

Lesson Name : 20

Lesson Title : Declaration of Conscience, Section 1

Course Name : English 2 Part 1 [Honors]

Task Id : 50300247

Course Id : 15019



Essential Instruction

Please read Margaret Chase Smith's speech "Declaration of Conscience" from the beginning to the section titled ["A Challenge to the Republican Party."](#)



A **rhetorical work** is one that can be analyzed to see *how and why* a speaker writes or says the words, as opposed to the much more common way of viewing a piece, which analyzes *what* the writer wrote. A **rhetorical work** can be analyzed to show how the author or speaker is making his or her points regarding the topic he or she is speaking about.

Margaret Chase Smith's speech to the Senate on June 1, 1950, is an effective rhetorical work to analyze because, at the time, she was speaking against a very controversial and powerful figure, Senator Joseph McCarthy.

The first thing that you should identify when reading a **rhetorical work** is what it's about. This will allow you to identify the author's approach. As you read, you can see that Smith's speech is about her coworkers in the Senate, who are using their powerful positions unfairly. Here is a passage from her speech as an example.

I think that it is high time for the United States Senate and its members to do some soul-searching—for us to weigh our consciences—on the manner in which we are performing our duty to the people of America—on the manner in which we are using or abusing our individual powers and privileges.

The next thing that you should do in analyzing a **rhetorical work** is to ask yourself, "What is the purpose of this speech? Is it to persuade, to criticize, or to inform this audience?" And, although the work may be addressing all three of these purposes, it is good to have this in mind as you proceed through your **rhetorical analysis**.

Also, notice how Smith repeats phrases throughout her speech for emphasis. This is a form of **rhetoric**. She is trying to make her central themes clear to the audience. Here is an example from the text.

The American people are sick and tired of being afraid to speak their minds lest they be politically smeared as “Communists” or “Fascists” by their opponents. Freedom of speech is not what it used to be in America. It has been so abused by some that it is not exercised by others.

The American people are sick and tired of seeing innocent people smeared and guilty people whitewashed.

Chase repeats the phrase, “The American people are sick and tired...” to emphasize that she is speaking on behalf of the people of the country, and that they want to see some change.

Cultural and Historical Significance

The **cultural significance** of Smith’s speech is that she was a woman speaking out against a very powerful person in a time when women were encouraged to remain silent and submissive, or obedient. Even more controversial was the fact that Smith was a Republican speaking out against a “fellow” Republican. Both of these points show her strength of character.

It is important to understand the **historical significance** of this time period, as well. America was just getting over the devastations of World War II when it dove right into another conflict with the Soviet Union. This conflict was known as The Cold War. There was a great fear and threat of being bombed by the Soviets, who were taking over areas in Europe and spreading the political practice of Communism. McCarthy used the fear that Americans had of being bombed and made it equivalent to the fear of Communism. He then accused many Americans, specifically American government officials, of being Communist. As a result, McCarthy both furthered his career by making these accusations, and ruined the career of many of the accused. This speech made Smith the first person to speak out against McCarthy and his unjust practices.

Context Clues

Context clues are “helper” words that are used to give meaning to unfamiliar words in a sentence. Here is an example.

I speak as briefly as possible because too much harm has already been done with **irresponsible** words of bitterness and selfish political opportunism.

In this passage, you should try to use other words to identify the unfamiliar word, **irresponsible**. First, it is used to describe “words” that are “bitter” and “selfish.” Before that Smith says, “too much harm has already been done.” She also uses the words “political opportunism,” to point to the idea that the harm being done is simply for political purposes, not because it is in the best interest of the American people. This should lead you to conclude that the word **irresponsible** means reckless or careless.



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Vocabulary

Understanding the vocabulary can really help you to gain meaning from the material. Here are some vocabulary words that are used in this lesson.

1. **opportunism** – noun – the practice of getting an advantage or something valuable from a situation without thinking about what is fair or right
2. **obscure** – verb – keep from being seen; conceal
3. **deliberative** – adj. – relating to or intended for consideration or discussion
4. **debased** – verb – reduced in quality or value; degraded
5. **impute** – verb – to say or suggest that someone or something has or is guilty of (something)
6. **redress** – noun – correction of something that is wrong or unfair
7. **communist** – noun – someone who believes in the political theory derived from Karl Marx, in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs
8. **fascist** – noun – a person who believes in a government ruled by a dictator who controls the lives of the people and in which people are not allowed to disagree with the government