

Speechmaking
and
Speechwriting Activities:

The Challenger Speech File

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

Engage
Excite
Educate

The Great Communicator Files

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.

Challenger: Speech File – Teacher Answer Guide

- 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.