The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum Education Department

President Reagan delivering the "Challenger Speech," January 28, 1986

The Great Communicator Files:
"Challenger Speech" File

"Address to the Nation: Death of Space Shuttle Challenger Crew"

President Ronald Reagan was known as the Great Communicator. Inside this file of original documents from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Archives, you'll uncover information relating to the speech President Reagan made after the Space Shuttle Challenger, carrying a seven-person crew including the first teacher involved in a space mission, exploded upon takeoff in 1986.

You'll go behind the scenes of the Reagan White House to explore the role of a president during a national crisis and the methods the president and his team used for gathering information and writing an address to the nation. You'll also gain special insight into President Reagan's speech-making style and public reaction to his words of consolation and support.

Then, you'll have the opportunity to develop your own personal style of communication and translate it into an address of your own. Excerpts from the very best speeches will be highlighted on the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum website.

CREW OF SPACE SHUTTLE MISSION 51-L

(back row, left to right) Mission Specialist El Onizuka, Teacher in Space Participant, S. Christa McAuliffe, Payload Specialist Greg Jarvis, and Mission Specialist Judy Resnik; (front row, left to right) Pilot Mike Smith, Commander Dick Scobee, and Mission Specialist Ron McNair.

Space Shuttle Crew and Challenger liftoff photographs courtesy of NASA

Speechmaking
and
Speechwriting Activities:

The Challenger Speech File

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum
40 Presidential Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065
www.reaganlibrary.com

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***E**ducate*

Challenger: Speech File – Teacher Answer Guide

OVERVIEW

Documents included:

- "President's Backup Copy" – January 28, 1986
- Letter from David Chew to President Reagan – January 28, 1986
- "Presidential Remarks: Death of Space Shuttle Challenger Crew" – January 28, 1986
- White House Staffing Memorandum – January 28, 1986
- "Presidential Remarks: Death of Space Shuttle Challenger Crew," draft from the National Security Council – January 28, 1986
- "Remarks of the President on Space Shuttle Explosion" Roosevelt Room, January 28, 1986
- *"High Flight,"* December 11, 1941
- "Teacher in Space Project," no date on packet
- "Space Shuttle Mission 51-L, Press Kit," January 1986
- Letter to President Reagan from William E. Brock, Secretary of Labor, January 30, 1986
- Letter to President Reagan from Reverend Bob Walter, January 28, 1986
- Letter to President Reagan from Charles F. Brannan, *"U.S. News & World Report,"* January 31, 1986
- Telegram to President Reagan from May Helen Lagasse, January 28, 1986

Document Set #1

a. The backup copy was used by the president in case the teleprompter broke.
b. The marks represented notes for speech delivery.
c. Peggy Noonan was one of President Reagan's speech writers.
d. The speech was presented from the Oval Office. We know this because the letter from David Chew indicates this information.

Document Set #2

a. The initials "RR" stand for Ronald Reagan and indicate that the president reviewed the speech.
b. The president was expecting to give the State of the Union Address that night.
c. We know that the president was expecting to give the "State of the Union Address" because the speech is written, "I had planned to speak to you tonight to report on the State of the Union."
d. Seven astronauts died on board the shuttle Challenger.
e. This mission included the first teacher to be involved in a space shuttle mission.
f. No. Americans had not lost astronauts in space prior to this accident.

g. Adjectives will vary. Some may include hopeful, sad, mournful, proud.
h. Answers will vary.
i. Answers will vary.

Document Set #3

a. The memorandum is marked ASAP because the president needed to respond to the tragedy very quickly.
b. The memorandum was used for inter-office communications in the White House.
c. Admiral John Poindexter was President Reagan's National Security Advisor at the time.
d. The "NSC" stands for National Security Council and is a group which advises the president on security-related issues.
e. The NSC was reviewing the speech for content and style.
f. Ben Elliott was the Director of Speechwriting for President Reagan.
g. Answers will vary.

Document Set #4

a. January 28, 1986
b. The time is 1:00 pm EST.
c. "Q" stands for question.
d. The address was made from The Roosevelt Room.
e. – h. Answers will vary.

Document #5

a. This document is a poem.
b. It is included in the speech file because excerpts from it are used in the speech.

Documents Sets #6a, 6

a. The "Teacher in Space" project was a program developed by NASA to have a teacher on board the Space Shuttle Challenger mission to instruct from the space shuttle.
b. The name of the "teacher in space" was Christa McAuliffe.
c. The teacher was expecting to conduct and tape lessons from space.

Document Set #7

a. The letters have been saved in the speech file to document public reaction to the president's speech.
b-d. Answers will vary. See letters.

Challenger: Speech File

OVERVIEW

Look through the materials in your speech file. List three of the different documents that you see:

	Title of Document	Date on Document (if available)
1)	_____	_____
2)	_____	_____
3)	_____	_____

(Document #1)

1. Look at the **President's Back-up Copy.**
   a. What do you think the backup copy was used for?

   _____

   b. What do you think the marks on the backup copy represent?

   _____

   c. What does the word "Noonan" in parenthesis at the upper left-hand corner of the document represent?

   _____

   d. Where was the speech presented? How do you know this?

   _____

   _____

(Document #2)

2. Look at the document **"Presidential Remarks: Death of Space Shuttle Challenger Crew Tuesday, January 28, 1986."**
   a. What do the initials "RR" stand for? _____
   b. What important address was the president expecting to give that night?

   _____

c. How do you know? Provide a quote to back-up your response.

_____

_____

d. How many astronauts died on board the shuttle Challenger? _____

e. What was unique about this particular mission?

_____

_____

f. Had Americans lost astronauts in space prior to this accident? _____

g. List two adjectives to describe the mood of the president and of the nation on this day.

_____ _____

Photo courtesy of NASA

h. Pretend you are a teacher watching this space shuttle take-off from your classroom with your class. What would you say to your students after the space shuttle explodes?

_____

_____

_____

i. Imagine you are the president and have just been informed of this incident. What do you think your role is in this tragedy?

_____

_____

_____

(Document #3)

3. Examine the page titled **"White House Staffing Memorandum."**

a. Why is it marked "ASAP"?

_____

b. What do you think this memorandum is used for? Why?

_____

_____

c. What role did Admiral John Poindexter play in the Reagan Administration?

_____

d. What is the NSC?

_____

e. Why would the NSC be reviewing the president's remarks?

_____

f. What role did Ben Elliott play in the Reagan Administration?

_____

g. Examine the changes made by the NSC.

List two changes which the president incorporated in his remarks.

_____

_____

List two changes which the president did **not** incorporate in his remarks.

_____

_____

(Document #4)

4. Look at the **"Remarks of the President on Space Shuttle Explosion."**

a. What is the date on this document? _____

b. What is the time on this document? _____

c. What does the letter "Q" stand for within the document? _____

d. From where was this address made? _____

e. List three emotions expressed by the president in this document.

f. Provide evidence for your response to question (e) using 2 or more quotes from the text.

_____

_____

_____

g. Do you think the president would continue to support the space program after this accident? _____

h. Explain your response to question (g) using a quote from the document to support your response.

_____

_____

_____

_____

(Document #5)

5. Look at the document titled, **"High Flight."**

a. What kind of document is this? _____

b. Why is it included in this speech file?

_____

(Document Set #6a and 6b)

6. What was the **"Teacher in Space Project?"**

a. How does it relate to the Space Shuttle Challenger?

_____

_____

_____

_____

b. What was the name of the "teacher in space"?

_____

c. What was the teacher expecting to do in space?

_____

_____

_____

_____

(Document Set #7)

7. Examine the **letters written to President Reagan.**
   a. Why have they been saved in the speech file?

   _____

   _____

   b. Summarize one of the letters in two-three sentences.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   c. If you have not already done so, read President Reagan's **"Address to the Nation: Death of Space Shuttle Challenger Crew."** (Check box when complete.) ☐

   d. In two paragraphs or more, write your own response to the president.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

(Use the back of the sheet to continue writing your response.)

Challenger: Speech Writing

SPEECH ELEMENTS

1. **Elements** of a **successful speech** include:

   - Attention-getting devices such as stories or interesting facts or jokes.
   - Clear communication – understandable language and specific points, ideas and plans.
   - Accurate information.
   - Specific examples to back-up your ideas.
   - An exciting ending such as a call to action or the repetition of a unifying theme.

2. **Multiple Drafts and Lots of Practice**

   Successful speeches, including presidential speeches, generally have gone through numerous drafts and have often been seen and reviewed by more than one person. Presidents generally practice their speeches and receive suggestions on how to best present information to the public.

3. **Know Thyself**

   Develop your own style. Present your speech in a manner which is consistent with and reflects your own personality.

QUESTION ON THE CHALLENGER SPEECH ELEMENTS:

(Answer the following question on a separate sheet of paper)

List, describe and **provide three examples** of the elements of successful speech writing evidenced in President Reagan's "Address to the Nation: Death of Space Shuttle Challenger Crew."

Challenger: Speech Writing

CREATE YOUR OWN SPEECH:

1. **Brainstorm a list of issues which are important to you**. They can be school-based, local, state, national or international issues.

   Some examples may include:

   - creating grade restrictions for playing on an athletic team,
   - school-improvement efforts,
   - lowering the age required to obtain a drivers' license,
   - election reform,

     or

   - foreign policy.

2. **Write a 250 word speech.** Make sure you incorporate the "elements of a successful speech" described above.

3. **Ask at least two other people you trust** to read over your speech and make comments and suggestions.

4. **Incorporate at least two of the** suggestions and change your speech to reflect these suggestions.

5. **Practice your speech** in front of at least two other people.

6. **Email your speech to reaganeducation@nara.gov.**

   Excerpts from the very best speeches will be posted on the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum website.

   Additionally, three times a year, one speech will be selected as the Great Communicator Student Winner. The student winner's speech will be posted in the rotunda of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

   Each student winner will receive:

   ☺ four free passes to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Museum
   ☺ a certificate
   ☺ additional prizes from the museum gift store

The Great Communicator Files: Challenger Speech Connections to California State Standards

The "Great Communicator Files" address both the secondary standards skills as well as standards-driven content.

Listed below are some relevant excerpts from the California Content Standards for history and social sciences.

GRADES SIX THROUGH EIGHT- HISTORICAL and SOCIAL SCIENCES ANALYSIS SKILLS

Research, Evidence, and Point of View

3. Students asses the credibility of primary and secondary sources and draw sound conclusion from them.

Historical Interpretation

2. Students understand and distinguish cause, effect, sequence, and correlation in historical events, including the long and short-term causal relations.

GRADE EIGHT- UNITED STATES HISTORY and GEOGRAPHY GROWTH and CONFLICT

8.4 Students analyze the aspirations and ideals of the people of the new nation.

2. Explain the policy significance of famous speeches (e.g., Washington's Farewell Address, Jefferson's 1801 Inaugural Address, John Q. Adams's Fourth of July 1821 Address).

GRADES NINE THROUGH TWELVE: INTRODUCTION

Chronological and Spatial Thinking

1. Students compare the present with the past, evaluating the consequences of past events and decisions and determining the lessons that were learned.

Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View

3. Students construct and test hypothesis; collect, evaluate, and employ information from multiple primary and secondary sources; and apply it in oral and written presentations.

Historical Interpretation

1. Students show the connections, causal and otherwise, between particular historical events and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.

GRADE TEN

World History, Culture, and Geography: The Modern World

Students in grade ten study major turning points that shaped the modern world, from the late eighteenth century through the present, including the cause and course of the two world wars. They trace the rise of democratic ideas and develop an understanding of the historical roots of current world issues, especially as they pertain to international relations. They extrapolate from the American experience that democratic ideals are often achieved at a high price, remain vulnerable, and are not practiced everywhere in the world. Students develop and understanding of current world issues and relate them to their historical, geographic, political, economic, and cultural contexts. Students consider multiple accounts of events in order to understand international relations from a variety of perspectives.

10.9 Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world.

1. Compare the economic and military power shifts caused by the war, including the Yalta Pact, the development of nuclear weapons, Soviet control over Eastern European nations, and the economic recoveries of Germany and Japan.

2. Analyze the causes of the Cold War, with the free world on one side and Soviet client states on the other, including competition for influence in such places as Egypt, the Congo, Vietnam, and Chile.

3. Understand the importance of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which established the pattern for America's postwar policy of supplying economic and military aid to prevent the spread of Communism and the resulting economic and political competition in arenas such as Southeast Asia, Cuba, and Africa.

6. Analyze the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union, including the weakness of the command economy, burdens of military commitments, and growing resistance to Soviet rule by dissidents in satellite states and the non-Russian Soviet republics.

10.10 Students analyze the integration of countries into the world economy and the information, technological, and communications revolutions (e.g., television, satellites, computers).

GRADE ELEVEN

United States History and Geography:
Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century

They learn that the United States has served as a model for other nations and that the rights and freedoms we enjoy are not accidents, but the results of a defined set of political principles that are not always basic to citizens of other countries. Students understand that our rights under the U.S. Constitution are a precious inheritance that depends on an educated citizenry for their preservation and protection.

11.8 Students analyze the economic boom and social transformation of post-World War II America.

5. Describe the increased powers of the presidency in response to the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War.

7. Describe the effects on society and the economy of technological developments since 1945, including the computer revolution, changes in communication, advances in medicine, and improvements in agricultural technology.

11.9 Students analyze U.S. foreign policy since World War II.

3. Trace the origins and geopolitical consequences (foreign and domestic) of the Cold War and containment policy…

4. Analyze the role of the Reagan administration and other factors in the victory of the West in the Cold War.

11.11 Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

2. Discuss the significant domestic policy speeches of Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Reagan, Bush and Clinton…

GRADE TWELVE

12.4 Students analyze the unique roles and responsibilities of the three branches of government as established by the U.S. Constitution.

3. Discuss Article II of the Constitution as it relates to the executive branch, including eligibility for office and length of term, election to and removal from office, the oath of office, and the enumerated executive powers.

12.8 Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life.

1. Discuss the meaning and importance of a free and responsible press.

2. Describe the roles of broadcast, print, and electronic media, including the Internet, as means of communication in American politics.

3. Explain how public officials use the media to communicate with the citizenry and to shape public opinion.

Principles of Economics

12.3 Students analyze the influence of the federal government on the American economy.

1. Understand how the role of government in a market economy often includes providing for national defense etc.