

Unit Organizer--Seventh-Grade English Essays and Speeches

Subject Matter and Relationship to Core Knowledge Sequence:

- ❖ “Shooting an Elephant” by George Orwell
- ❖ “The Night the Bed Fell” by James Thurber
- ❖ “Declaration of War on Japan” by Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Assessments:

- ❖ Class discussion (factual, cause-effect, interpretation, themes, literary terms)
- ❖ Bell work entries dealing with key issues in the texts
- ❖ Narrative essay assignment using an experience from the student’s personal life, modeling the strategy and technique of Orwell’s narrative essay

Standards for Achievement and Performance:

AFTER THIS UNIT THE STUDENT SHOULD BE ABLE TO...

- ❖ Understand that non-fiction writing does not have to be boring. With that, the student should be able to express what makes these non-fiction works memorable.
- ❖ Understand the uniqueness and purpose of speeches and essays.
- ❖ Understand that more than any genre, understanding speeches requires a thorough knowledge of the audience and the historical backdrop. The speech is not primarily the recorded text in a book, but the event of delivery in a certain time and place.
- ❖ Apply aspects of the speeches in his/her own public speaking.
- ❖ Understand the uniquely powerful role of language in politics. This will help humanize the student’s role of true politics. Orwell’s piece doubtless has political implications, but they are implications flowing from true people, places, faces.
- ❖ Understand that essays do not have to be overtly explicit and boring. Readers can be humored and left to make some conclusions for themselves. Thurber’s piece in this unit particularly shows this as it hilariously examines the effects of our preconceived fears in the midst of everyday life.
- ❖ Understand each author/speaker’s life and impact.
- ❖ Write better essays and appreciate the role of an essay as a literary composition dealing with a specific subject from a focused point of view (i.e. the beauty of a well defined, well developed, worthy thesis).
- ❖ Want to read more works by these authors and learn more about their lives and impact.
- ❖ Understand how to write an effective narrative essay and why such a genre can be particularly powerful as it accomplishes the expository task through engaging narrative.

Character Traits/Habits of Mind:

Essays have a stigma of boredom, and speeches seem daunting and reserved for the classroom, but this unit helps develop a broader view of expression’s role in life’s various problems and pursuits. No one can leave Thurber’s narrative essay without a side-splitting laugh or two and a mind bending thought or two concerning the chaotic potential of preconceived fears. It’s hard not to stop and contemplate Orwell’s counterintuitive conclusion: “When the white man turns

tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys.” And as we listen to FDR’s carefully worded and delivered discourse the day after one of America’s lowest moments, we see the vital role of language in leadership. Students thus see that essays and speeches are things of life, things for the world beyond the four walls of their English classroom.

Previous Unit(s):

- ❖ Vocabulary
- ❖ Short Stories

Next Unit(s):

- ❖ *Cyrano de Bergerac*
- ❖ Continue Vocabulary
- ❖ Continue Foreign Phrases/Spelling