

Lesson Name : 27

Lesson Title : I Am an American Day Address

Course Name : English 2 Part 1 [Honors]

Task Id : 50728486

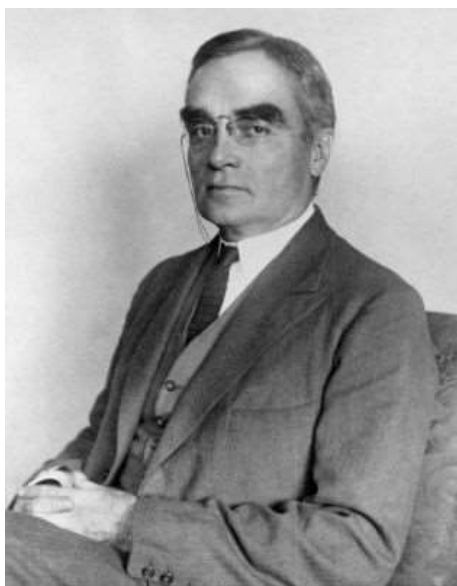
Course Id : 15019



Essential Instruction

Read Learned Hand's "[I am an American Day](#)" speech, also called the "Spirit of America" speech.

Learned Hand gave a very moving speech during a ceremony that honored the men going off to fight in World War II. In a time when the world feared Hitler's global takeover, unity was especially important on a local, personal level. Hand was able to deliver a call to unity with his speech "I Am an American Day."



Rhetorical Work

A **rhetorical work** is a speech, a letter, or any kind of work that is analyzed to see *how* and *why* an author chose to compose it. In other words, you are thinking about the intentions behind a work and not necessarily the work itself. Learned Hand's speech, "I Am an American Day" is an example of **rhetoric** because it addresses the concerns of the people during this time and discusses liberty and justice in America.

The first thing a reader should do when beginning to analyze a **rhetorical work** is to understand what it's about. This will be important in helping you to understand what the author's approach to the subject is. Hand is writing about the country's unity and definitions of freedom as it goes to war again. War is a time of unrest at home, as well, and the concerns of the nation often need to be addressed. Here is an example from the text.

What was the object that nerved us, or those who went before us, to this choice? We sought liberty; freedom from oppression, freedom from want, freedom to be ourselves. This we then sought; this we now believe that we are by way of winning.

The next thing that you should be thinking about is the purpose of the speech. Is it to inform, to criticize, or to persuade? Hand is persuading the people of this country to redefine what liberty means and to stand together in this time of global crisis. Let's look at an example from the text:

What do we mean when we say that first of all we seek liberty? I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it.

Now you should think about whether or not the work is effective. Hand's piece is effective because he uses many techniques of **rhetoric** that help him to connect with the audience. One technique that he uses is the **repetition of phrases or words** to accent the speech's central meaning. Here is an example from the text.

The **spirit of liberty is the spirit** which is not too sure that it is right; the **spirit of liberty is the spirit** which seeks to understand the mind of other men and women; the **spirit of liberty is the spirit** which weighs their interests alongside its own without bias...

Cultural and Historical Significance

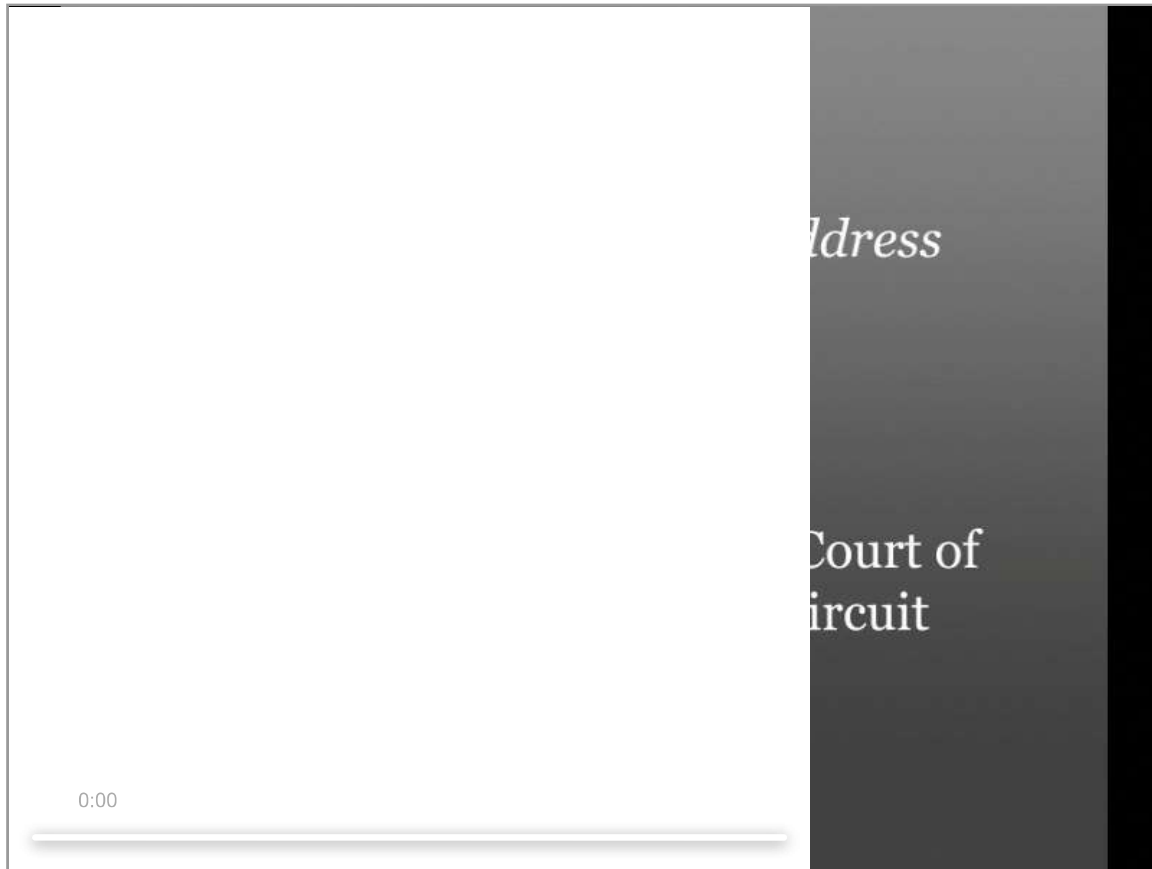
The **cultural** and **historical significance** of a rhetorical work is important to consider. This speech is delivered for a gathering of people on May 21, 1944, in New York City's Central Park. Hand's speech is given during a time where the country is going into war and the people are troubled. Hand's profession as a judge is one of esteem and importance, and the people see him as a figure of knowledge and assurance. This speech not only asks the people to be faithful, but it also asks them to be progressive, or open-minded.

Context Clues

Context clues are "helper" words that are used to give meaning to unfamiliar words. Think about the other words in the sentence when you are struggling with the meaning of a word you don't know. Let's look at an example.

We sought liberty; freedom from **oppression**, freedom from want, freedom to be ourselves. This we then sought; this we now believe that we are by way of winning. What do we mean when we say that first of all we seek liberty? I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts.

The **context clues** that will help you to determine the meaning of the word, **oppression** are: "sought liberty," "freedom," and "freedom from want," "freedom to be ourselves," "first of all we seek liberty," "do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts." All of these words talk about the desire to be "free," which indicates that, currently, people do not feel as if they are free. This means that they are being **oppressed**, or *treated in a cruel or unfair way*.



[Open Video in New Tab](#)



Vocabulary

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

1. **conviction** – noun – firmly held belief or opinion
2. **ruthless** – adj.– having or showing no pity or compassion for others
3. **unbridled** – adj. – uncontrolled; unconstrained
4. **savage** – adj. – fierce, violent, and uncontrolled
5. **bias** – noun – prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another
6. **conscience** – noun – an inner feeling or “voice” viewed as acting as a guide to the rightness or wrongness of one’s behavior