

## FOCUS ON LITERARY FORMS



SPEECH IS POWER:  
SPEECH IS TO PERSUADE,  
TO CONVERT, TO COMPEL.

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON

### Defining Speeches

A **speech** is a nonfiction work that is delivered orally to an audience. Some speeches are composed in writing before they are spoken aloud. Others are composed less formally as they are being presented, usually with notes as a guide.

### Types of Speeches

Here are some common types of speeches:

- A **political speech** focuses on an issue relating to government or politics. Usually, the speaker tries to persuade people to think or act in a certain way. During the Revolutionary War period, leaders gave inspiring and persuasive political speeches. One example is Patrick Henry's "Speech in the Virginia Convention" on page 100.
- An **address** is a formal speech that is prepared for a special occasion. For example, Abraham Lincoln delivered "The Gettysburg Address," page 538, at the dedication of a military cemetery during the Civil War.
- A **sermon** is a speech that is usually based on a scriptural text and is intended to provide religious instruction. Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," page 86, is a sermon.

## Persuasive Techniques

Many speeches are examples of **persuasion**—speech or writing that tries to get the audience to think or act in a certain way. **Persuasive techniques** are the methods that a speaker or a writer uses to sway an audience. Most speeches use a mixture of persuasive appeals.

- A **logical appeal** builds a well-reasoned argument based on evidence, such as facts, statistics, or expert testimony.
- An **emotional appeal** attempts to arouse the audience's feelings, often by using **loaded words** that convey strong connotations.
- An **ethical appeal** is directed at the audience's sense of morality or values. This type of appeal is linked to the audience's perception of the trustworthiness and moral character of the speaker or writer.

## Rhetorical Devices

Effective speeches typically include **rhetorical devices**—patterns of words and ideas that create emphasis and stir the audience's emotions. Rhetorical devices include the following techniques:

- **repetition**: restating an idea using the same words  
Patrick Henry: "The war is inevitable—and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come!"
- **restatement**: expressing the same idea using different words  
Abraham Lincoln: "... we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground."
- **parallelism**: repeating a grammatical structure  
Abraham Lincoln: "With malice toward none; with charity for all ..."
- **antithesis**: using strongly contrasting words, images, or ideas  
John F. Kennedy: "...ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."
- **rhetorical questions**: asking questions for effect, not to get answers  
Benjamin Franklin: "From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected?"

## Strategies for Reading Speeches

Use these strategies as you read or listen to speeches.

**Identify Persuasive Techniques** Ask yourself if the speaker relies primarily on logical appeals, emotional appeals, ethical appeals, or a combination of these techniques. If the speaker uses logic, evaluate whether it is based on sound evidence. If the speaker uses an emotional appeal, consider whether it is manipulative as well as stirring. If the speaker uses an ethical appeal, examine the speaker's authority to comment and the value he or she states or implies.

**Identify Rhetorical Devices** Consider whether the speaker uses repetition, restatement, parallelism, antithesis, or rhetorical questions. If so, notice how these devices affect the sound and the meaning of the speech.