How to be an Effective Public Speaker Like Frederick Douglass

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Suggested Age Group: 7th-10th Grades

Lessons/Themes: Abolition, Activism, Public Speaking, Speech Analysis

Topic Overview:

Delves into the life and work of Frederick Douglass. A video overview is included to allow for an understanding of Frederick Douglass’ life in order to gain historical background. The activities emphasize the analysis of the oral works and speeches of Frederick Douglass. This lesson plan uses a series of texts and videos in order to encourage diverse methods of interaction with primary and secondary sources. Materials include short and long answer questions that encourage students to engage in critical and creative thinking. Final activity includes encouraging students to write their own speech using rhetorical devices and mirroring the provided examples.

For More Information, Please Reach out:
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How to be an Effective Public Speaker Like Frederick Douglass

Lesson Plan for 7-10th grade students
Prepared by Allison Shearer

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Students will learn background information about Fredrick Douglass. Frederick Douglass was an escaped enslaved person who fought oppression and learned how to read and write independently. Douglass’s speeches brought awareness to oppression and brought light to his past. After reviewing some of Douglass’s work, students will be able to prepare a short speech about something they are passionate about.

OBJECTIVES
- Understand how oratory can make an impact
- Learn about Douglass and his impact
- Be able to analyze oratory work
- Gain public speaking skills
- Support standing up for one’s beliefs despite prejudice

VOCABULARY
Orator: a public speaker, especially one who is eloquent or skilled
Pathos: an element in experience or artistic representation evoking pity or compassion
Ethos: the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution
Logos: to appeal to the audiences’ sense of reason or logic
Imagery: descriptive language used to appeal to a reader’s senses
Phenomenon: an object or aspect, known through the senses rather than by thought or intuition

TIME
- Class Period 1 (40 minutes): Perform Activity 1 in class. Have the students do Part 1 and 2 of Activity 2 as take home work if there is no time to finish in class.
- Class Period 2 (40 minutes): Perform Part 3 of Activity 2 in class. Perform Activity 3 in class and have students finish questions for take-home work. Introduce Activity 4 so students can bring an idea for the speech for the next class period.
- Class Period 3 (40 minutes): Have students share their answers for Activity 3 in groups. Answers can be shared out with the whole class. Let the students work on their own writing their speeches for the rest of the class. Students should have these finished for the next class period.
- Class Period 4 (40 minutes): split students into groups and allow the students to stand up and present to their classmates.
ACTIVITY 1: (In-Class)

Watch the YouTube video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QOTxnxD-NE) on Frederick Douglass and answer the following questions:

1. Before watching the video, What do you know about Frederick Douglass?

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2. How did Frederick Douglass learn to read and write? Why is this important?

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3. What does it mean when Frederick Douglass is referred to as an orator?

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4. What types of people were Douglass advocating for? Consider the quote “Right is of no Sex - Truth is of no Color- God is the father of us all, and all we brethren” from the North Star Newspaper.

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5. What did you find most interesting in this video?

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ACTIVITY 2: Analyzing a Douglass Speech (Part 1-2 take home. Part 3 in class)

Original Text from Frederick Douglass’s, What to a Slave is the Fourth of July:

“The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, the distance between this platform and the slave plantation, from which I escaped, is considerable—and the difficulties to be overcome in getting from the latter to the former, are by no means slight. That I am here to—day is, to me, a matter of astonishment as well as of gratitude. You will not, therefore, be surprised, if in what I have to say, I evince no elaborate preparation, nor grace my speech with any high sounding exordium. With little experience and with less learning, I have been able to throw my thoughts hastily and imperfectly together; and trusting to your patient and generous indulgence, I will proceed to lay them before you. This, for the purpose of this celebration, is the 4th of July. It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom . . . There is consolation in the thought, that America is young. —Great streams are not easily turned from channels, worn deep in the course of ages. They may sometimes rise in quiet and stately majesty, and inundate the land, refreshing and fertilizing the earth with their mysterious properties. They may also rise in wrath and fury, and bear away, on their angry waves, the accumulated wealth of years of toil and hardship. They, however, gradually flow back to the same old channel and flow on as serenely as ever. But, while the river may not be turned aside, it may dry up, and leave nothing behind but the withered branch, and the unsightly rock, to howl in the abyss—sweeping wind, the sad tale of departed glory. As with rivers so with nations.”
Part 1: Highlight keywords and circle words you do not know.

Part 2: Summarize the main points that Douglass is trying to convey. (Keywords should be used in the summaries and unknown words should not be used. This is a summary using your own words)

Summary:
Step 3: Answer question 1, then listen to a recording of a rendition of this speech. Have the students answer the question again based on the recording.

1a. What are the emotions behind this speech? Can you tell through reading the words without actively listening? What words stick out giving it this emotion? What Rhetorical Devices are used?

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Listen to this reenacted recording from (0:35-5:30) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-cYwuMmylA), and answer the question again.

1b. What are the emotions behind this speech? How do the feelings you understood from reading the speech compared to listening to it?

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2. Why might it be important to show emotion in writing when it is not going to be presented orally?
ACTIVITY 3: Analyzing Douglass’s Presentation (In-Class)

Watch the YouTube video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ib_hT2g4wJE). If class time allows, the students can be shown the full episode on HBO Max. This is the preview. The video shows how the voice was an important resource for Douglass. Douglass’s speeches were not filmed or recorded; however, his transcripts have been kept. The actors in these videos speak his speeches in ways that Douglass was known for.

1. “It became an American Phenomenon to see Douglass.” Who is someone you would want to see speak, sing, or perform, and what aspects about them make them appeal to you (e.g. how they interact with the audience, their passion)?

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2. Do you think Frederick Douglass did similar things to the person you chose? How?

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3. Frederick Douglass showed passion, anger, sadness, and other emotions in his speeches. What are other methods he used to persuade and bring attention to issues?

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ACTIVITY 4: Creating and Delivering a Speech- Real Life Connection (at home and in class)

Students will create a short speech (3-5 minutes) about something they are passionate about. In the speech, they will then highlight phrases to mimic Douglass’s style. They can share their speech with partners or in groups. Students can give constructive criticism to their partners. These speeches should be given while standing using eye contact and other important strategies to engage the audience. An example of a topic could be why you believe your school should wear uniforms. Consider having a hook, real-life examples from your past, Rhetorical Devices, and other things you have learned about Douglass’s oratory styles.
Frederick Douglass

Find the following words in the puzzle.
Words are hidden →, ↓, and ↘.

ABOLITION        FREEDOM SEEKER       PHENOMENON
ALLY             IMAGERY            PREJUDICE
CONTROVERSIAL    LOGOS              PUBLIC SPEAKING
ENSLAVED         ORATOR              SELF CONFIDENCE
ENSLAVER         PATHOS              SLAVERY
ETHOS
Works Cited- Lesson 1:

(1852) Frederick Douglass, ‘What, to the Slave, Is the Fourth of July’.” *(1852) Frederick Douglass, "What, To The Slave, Is The Fourth Of July"*, 24 Aug. 2020,


HBO. “Frederick Douglass: In Five Speeches | HBO.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 16 Feb. 2022,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ib_hT2g4wJE.


“‘What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July.’” *YouTube*, YouTube, 21 May 2015,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-cVwuMmyIA.

Works Cited- Extra Activity:

*Super Teacher Worksheets: Word Search*

https://www.superteacherworksheets.com/generators/wordsearch.php