
Objectives:

- Students will be able to analyze a rhetorical work and to understand its cultural influence and its historical significance
- Students will be able to use context clues to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words.
- Students will be able to correctly use vocabulary words.

President Ronald Wilson Reagan (1911 - 2004)

Ronald Wilson Reagan was the 40th President of the United States. During his Presidency, Reagan pursued policies that reflected his personal belief in individual freedom. Those policies brought changes in the U.S. and contributed to the end of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. When Reagan visited Moscow for the fourth summit with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1988, he was viewed as a celebrity by the Soviets. At Gorbachev's request, Reagan gave a speech on free markets at the Moscow State University.



Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the art or study of using language effectively and persuasively. President Reagan was known as “The Great Communicator” because of the persuasiveness of his speeches. Here are a few of the rhetorical devices he used in his speech to help make it so powerful.

Reagan quoted the US Declaration of Independence. Referencing and reminding his audience of an old, established source gave his word extra weight.

You will see children being taught the Declaration of Independence, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights - among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness - that no government can justly deny - the guarantees in their Constitution for freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion.

Reagan used “tautology,” the repetition of an idea using different words, phrases, and sentences.

Go into any courtroom and there... every defendant has the right to a trial by a jury of *his peers*, usually *12 men and women - common citizens, they are the ones, the only ones*, who weigh the evidence and decide on guilt or innocence.

A similar device is “anaphora,” the repetition of a word, phrase, or idea at the beginning of a sentence.

But freedom is more even than this: *Freedom* is the right to question, and change the established way of doing things. *It is the* continuing revolution of the marketplace. *It is the* understanding that allows us to recognize shortcomings and seek solutions. *It is the* right to put forth an idea, scoffed at by the experts, and watch it catch fire among the people. *It is the* right to stick - to dream - to follow your dream.

Repetition makes it easier for people to remember what is said, and therefore, to be influenced.

Cultural Significance

In his address, President Reagan referenced a Russian “pop” song to the students. Reagan’s reference was culturally significant to the students because they could recognize it and identify with it as part of their own culture.

I’ve been told that there’s a popular song in your country - perhaps you know it - whose evocative refrain asks the question, “Do the Russians want a war?” In answer it says, “Go ask that silence lingering in the air, above the birch and poplar there; beneath those trees the soldiers lie. Go ask my mother, ask my wife; then you will have to ask no more, ‘Do the Russians want a war?’”

The rhetorical purpose of the phrase is to create a personal connection with the audience. “Wow, the President of the United States knows one of our pop songs. Cool!”

Historical Significance

This speech is historically significant because when it was given, the United States and The Soviet Union were still fierce rival nations that deeply distrusted each other. More importantly, for decades it had been illegal in the Soviet Union to have any kind of contact with “Western Culture” for fear that it would expose the citizens to “decadent,” non-Communist ideas. For a sitting US President to give an uncensored address to Soviet students in Moscow was remarkable, and it was a major step towards improving relationships between the Soviet Union and the United States.

The President follows his culturally significant remark to the students with one that is historically significant.

Americans seek always to make friends of old antagonists. After a colonial revolution with Britain we have cemented for all ages the ties of kinship between our nations. After a terrible civil war between North and South, we healed our wounds and found true unity as a nation. We fought two world wars in my lifetime against Germany and one with Japan, but now the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan are two of our closest allies and friends.

The purpose of this passage is to assure the students that peace with the United States is not only possible, but desired by Americans. It is intended to offer them a peaceful alternative to the antagonistic relationship which Americans and Soviets were accustomed to.

Context Clues

Context clues are “helper” words and phrases within a sentence or paragraph that can help the reader understand an unfamiliar word. Let’s look at an example from this section of Ronald Reagan’s speech. Use the words surrounding the word “entrepreneurs” to determine its meaning.

The explorers of the modern era are the entrepreneurs, men with vision, with the courage to take risks and faith enough to brave the unknown. These entrepreneurs and their small enterprises are responsible for almost all the economic growth in the United States.

The context clues that will help you to identify the meaning of the word “entrepreneurs” are: “men with vision,” “courage to take risks,” “faith enough to brave the unknown,” and importantly, “are responsible for almost all economic growth in the United States.” All of these terms describe somebody who started a new business venture. That is what we can determine “entrepreneurs” to be: “A person who organizes, operates, and assumes the risk for a business venture.”

Vocabulary

Being able to understand the vocabulary in Ronald Reagan’s “Speech at Moscow State University” will help you better understand and appreciate the speech. The following is a list of words from this section that you can use to help expand your vocabulary:

Vaulted – verb – Jumped over

Henry *vaulted* from the 43rd percentile all the way up to the 96th on the standardized tests!

Free market – noun – An economy in which there is little intervention or regulation by the government in order to encourage competition among businesses.

Six children have lemonade stands on that street. That is the *free market* at work!

Kinship – noun – Connection by blood, marriage, or adoption; family relationship

When I go to family reunions, I love to discover people with whom I share a *kinship*.

Accumulate – verb – To gather or pile up, especially little by little; amass

The interest in my Savings Account ensures that my money will continue to *accumulate*.

Reconciliation – noun – The reestablishment of friendly relations; conciliation or rapprochement

He longed for *reconciliation* with his estranged father, but too many painful memories existed.

Growth & Assessment

1. What is rhetoric?
 - a. A rhyme scheme
 - b. Euphoric emotion
 - c. A question
 - d. Persuasive speaking or writing
2. What historically significant reference did the President make in his speech?
 - a. “Perhaps you know it...”
 - b. “Americans seek always to make friends of old antagonists...”
 - c. “Whose evocative refrain asks the question...”
 - d. “Go ask my mother, ask my wife...”
3. What culturally significant reference did the President make in his speech?
 - a. “We fought two world wars in my lifetime...”
 - b. “Weigh the evidence and decide on guilt or innocence...”
 - c. “I’ve been told that there’s a popular song in your country...”
 - d. “After a terrible civil war between North and South...”
4. What is a “Free Market”?
5. What is an “entrepreneur”?