
<sup>3)</sup>

## Persuasive Writing

Persuasive writing, speech delivery and rhetoric go hand in hand in the classroom. Often the strategies and models set forth by the Greeks can be used by teachers to assess and evaluate students writing. For example, using Quintilian's model of rhetoric, especially the idea of arranging your argument to make it most effective, can be easily utilized in the classroom. With the growing emphasis on persuasive writing as a means of standardized assessment, we short change our students if we do not include a segment of persuasive writing in our curriculum.

What is persuasive writing? In short, like its counterpart rhetoric, it is the presentation of an argument with carefully investigated and accurately stated evidence. The writer should have a clear idea about where he/she stands. The strongest arguments not only support the writer's point of view but also acknowledge there may be other opinions; however, the writer is quick to invalidate those opposing viewpoints. Persuasive writing can be assigned as a written paper but can also transition into writing and speaking assignment. This idea would fall in line with the Greeks' idea of speaking and rhetoric because so many of their ideas were discussed rather than written. Just as there are a great many topics for persuasive writing, there are a variety of models that students can use when writing <sup>(4)</sup> .

One model is reminiscent of the Roman rhetorical model. The writer begins with an introduction that establishes the argument and its importance. Next, the writer states his/her case potentially offering background information that led the writer to this topic in the first place. This is truly an interesting idea because it also encourages the writer to state why he/she chose his/her standpoint. It seems important to find out *why* and it forces students to become somewhat invested in the topic.

Following this two-fold introduction, the writer will develop his/her case using specific, supportive evidence and details as well as anecdotes to really strengthen the argument. After refuting opposing ideas, the writer will finish with a strong conclusion further showing his/her conviction in the topic <sup>(5)</sup> .

Another model is **R.A.F.T.S** from Helena High School in Helena, Montana. This model serves more as a pre-writing evaluative tool in developing a persuasive essay. The acronym stands for:

- **R**ole: Who am I and what is my role as a writer?
- **A**udience: How should I write this and who is my audience?
- **F**ormat: What is the best format for me to use?
- **T**opic: Is my topic completely focused?

- **S** trength: What am I trying to do in this piece of writing?

In using this model, the teacher and student can conference and work together in developing a strong argument. Although basic, it is sometimes the most elementary formats that can help students develop their strongest arguments (5).

Another strong model comes from Winthrop University. It breaks down the persuasive essay into different parts and emphasizes the fact that students should feel free to elaborate where needed and to work toward creating a cohesive essay that brings in the audience. This model outlines what is coined *The Classical Argument* boasting how closely it relates to the Greek rhetorical models. This argument is made up of basic components and essentially elaborates on a student's already learned five paragraph model of writing (7).

The classic argument of persuasive writing begins with an introduction that appeals to the audience by capturing their attention and establishing the writer's point of view. Like expository writing, the introduction should include a thesis statement. Next, is the narrative. In the narrative portion, the writer summarizes background information and provides any other information needed for the reader to understand where and why this issue has come about.

The next step is the confirmation that lays out all the evidence and claims that support the main themes and ideas. Although it is common for teachers to encourage students to present evidence or assertions from strongest to weakest, I am of the opposite school of thought. The reader should never be left with the weakest claim; they should walk away with your strongest idea on the brain.

Next, the refutation and concession where the writer lets the reader know there are opposing viewpoints. Writers should not spend too much time highlighting all the opposing ideas because they may weaken their own argument. Lastly, the writer comes to the summation. In this section, the writer summarizes all the main ideas, amplifies the force of the argument and offers solutions (7).

We would be remiss in not addressing fallacies and illogical thinking when discussing persuasive writing. Logical fallacies are an oxymoron in and of themselves since fallacies are illogical or faulty reasoning. In addition, these illogical conclusions or ways of reaching the conclusions can put holes in a writer or speaker's arguments. In oral debate, the speakers should not only avoid these type of arguments but also seek to invalidate others reasoning by invalidating their arguments. Logic is a huge part of rhetoric thus making logical arguments that much more important. Teachers can easily assess writing using an anti-fallacy rubric or by having students peer edit looking to identify fallacies in others writing.

The following are examples of some of the more common fallacies found in speaking and writing. They are:

- Argumentum antiquitatem: This Latin phrase translates into the idea that something is acceptable or right because it's always been or done a certain way.
- Argumentum ad logicam (argument to logic): This argument assumes something is true because

some *one* has offered proof. However, the argument can be refuted or invalidated because there may be other information out there to disprove it.

- Argumentum ad misericordia (appeal or argument to pity): Appealing or using pity to validate an argument does not use facts in any way and essentially cannot make what is true untrue no matter how sad it is.
- Sweeping Generalization: Essentially any generalization assumes something to be true in any case presented. For example, saying all men are strong. Although it may be true in *some* cases, it is *not* true in all cases.
- Slippery Slope: In a sense it is a weak cause and effect argument that has no strong basis.

As always fallacious argument when someone attacks a person or a specific institution or belief just for the sake of attacking invalidates the argument. Knowing the fallacies can encourage students to research in more places than just one internet source or one book source. Proving their case using multiple experts or research can undoubtedly lead to a strong persuasive essay <sup>(6)</sup>.

Persuasive writing often focuses on controversial or important topics of the time period in which they are written. The writer normally seeks to find an issue that is important in his/her society and in their world; thus allowing those looking back to see what was valued during the time period. This way of thinking was no different in the 1950's and early 1960's. This post war era is filled with speeches and orations that clearly show what was going on during that pivotal time in history.

### **The 1950's: A Time of Change**

The post WWII period was one of change and revolution in society. With the production of the hydrogen bomb to the end of the Korean War to the refusal of Rosa Parks to give up her seat on an Alabama bus, the time period set in motion a myriad of racial, social and political change.

Society during a major war tends to band together to fight the great enemy. After WWII, this society that had once been so joined together separated once again. Women who worked in factories went back to the home. Races that once were against the enemy side by side went back to a segregated existence. Fear of communism and racial tension were on the rise and the times were definitely changing.

The advancement of television broadcasting brought war, racism and consumerism into the American living room. Companies found new ways to reach the public. Images were thrust into American life, both good (with new television sitcoms and news programs) and bad (images of war and racial unrest). Norms and ideals changed as well because what was seen on television became what was normal and desired. This is something today's student can almost not imagine; a life that may have begun without television.

Gender roles were also changing and women were beginning to question their prescribed roles in society and how they could make contributions as more than just wives and mothers <sup>(8)</sup>.

Great Speeches -- Post War America



## Nixon's Checkers Speech, 1952

"..why can't we have prosperity built on peace rather than prosperity built on war"

- Richard Nixon

On September 23, 1952, Senator Richard Nixon delivered his famous Checkers speech. With the inception of broadcast television and its place in the 1950's American home, Senator Nixon landed in living rooms to refute allegations that he used campaign funds for personal use in his bid to become the Vice Presidential candidate.

The speech begins with Nixon immediately stating he is a man "whose honesty and integrity have been compromised" <sup>(9)</sup> . Nixon's intent is to come clean and point out the allegations were not only claiming what he did was illegal but also that those allegations were immoral. Within his speech, he details the need for a political fund to support his campaign. He says "The taxpayers shouldn't be required to finance items which are not official business but which are primarily political business" (Nixon, 1995-2006). He continues to submit proof in the form of a financial audit to prove he had not misappropriated funds.

Toward the end of the speech, he references Checkers, the family dog, and namesake of this oration. He makes clear the dog was a gift that refuses to return and ensures no favors or promises were a result of this gift. Nixon concludes by turning the decision of his innocence over to the American public. He lets them know how much he trusts them and the ability to see the honest man he is.

The Checkers Speech serves as a model for effective persuasion in its use of so many different rhetorical techniques. Nixon clearly knows his audience and appeals to the 1950's value on family and home life. He mentions his wife numerous times and how much faith and trust he has in her. American wives could certainly appreciate this. Nixon clearly mentions the family dog as a ploy to pull at America's heart strings. What full blooded American post WWII could fault a man providing a dog for his family? Nixon also appeals to America's Cold War fears by mentioning how Communism is a far greater problem that the question of \$18,000.

Teachers can use this speech as a model to have students look at ways to convince a reader of their particular point of view. Persuasion is found a multitude of times in this speech and easily serves as an example for students <sup>(9)</sup> .

## **Dwight D. Eisenhower -- "Atoms for Peace"**

"I know that the American people share my deep belief that if a danger exists in the world, it is a danger shared by all..."

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

Early in his presidency, Dwight D. Eisenhower delivered his "Atoms for Peace" speech before the United Nations in 1953. The nuclear arms race was threatening on the horizon and put great fear in the hearts of the nation. The speech mentioned the danger of the nuclear arms race. His speech went through a variety of revisions because initially he felt that his speechwriters were giving too much frightening information to the American people; not what a president wants to leave his nation feeling. The speech was received quite well and he received praise from the press for his delivery and his message.

Eisenhower begins the speech sharing his belief that the greatest threat to peace and safety not only within



the United States but within the world is the creation and stockpiling of nuclear arms. The United States should not be fooled into believing they are the only ones with nuclear arms; our Allies and our enemies (the biggest being the U.S.S.R.) are in on the secret of nuclear weapons. Eisenhower highlights two major points: the first being what was stated above about so many countries having the potential to create nuclear arms and the second being that the potential now exists to destroy the entire world with these weapons.

Eisenhower then goes on to state the United States has never and will never believe in the idea of destroying humanity. He says "it is not the purpose or hope of the United States" to start any kind of war or battle in which all of human kind is destroyed; however, he recognizes that with the kind of weapons being made, the possibility does exist <sup>(10)</sup> .

Toward the end of the speech, he focuses on two major ideas. He first says that we want and should move forward with peace and happiness. Eisenhower even states that he does not want to consider or call Russia an enemy. He also proposes the Atomic Energy Agency. Eisenhower does what all great speakers should do; point out a problem or issue and then offer a solution. The Atomic Energy Agency does just that. He then pledges to go before Congress with a game plan to address the threat of nuclear war.

Nuclear war may not be the foremost political issue in 2006 but the speech can still resonate in the modern classroom. Eisenhower makes statements that clearly show his patriotism and his desire to continue to have America as one of the largest powers in the world. These ideas in a post 9/11 world still hold true.

His speech making and persuasive techniques, like Nixon's speech, serve as models for students to analyze and write. Teachers can assign students to read Eisenhower's speech and have them identify persuasive techniques (appealing to national pride or using statistics and research to support a claim). Teachers can also have students choose a national issue and highlight the problems and create solutions as Eisenhower did with his creation of the Atomic Energy Agency <sup>(10)</sup> .

### *William Faulkner -- Acceptance Speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature, 1950*

In 1950, Stockholm, Sweden was the setting for writer William Faulkner to deliver his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize. It is rumored that he delivered the speech in such a terrible way that it did not become notable until it was read and seen on paper. This speech clearly is a great example of why writing is so important if the delivery is less than stellar.

Faulkner begins his speech by saying that the speech is not for him but for his work. He says "-a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit" (11.). He actually sees the acceptance speech as an opportunity to speak to young men and women about not losing their "souls" and not losing perspective of their lives. At this time, society was so afraid of nuclear war and Communism that writing about emotions and matters of the heart are often pushed to the wayside. Faulkner says, however, that one *must* feel fear since it is the most base of emotions and feeling that fear will ultimately make writers even better.

Faulkner is also very optimistic about the future. He believes whole heartedly that even though the future seems dreary with the prospect of Communism and racial tension, man will prevail because of his spirit. He also reminds writers that they have the privilege and duty to uplift the human spirit and those reminders of the past will help to change the future <sup>(11)</sup> .

Martin Luther King -- "I Have A Dream" John F. Kennedy -- Inaugural Address

I grouped these two speeches together for two reasons; the themes are quite similar and they are two of the most well known speeches in all of history. Although given during the 1960's, it seems remiss to not include them in a unit about persuasive writing and rhetoric. These speeches can be used either in chronological order or simply as a method to introduce some of the more mechanical elements of persuasive writing.

Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. on August 28, 1963. In the midst of racial tension and political unrest, King urges the nation to lift itself up from the ruins of racism and segregation to come together and form one great nation, as our forefathers intended. He has a "dream" that his sons and daughters will be able to live and work among their white counterparts. He challenges the nation to look at what it was founded on and once again, urges people to honor what was intended for the United States of America.

John F. Kennedy could never have known when he delivered his inaugural address on Friday, January 20, 1961 how famous and influential his words would be. This address coined the famous "And so my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." Kennedy also is asking his country to do something in light of the unrest and injustice it was facing. He speaks more to the threat of world powers against the freedom and sovereignty of the United States. He acknowledges threats of Communism and encourages all nations to not be afraid to negotiate but also not to negotiate out of fear. Kennedy speaks to the nation as a whole group to band together, regardless of race, religion, nationality or gender, and forge against our enemies.

The delivery of these speeches moves people to this day. When reading Dr. King's words, we cannot help but notice the eloquence of his language and writing. He fills his speech with similes and metaphors. He uses references that appeal to people from the highest class to the lowest class; from the North to the South. Dr. King utilizes all that is within him to appeal to the public at large thus making his speech one of the most famous in all of history. Kennedy's words still ring true in a nation fighting terrorism post 9/11 and can be used to show students how words can still be significant even forty years later. Both speeches allow a teacher to not only teach content but to emphasize the importance of audience and delivery in any type of writing or speech making <sup>(12, 13)</sup> .

Transcripts of all the speeches featured can be found on the American Rhetoric website at [www.americanrhetoric.com](http://www.americanrhetoric.com). The site not only includes the transcripts but also videos and/or audios of those speeches.

## Strategies/Assessment

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In a relatively homogeneous classroom, it is necessary to utilize a variety of strategies to reach *all* learners. The material in the curriculum unit provides a multitude of information in which a teacher can reach in, extract information and decide which strategies would work best to convey the information at hand. My strategies would include some direct instruction (utilizing Power Point), collaborative groups for discussion and analysis, "jigsaw" readings of various speeches, debates in class and a final culminating persuasive essay that can be delivered as a speech to the class as well.

Direct instruction is a strategy often learned in education classes but often a tactic teachers are quick to shy away from because of the fear of "telling" students information rather than having them discover it themselves. In teaching about rhetoric and its history and/or teaching persuasive techniques, direct instruction can be used if the teacher involves the students. Doing K-W-L (Know, Want to Know, Learned) charts before and after a presentation, the students become involved rather than just sitting and listening.

Jigsaw activities involve students breaking out into smaller groups and performing a task (possibly an inquiry based task). After working with small groups, each of these groups chooses a speaker or presenter and conveys the findings to the entire class. Teachers can use the jigsaw technique to analyze a long speech (dividing it into sections and having groups analyze a section) or shorter speeches where each small group would have a different speech rather than analyzing parts of a larger one.

Debate and oral presentations would be a great addition to teaching persuasive writing. Students would have a chance to take something they write and actually use it as support for a debate or use it as the basis of a persuasive speech for the class. Students would not only have to consider research and support but also consider who the audience will be. Easily, the audience can literally be the class in front of the speaker; however, teachers can assign a target audience and have the class pretend to be that audience. For example, students might write a speech to try and convince the school board to include recess in the school day. Although the speech may literally be spoken to a class of 11th graders, the student would know they were being graded as though the speech were for the actual school board.

Assessment of the overall success of the unit will be ongoing. Assessment of student performance would be checking to see if students have accurate notes of rhetorical elements, importance of audience and/or logical fallacies. Students would also be assessed on their ability to work in groups while peer editing one another's pieces of writing as well as reading and discussing the importance of the selected speeches. Lastly, the students will write a persuasive essay and will consider audience, word choice and technique. Rubrics can be student or teacher generated and clearly presented before the assignment is started to give students a clear idea of what the assignment calls for.

## Classroom Activities

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The following lesson plans are designed to work in an 82-minute block. However, the teacher can add or subtract elements to suit his/her needs on any particular day.

### **Lesson One: It's All Greek to Me**

Direct Instruction: Present information about rhetoric and its relationship to the Greeks and Aristotle; stress the different elements of rhetorical arguments. This can be done via Power Point or overhead projector.

\* For higher level students, excerpts from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* can be given out. It is reading that may take students awhile to get through but if the class is up for the challenge, it can be used and discussed in class.

## **Lesson Two: Write Me A Letter**

Introduction to Lesson: Review or present what rhetoric is and the importance of considering ones audience when writing a speech or an essay. Teacher should stress how language and word choice are always based on the audience.

Topic Presentation: Students will be writing four letters about the school board decision to have school on Saturday. The four letters will be written to four different individuals: the principal, the head of the school board, the student's best friend and the local newspaper.

Class Discussion: Class will brainstorm with teacher writing on board the different topics or issues that each recipient would be most interested in.

Class Work: Students will write letters and share with a partner during the class period.

*Closure* : Students will each get an index card and on that card they will write two-three sentences about the importance of audience and what they learned that day in class.

This lesson can certainly be a mini-lesson for advanced students to just illustrate the idea of audience and its importance.

## **Lesson Three: Essays That Persuade (Jigsaw Activity)**

Introduction to Lesson: Teacher should ask students to brainstorm elements of persuasive writing (e.g. good research, facts/details to support argument). List elements on the board.

*Group Work*: Students will work in groups and each group will read one of the following proposal and position essays: *Cultures Gives Us a Sense of Who We Are* by Robert C. Solomon, *Improving Television for America's Children* by Edward L. Palmer, "We Can't Dance Together" by Maria Rose Menocal and *A Proposal for Multilingual America* by Allen L. Sack. All these essays can be found in Reading Critically, Writing Well: A Reader and Guide

*Group Work II*: Groups will read essays and find the elements of persuasion in each. Groups will be asked the following: Author's position

Summary of essay

Support for that position

Evidence of an opposing viewpoint

Evaluation of the author's success

Note: Teachers can also ask students to answer some of the questions that follow each essay or make up his/her own

*Reporting*: Each group will report its finding to the class

## Lesson Four: Using American Rhetoric

*Introduction to Lesson:* Brainstorm the following people with the class: Martin Luther King, John F Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Dwight Eisenhower. Ask students what they know about each political figure. Record findings on the board.

*Activity (Students should be brought to computer lab):* Students will be given packets with speeches from the four political figures above: "I Have A Dream" (King), Inaugural Address (Kennedy), "Checkers" (Nixon) and "Atoms for Peace" (Eisenhower). Students will be randomly assigned ONE speech to listen to and view (if possible) on [www.americanrhetoric.com](http://www.americanrhetoric.com). Students will read the speech first, then listen and follow along.

*Group Work Activity:* After students have read and listened to their respective speech, they will group with students who have the same speech and answer the following questions:

- What is the speaker trying to persuade the public to do?
- For whom is his message intended? How do you know this?
- What effect does this have on the reader or audience? What feelings or emotions does the speech trigger?
- What is the tone of this speech? How do you know this?
- Did listening to the speech change your initial perspective?

*Regrouping:* Once students are finished in their groups, teacher should make groups of four with one person representing each speech. Students will report to the other students so by the end of class each person will have some understanding of each of the four addresses.

*Culminating Activity:* Controversial Issues

*Essay:* Students will write a seven to ten page essay in which they choose a controversial topic and present the pros/cons of that issue. Issues can range from Poverty to Abortion to Animal Rights. Students will be asked to use essential questioning to narrow down the large topic into two to three specific areas to focus on. For example, if a student wishes to write about Poverty, he/she can focus on how poverty influences learning or if there are statistics that link poverty with certain areas of the country. The goal will be to have students do more than just report. Students will work toward presenting the issue with support, research and statistics.

*Report/Presentation:* On the day students hand in their final paper, they will begin putting together a PowerPoint presentation in which they present their topic and try to persuade the audience to see the issue in the same light they did.

## Resources

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### For Teachers

#### *Books:*

Rise B. Axelrod & Charles R. Cooper. *Reading Critically, Writing Well: A Reader and Guide* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990): This book is a collection of essays grouped by essay type. There are sections dedicated to the position essays and proposals. The sections begin with an overview of essay type and then give examples by noted authors. For example, in the proposal section there is the essay *A Modest Proposal* by Jonathan Swift. This book serves as a reference for teachers to find examples for students to read and to model.

Edward P. J. Corbett, Robert J. Connors. *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1998). This text is mainly used in college classrooms but can be a source of information for teachers before they tackle the subject of rhetoric in the classroom. The book focuses on three main components of rhetoric: argument, arrangement, and style. The book has a variety of examples from full essays to paragraphs to illustrate the different areas of rhetoric.

Lauren Spencer. *A Step by Step Guide to Persuasive Writing* (USA: Rosen Publishing Group, 2005) This short book gives a basic outline and framework for writing persuasive essays. Teachers can use this resource to help beginning or struggling writers get a handle on what it takes to be successful at writing speeches or persuasive essays.

Juan Williams, Julian Bond *Eyes on the Prize* (England: Penguin, 1987): This book was the impetus for the making of the Documentary by the same name. Filled with information about the various incidents of the Civil Rights Movement, it also includes photos and interviews with some of the prominent figures of the 1950's and 1960's

Tom Liner, Dawn Latta Kirby, Dan Kirby *Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing* (USA Heinemann, 2003) Book with various strategies for teaching writing, including persuasive writing. The book was written as a freshmen composition type book but can easily be used in the high school classroom.

#### *Media:*

*Eyes on the Prize* (PBS Documentary, 1999): This seven tape/DVD series highlights the Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's. Major events like the killing of Emmitt Till and the Alabama Bus Boycott illustrate the need for change in the 1950's. Clips from this documentary can help students learn the historical background needed to understand where some of the speakers were coming from

#### *Internet:*

American Rhetoric ([www.americanrhetoric.com](http://www.americanrhetoric.com)): This website is a collection of speeches divided by decade, sectioned by the Top 100 of all time and by topic. The site is an excellent source of transcripts and audio/video for the various addresses.

Outta Ray's Head Lesson Plans (<http://home.cogeco.ca/~rayser3/litera1.htm>): This website has a wealth of writing activities. Some of the activities can be fine tuned and used within this curriculum unit.

### For Students

Michelle Howe *Persuasive Writing Made Easy* (OC Publishing, 2004): Step by step guide to various types of persuasive writing. Exercises included

Lauren Spencer. *A Step by Step Guide to Persuasive Writing* (USA: Rosen Publishing Group, 2005) This short book gives a basic outline and framework for writing persuasive essays. Teachers can use this resource to help beginning or struggling writers get a handle on what it takes to be successful at writing speeches or persuasive essays.

Hugh Tancred, (Ed.). *Aristotle: The Art of Rhetoric*. (England: Penguin Classics, 1991): This book has an excellent introduction that really outlines rhetoric and Aristotle's philosophy. The introduction is extremely user friendly.

Juan Williams, Julian Bond *Eyes on the Prize* (England: Penguin, 1987): This book was the impetus for the making of the Documentary by the same name. Filled with information about the various incidents of the Civil Rights Movement, it also includes photos and interviews with some of the prominent figures of the 1950's and 1960's

### *Internet:*

Purdue University: Online Writing Lab ([http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl\\_logicon.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_logicon.html))- Website with information for persuasive writing as well as all types of writing. Helpful to students as they write their final essays.

Essays for In Class Exercises: Maria Rose Menocal " *We Can't Dance Together* " : Essay about how rock music has a place in our cultural canon.

Edward L. Palmer *Improving Television for America's Children* : Interesting essay in which programming of children's television is analyzed and the author proposes the quality and amount of television children watch.

Allen L. Sack. *A Proposal for Multilingual America* : Essay where author proposes multilingual education should become a national goal rather than a topic people fight and avoid discussion.

Robert C. Solomon *Culture Gives Us a Sense of Who We Are* : Solomon writes about his belief that students need a sense of culture that is common to all people. He stresses the need for a common frame of reference.

### *Materials for Classroom Activities:*

- Copies of Faulkner's Nobel Prize Address, Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" speech and Nixon's "Checkers" speech
- Excerpts from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*
- Slides or overheads- History of Rhetoric
- Copies of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address
- Handouts of Logical Fallacies
- Copies of *Culture Gives Us a Sense of Who We Are* by Robert C. Solomon, *Improving Television for America's Children* by Edward L. Palmer, "*We Can't Dance Together*" by Maria Rose Menocal and *A Proposal for Multilingual America* by Allen L. Sack.
- Internet Access for students to listen and view speeches



## Notes

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- (1) Reynolds, Nedra, Bruce Herzberg and Patricia Bizzell (2003). *A Brief History of Rhetoric and Composition*. Retrieved June 30, 2006, from The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing Web site: <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/bb/history.html>
- (2) Editors, (2006). *Rhetoric*. Retrieved June 30, 2006, from Wikipedia, Free Encyclopedia Web site: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special:Cite&page=Rhetoric&id=61034323>
- (3) Tancred, H (Ed.). (1991). *Aristotle: The Art of Rhetoric*. England: Penguin Classics.
- (4) Spencer, L. (2005) *A Step by Step Guide to Persuasive Writing* Rosen Publishing Group,
- (5) Prody, K. (2001). *R.A.F.T.S* .. Retrieved June 30, 2006, from Persuasive Writing, Speaking, & Activities Web site: <http://www.hhs.helena.k12.mt.us/Teacherlinks/Oconnorj/persuasion.html>
- (6) Purdue University, (1995-2001). *Fallacies*. Retrieved , from Owl Online Writing Lab Web site: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl\\_fallacies.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_fallacies.html)
- (7) *The Classical Argument*. Retrieved June 30, 2006, from Winthrop University Web site: <http://www.winthrop.edu/wcenter/handoutsandlinks/classica.htm>
- (8) Bradley, B. (2005). *American Cultural History*. Retrieved June 30, 2006, from Kingwood College Library Web site: <http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/decade50.html>
- (9) Nixon, R (2001-2006). *Richard Nixon: Checkers*. from American Rhetoric Web site: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/richardnixoncheckers.html>
- (10) . Eisenhower, Dwight.( 2001-2006) *Atoms for Peace* from American Rhetoric. Web Site: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/dwightdeisenhoweratomsforpeace.html>>.
- (11) Faulkner, William (2001-2006). *William Faulkner: Speech Accepting the Nobel Prize in Literature* from American Rhetoric. Retrieved June 30, 2006, from Web site: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/williamfaulknernobelprizeaddress.htm>
- (12) King, Jr, Martin Luther (2001-2006). *I Have A Dream* American Rhetoric. Retrieved from Web Site: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ihaveadream.htm>>.
- (13) Kennedy, John F.(2001-2006) . *Inaugural Address* American Rhetoric. Retrieved from Web Site <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/johnfkennedyinaugural.htm>>.

## Appendix

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The curriculum unit addresses the following Language Arts Standards from Grades 9 --12 for the City of New Haven:

#### Content Standard 1.0: Reading:

· Students will move beyond the text - reflect, make judgments about its quality and meaning. · Students will construct meaning through analyzing, elaborating, and responding critically.

#### Content Standard 3.0: Speaking

- Students will establish a purpose for speaking.
- Students will identify and plan for a specific audience
- Students will confer with others to assess effectiveness of communication skills.
- Students will respond to a wide variety of questions, comments and ideas during discussions.
- Students will speak reflecting logical, independent, creative and critical thought.
- Students will express opinions and ask questions in class discussions.

#### Content Standard 4.0: Listening

- Students will continue to construct meaning through initial understanding and interpretation.
- Students will construct meaning through analyzing, elaborating and responding critically.

Standards from *New Haven Public Schools Curriculum Documents* ([www.nhps.net](http://www.nhps.net))

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