

Dalai Lama's Nobel Prize Speech and Vocabulary

Section Objectives:

- Summarize a story
- Analyze primary and secondary sources and make inferences
- Analyze a literary work using philosophical, political, religious, ethical, and social influences of a historical period
- Complete word analogies
- Create semantic maps
- Understand jargon or technical language and synonyms

Reading Dalai Lama's Nobel Peace Prize Address

One of the most important things to focus on as you read this address is determine the Dalai Lama's core political and spiritual beliefs through the speech. He conveys the third of his "Three Main Commitments in Life" by saying "...with truth, courage, and determination as our weapons, Tibet will be liberated." Then he refers to his first of his "Three Main Commitments in Life," which is to promote human values such as compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment, and self-discipline when he says, "...we are all basically the same human beings. We all seek happiness and try to avoid suffering. We have the same basic human needs and concerns. All of us human beings want freedom and the right to determine our own destiny as individuals and as peoples." Finally, the second of his "Three Main Commitments in Life" is to promote religious harmony and understanding among the world's major religious traditions. He alludes to this when he proclaims, "I believe all religions pursue the same goals, that of cultivating human goodness and bringing happiness to all human beings. Though the means might appear different the ends are the same."



The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 began in Beijing as a gathering to mourn the death of a pro-democracy official. The protests grew and lasted seven weeks until tanks moved in to clear the square. Violence ensued and several thousand people died. Afterward the Chinese government tightened its control through arrests and censorship.

The Dalai Lama also conveys some more of his philosophical and spiritual beliefs throughout this speech. Specifically, he communicates what he feels causes human suffering and what causes true happiness. In paragraph 10, he comments that suffering is caused by ignorance. This is because people inflict pain on others in the selfish pursuit of their happiness or satisfaction. In addition, he notes that happiness comes from a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood.

Another core political and ethical concern of his is the environment. As a matter of fact, the Dalai Lama was also recognized as a Nobel Laureate for his work addressing environmental concerns. He makes reference to this concern in his speech by declaring

in paragraph 11, “There is no contradiction between the two. Each gives us valuable insights into the other. Both science and the teachings of the Buddha tell us of the fundamental unity of all things. This understanding is crucial if we are to take positive and decisive action on the pressing global concern with the environment.”

It is important to keep in mind the historical time period of this speech when reading it. It was given in December of 1989. During the speech, he refers to several current events. For example, he remarks that last week Tibetans were sentenced to 19 years in prison for the expression of the widespread desire of Tibetans for the restoration of their beloved country’s independence. He notes that this year, China’s popular movement for democracy was crushed by brutal force. Then he refers to an event in 1987 when he proposed negotiations between Tibet and China. He talks about when he made the Five-Point plan for peace then elaborated on the plan in Strasbourg where he made concessions to China, but that they never responded positively to any of these attempts at reparations.

He also makes reference to an ancient agreement, the 823 AD treaty. This was between China and Tibet. It proclaimed that “Tibetans will live happily in the great land of Tibet, and the Chinese will live happily in the great land of China.” This underscores that these two nations co-existed peacefully for centuries before China invaded. He includes this in his speech because it reinforces a main purpose of his speech and his life: freeing Tibet from Chinese rule.



Tone is the overall attitude of the author conveyed by word choice. Many words would convey the tone of this address. Some include humble (in the beginning); hopeful (in the last paragraph); righteous and just (throughout).

To focus your reading of this address, look for the answers to the following questions.

1. The first of the Dalai Lama's "Three Main Commitments in Life" is to promote human values such as compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, contentment, and self-discipline. Where does he address this commitment in his speech?
2. The second of his "Three Main Commitments in Life" is to promote religious harmony and understanding among the world's major religious traditions. Where does he address this commitment in his speech?
3. This speech was given in December 1989. During the course of the speech, he makes reference to several current events. One event took place in the last week, one in the last year, and one two years before the speech was given. What were these three events and explain why he mentions them.
4. The Dalai Lama conveys some of his philosophical and spiritual beliefs throughout this speech. Specifically, he communicates what he feels causes human suffering and what causes true happiness. What are the causes that he mentions?
5. The Dalai Lama was also recognized as a Nobel Laureate for his work addressing environmental concerns. What does he see as the connection between religion and science?
6. **Tone** is the overall attitude of the author conveyed by word choice. How would you describe the **tone** of this address? Cite specific words and phrases as evidence.

Vocabulary terms

1. sanctuary
2. conciliatory
3. concessions
4. sentient
5. fundamental

Synonyms for Vocabulary terms

A synonym is a word that means the same or about the same as another word. Identify which vocabulary term is a synonym for each word listed below.

1. appeasing
2. conscious
3. basic
4. asylum
5. compromise