

Analyzing an Historical Speech

Introduction

Since almost the beginning of time, people have found reasons to give speeches. We're going to look at ways we can break down what the speakers said and try to understand why they said it and why they said it the way they did. We'll look at what impact it had on people and why it had the impact it did. It sounds hard, but it won't be. We'll just take it one step at a time. Understanding how authors and speakers made their points will help us learn to write clearly in ways that communicate our ideas to others and might just change the world!

Step One:

Read the speech thoughtfully and carefully out loud. Then read it silently to yourself. Are there any words of which you aren't sure of the meaning? Write them down.

Step Two:

What do you think the words mean from their context in the speech? Write down your thoughts and then look the words up in a dictionary. Revise or expand their definitions based on what you learn.

Step Three:

Who gave the speech? When and where was it given?

Step Four:

What was the occasion for giving it? Who was the audience?

Step Five:

Was the speaker the author of the speech? If not, who was the author, and why was that person given the task?

Step Six:

What kind of speech was it? Was it an argument, an informative speech, a speech meant to entertain, or something else? What clues tell you this?

Step Seven:

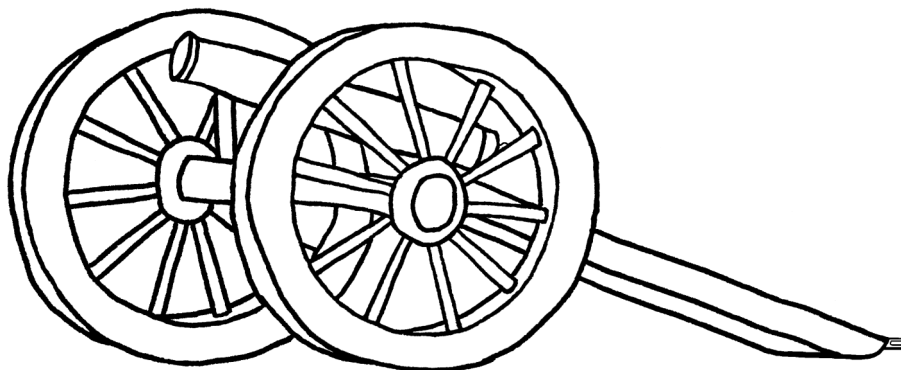
What was the speech's purpose, or what were the speaker's goals in giving the speech?

President Abraham Lincoln's
Gettysburg Address
November 19, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.



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