

Unit Organizer--Eighth-Grade English Essays and Speeches

Subject Matter and Relationship to Core Knowledge Sequence:

- ❖ Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
- ❖ Excerpts from Maya Angelou's *I Know Why a Caged Bird Sings*
- ❖ JFK's "Inaugural Address"
- ❖ E.B. White's "Death of a Pig"
- ❖ Rachel Carson's "The Marginal World"

Assessments:

- ❖ Class discussion (factual, cause-effect, interpretation, themes, literary terms)
- ❖ Journal entries dealing with key issues in the texts
- ❖ Final test

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. Also, this will propel the student into a more meaningful study of *Animal Farm* in the next unit.
- ❖ Understand the leveling power of language in the sphere of prejudice and majority/minority tensions.
- ❖ 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).
- ❖ Appreciate the role of expression/writing in the life of a scientist. Rachel Carson was able to have a singular impact because she was both a great scientist and a great writer. Both were essential.
- ❖ Apply these things to his/her historical research paper as that unit coincides with this one.

Character Traits/Habits of Mind:

More than any other unit in the year, this unit makes the students confront models of true leadership, and how true leaders often rely on language to move people in the right direction. There are ramifications here for ideals of citizenship, perseverance, etc. A figure like MLK Jr.,

for example, was not just a great speaker or writer—he was also a man whose whole being was given over to the cause.

Also, regarding language arts habits of the 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. Stylistically, E.B. White's essay in this unit is as clear as glass. It offers a matrix to explore stylistic principles, rather than handling such principles in isolation.

Previous Unit(s):

- ❖ Vocabulary
- ❖ *Twelfth Night*

Next Unit(s):

- ❖ Animal Farm
- ❖ Continue Vocabulary
- ❖ Continue Foreign Phrases/Spelling