6 War speeches

You are learning:

- about the persuasive techniques used in speech-writing.

Wars have inspired some famous speeches. Speeches – including war speeches – can have many purposes. Here are some of those purposes with examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To inform</td>
<td>A teacher giving a talk in assembly about his trip to the Himalayas during the school holiday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To explain</td>
<td>A teacher explaining to the class how a piece of science apparatus works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To entertain</td>
<td>A stand-up comedian telling an amusing story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To persuade</td>
<td>A charity worker trying to talk someone into making a regular donation.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Activity 1

1 Read extracts A–D, which are all bits of speeches. Each speech has a different main purpose – either to inform, explain, entertain or persuade.

A Well, you’ll never believe it but the third new soldier who arrived in our dug-out was carrying a gold-plated cigarette lighter. ’What do you want that for?’ the sergeant asked him. ’It’s my lucky charm,’ the new soldier replied.

B Some say we should do a deal with Hitler. I say you can’t deal with a cheat. Some say we should let him have Europe. I say we are part of Europe. Some say we cannot beat him. I say we must.

C I am speaking to you from the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street. This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German government a final note stating that, unless we heard from them by 11 o’clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.

D War is when two or more opposing groups fight each other over a long period of time. These groups are usually different countries, but that is not always the case. In many parts of the world civil wars are taking place between different tribes or factions in the same country.

2 Write down the letter of each speech (A, B, C or D) and say what the main purpose of that speech is. Briefly explain how you decided on that purpose.
Activity 2

Speeches that are designed to persuade and inspire people tend to use **rhetorical devices**. These are particular methods of persuasion.

1. Look at this list of commonly used rhetorical devices.

- Inclusive pronouns: we, us, our.
- Repetition.
- Groups of three: we want it; we need it; we are going to have it.
- Rhetorical questions. These are questions that don’t need answering: Are we going to put up with this any longer?
- Anticipating objections: I know there are those who will argue that...
- Giving examples.
- Flow: long sentences that build towards a climax.
- Short sentences for contrast and emphasis.
- Informal language to sound ‘down-to-earth’.
- Statistics and ‘facts’.
- Vivid images: metaphors and similes.
- Emotive language: words chosen to stir up the listeners’ emotions.
- Exaggeration.
- Humour.
- Anecdotes – stories from the speaker’s own life.
- Playing on the listener’s sense of guilt.
- Claiming special knowledge or authority: most scientists would agree that...
- ‘Catchy’ phrases.

2. Read this speech by Winston Churchill, who became famous for his persuasive, morale-building speeches during the Second World War. As you read the speech notice how he uses rhetorical devices.

We shall fight on the beaches...

We shall go on to the end; we shall fight in France;
we shall fight on the seas and oceans;
we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air; we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be;
we shall fight on the beaches;
we shall fight on the landing grounds;
we shall fight in the fields and in the streets;
we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God’s good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.
3 Copy the table below and use it to record examples of rhetorical devices used by Churchill. An example has been done for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical device</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of inclusive pronoun</td>
<td>We, we, we</td>
<td>It makes the listener feel that we are ‘all in this together’ and that will make them feel that the fight will be worthwhile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Activity 3**

The speech that follows comes from William Shakespeare’s play *Henry V*. At this point in the play, Henry is about to lead his troops into battle at Agincourt, France. In order to inspire them he makes this speech telling them that, in the future, they will be proud to have fought in this glorious battle. Although the speech is fictional (we don’t know what Henry actually said), it clearly uses rhetorical devices to inspire its listeners. The Battle of Agincourt took place on St Crispin’s Day – 25 October 1415.

1 Read King Henry’s speech from Shakespeare’s play, *Henry V*.

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**HENRY**

This story shall the good man teach his son; And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by From this day to the ending of the world But we in it shall be remembered, We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that sheds his blood with me Shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile, This day shall **gentle his condition**. And gentlemen in England now a-bed Shall think themselves accursed they were not here, And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks That fought with us upon Saint Crispin’s day.

*Henry V*, Act 4 scene 3, William Shakespeare

2 Look at the list of emotions on the right.
   a Explain how Henry’s speech appeals to **at least two** of these feelings.
   b What other rhetorical devices does Henry use to persuade his listeners? List some examples and their effects.
3 Compare the emotional appeal of Henry’s speech with the emotional appeal of recruitment posters A and B on page 92. What similarities do you notice in the way the posters and Henry’s speech appeal to their audiences?

**Sharpen your skills: Modal verbs**

Modal verbs join with main verbs to give them a sense of doubt or possibility. The common modal verbs are:

- could
- can
- might
- may
- should
- would
- ought
- must
- will

Here are some examples of modal verbs in use.

I could [modal verb] come [main verb] with you.
Can [modal verb] you play [main verb]?
They might [modal] like [main verb] that film.

1 Which three modal verbs appear in Churchill’s speech on page 101?

   Be careful: *can*, *might*, *may* and *will* are sometimes used as nouns rather than modal verbs.

2 Modal verbs are particularly useful for exploring ideas and considering alternatives. Look at the two student responses opposite:

   The modal verbs *could* and *might* have helped the second student to explore alternative meanings and to keep an open mind.

**Assess your progress**

Look back over the *Henry V* and ‘We shall fight on the beaches’ speeches and what you have written about them. Use the criteria below to help you decide how well you have been doing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 5</th>
<th>Level 6</th>
<th>Level 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can identify ways in which writers use language and give some explanation of how their words affect the reader</td>
<td>I can explain in detail (and with appropriate terminology) how language is used</td>
<td>I am beginning to develop a precise, perceptive analysis of how writers choose their language to affect their readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can clearly identify how writers persuade their readers</td>
<td>I can explain how the writers’ language choices contribute to the overall effect on the reader</td>
<td>I can analyse and evaluate writers’ purposes and viewpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can clearly identify writers’ purposes and give some explanation of how these are pursued by the writers</td>
<td>I can clearly identify the effect on the reader, and explain how that effect has been created, commenting on single words or sentences</td>
<td>I can appreciate how particular techniques and devices achieve the effects they do</td>
</tr>
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