

 TEXT STUDY

“First Inaugural Address”

BY FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, MARCH 4, 1933

MAP Grade 9 • Unit 2

UNIT The Novel-Honor

TYPE Informational Text (Lexile 1190L)

OVERVIEW • TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS • ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW

RATIONALE

Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered this speech at a pivotal point in American history. The nation was in crisis. The crash of the financial markets and the banking industry in 1929 impacted businesses across all regions the country. The resulting wide-scale unemployment led to a crisis of confidence in the business community as well as individual hardship. The failure of banks hit families hard as life savings were wiped out. The people lost faith in the government’s ability to make sound economic decisions. Some even began to question the capitalist system as a whole. In 1932, Roosevelt defeated the incumbent, Herbert Hoover, in a landslide victory. In this inaugural speech, his first address to the American people at this time of crisis, the incoming president laid out his new agenda for his administration. This text is historically significant and provides an excellent demonstration of Roosevelt’s use of rhetorical appeals, word choice, and literary devices to relay his message to the American people.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

Teachers may read the text aloud or have students complete the initial reading independently. Alternatively, the audio or visual clips of this speech can be found online and shown to the class. This would give students an opportunity to experience the speech as Roosevelt’s audience did in 1933. During the first reading or listening, students should develop an overall sense of the speech, and begin to identify the main points Roosevelt wanted to convey to the audience. Upon a subsequent examination, students can begin to annotate for devices that Roosevelt uses to achieve his intended objectives. Before this second reading, teachers could also review rhetorical appeals and literary devices with the students.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

(a) Focus Standards

Students will practice the following standards through the analysis of the text and the completion of the performance assessment:

SL.9-10.3: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

RI.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RI.9-10.3: Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

VOCABULARY

Some words from this book may be unfamiliar to students or may be used in a different way than students have seen previously. Possible words for study include:

- candor
- evanescent
- induction
- preeminently
- impel
- frank, frankly, frankness
- curtailment
- markets
- minister (as noun and verb)
- mandate
- strife

TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

Teachers may consider reviewing key content, rhetoric, and analysis terms prior to reading, such as: inaugural address, the Great Depression, nationalism, patriotism, Executive power, ethos, logos, pathos, figurative language, metaphor, repetition, connotation, denotation, allusion, and tone.

- 1 Reread the first two sentences of Roosevelt’s speech. What does Roosevelt say the present situation requires him to do when speaking to the American people?
 - **Roosevelt believes that the American people expect him to speak honestly about the current situation of the nation.**
 - **This is supported by use of the word candor, which means honesty and sincerity.**

- 2 Roosevelt says this inaugural address is “preeminently the time” to speak the truth to the American people. Why would this instance be different than any other time?
 - **Preeminently means first or foremost.**
 - **The inaugural address is the first time that Roosevelt addressed the American people as their president and this speech sets the tone for his presidency.**
 - **He is saying to the people that given the crisis situation, it is time that the leaders are honest with the citizens of the country.**

- 3 In his first paragraph, Roosevelt uses both the pronouns “them” and “we” in reference to his audience. When does he use these pronouns and what is the desired effect of using different pronouns at different places in the paragraph?
 - **Roosevelt uses “them” in the first sentence in reference to his audience of the American people. The use of this word separates Roosevelt from his audience and demonstrates that he knows his audience has expectations of him as their leader.**
 - **Roosevelt uses “we” and “our” through the rest of the first paragraph. His use of these pronouns suggests that he is a part of the American people and demonstrates his belief that the nation’s citizens should face the challenges ahead of them together.**

- 4 What does Roosevelt state that Americans should fear? Why would he choose to begin his speech by addressing the citizens’ fears?
 - **Roosevelt says that, “...the only thing we [Americans] have to fear is fear itself...”**
 - **He is acting like a parent, attempting to calm the fears of the public about the state of the country, as a parent would calm the fears of a child.**
 - **By using “we” he avoids a patronizing tone that might be inferred otherwise.**
 - **This statement means that the American people should only be afraid of allowing their fear to impede their efforts to fix the economic problems facing the country.**
 - **They must overcome this psychological roadblock before they can begin to take physical action.**
 - **Members of the audience should feel reassured when the president says that the challenges ahead are not so difficult that they will not be able to overcome them. In addition, they may feel that they have to overcome their fear of what will happen next and focus on supporting others and the country’s leadership.**

- 5 In his opening paragraph, Roosevelt says the American people need “to convert retreat to an advance.” What is the denotation and connotation of the word “retreat” in this sentence? A denotation is a word’s literal or defined meaning. A connotation is an understood meaning for the word that is different from its definition. What does Roosevelt mean by this statement?
- » *Note to teachers: This question provides an opportunity to demonstrate how the same word can have different meanings (denotation vs. connotation), or part of speech (used as a verb versus a noun or adjective), depending on the context.*
 - **The definition of the word “retreat” is to move away or move backward, while to “advance” is to go forward. (denotation)**
 - **In the military sense, to retreat means to back away or move away from an enemy or conflict. To advance is to move forward, acquire territory, or engage the enemy.**
 - **The connotation of “retreat” is defeat; the connotation of “advance” is victory or success.**
 - **Roosevelt suggests that the American people need to change their belief from a sense of defeat or failure into a movement in a more positive direction.**
 - **Roosevelt plans to “wage a war” on the economic crisis impacting the United States.**
 - **This use of a military phrase at the beginning of the speech introduces Roosevelt’s use of the war metaphor throughout the rest of the speech.**
- 6 In the second paragraph, Roosevelt identifies some of the nation’s “common difficulties.” He states that “They concern, thank God, only material things.” What does he mean by this statement?
- **He is reassuring the people that the problems the country is facing, though serious, are within their power to fix. The American people have the ability to get the country moving again.**
 - **Roosevelt’s use of “common” suggests that he and many others are facing the concerns of rising taxes, declining wages, and national output of industrial and agricultural goods. He is using the rhetorical appeal of ethos because he lists events that many, if not all, Americans have dealt with before his election.**
 - **Through this list, he demonstrates that he knows specific issues that Americans are facing and he understands their concerns. This persuades the American people to trust him as his knowledge of their problems adds to his credibility as a leader.**
- 7 When Roosevelt states, “We are stricken by no plague of locusts,” what message is he trying to instill in the minds of his audience?
- » *Note to teachers: A possible extension of this question could include reviewing biblical allusions in historical documents, such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, as well as in the remainder of Roosevelt’s speech.*
 - **This statement is an allusion to biblical stories in which devastating plagues were unleashed on specific groups of people or countries who displeased God. In the story, swarms of locusts eat everything in sight, leaving the impacted country destroyed and without resources.**
 - **Roosevelt is assuring citizens they are not experiencing God’s wrath and are not destined for collective punishment. Although the country’s resources have been mismanaged and times are difficult, America still has a multitude of resources and gifts. Their ability to recover does not depend on an act of God but on their own determination and resourcefulness.**

- 8 Who or what caused the current economic situation, according to Roosevelt?
- Roosevelt places blame for the country’s economic distress on the “unscrupulous practices of the money changers.”
 - Unscrupulous means without morals or dishonest.
 - The term “money changer” is another biblical allusion; it refers to people who loaned money for interest (early bankers). In the New Testament, Jesus goes into the temple and physically throws out the money changers and admonishes them for conducting business in God’s house.
 - He is implying that the status of the country is the result of certain poor decisions and dishonest actions of a few, not a statement about the inadequacies of the American people.
 - He is blaming the bankers and their policies for the nation’s economic problems.
 - Roosevelt goes on to say that the money changers will be held accountable for their actions by “the court of public opinion.” They will not go unpunished for the problems they caused.
 - He wants to distance the common people from those who caused the problems—to establish an “us vs. them” relationship. (Ethos)
- 9 In this section of the speech, Roosevelt begins to outline his plans to get the country out of its economic distress. He says, “This Nation calls for action, and action now.” Why is the word “Nation” capitalized in the written version of the text? Why is it significant? From whom does the “Nation” demand action?
- Capitalizing the word “Nation” treats it as a person or unified entity. In addition, the capitalization of the word signifies that “Nation” is a proper noun and refers solely to the American Nation.
 - This is personification: giving the Nation (a thing) the ability to call for action using one voice.
 - The Nation (American people) demands action from its leaders and/or its government. The business community has already failed the country, according to Roosevelt, who demands “an end to a conduct in banking and business which too often has given to a sacred trust the likeness of callous and selfish wrongdoing.”
 - The demands of the people to fix the problems must be met immediately.
- 10 When identifying actions that he proposes to address the country’s economic problems, Roosevelt repeats the phrase “it can be helped by” six times in the same paragraph. He finishes the paragraph by stating, “but it can never be helped by merely talking about it.” What idea or belief is Roosevelt attempting to instill in the audience?
- Roosevelt wanted to instill confidence in his ability to actively address the problems.
 - In addition, he wanted to instill in them a belief that the country’s economic problems can be solved.
 - He also wanted to emphasize the need to act, addressing the previously stated demands of the nation.
 - He indicates that he has listened to the nation’s demands and plans to act.

- 11 In his plans for the country, Roosevelt advocates for “national planning for and supervision of all forms of transportation and of communications,” and “strict supervision of all banking and credits and investments.” What does Roosevelt mean by “national planning?” Who will be supervising? Does this idea align with his other plans advocated by Roosevelt in this speech?
- Roosevelt suggests government control of utilities having a “public character” and government regulation of banking and investment.
 - He proposes removing control of private businesses over companies that provide a public service, such as railroads and telegraph lines.
 - Roosevelt’s proposals advocate for stricter government regulation over businesses and greater government control over the public utilities in the economy.
- 12 In relation to “international trade relations,” Roosevelt claims that by taking his recommended actions, “we address ourselves to putting our own national house in order.” What does he mean by this phrase? What policy is Roosevelt advocating in relation to other countries?
- This is an idiomatic expression. Literally, to “put a house in order” means to clean and organize a house.
 - The phrase means to get organized and to act decisively to clean up past messes or mistakes.
 - In this case, he figuratively means that the nation must come together to solve its current financial problems (the mess) and find a way to create a system to address this problem (the cleaning or organization).
 - Roosevelt says that the people of the United States must first work on resolving their own problems before moving on to the rest of the world, which was also suffering a financial crisis.
- 13 In the sentence beginning with the phrase, “In the field of foreign policy,” Roosevelt uses the word “neighbor” four times, and the word “respect” four times. Why did he repeat these words? How does Roosevelt employ the word “neighbor” in this sentence? In his overall plan for U.S. foreign policy?
- Repeating a word multiple times is a rhetorical strategy that is used to emphasize an important point.
 - Roosevelt is appealing to their sense of community (pathos). He extends this concept of community to emphasize that America is part of a global community.
 - The word neighbor denotes someone who lives next to you. It also can mean a fellow human being, or even a friend.
 - Roosevelt is saying that he wants to maintain a respectful relationship with the countries next to the United States as well as around the world.
- 14 Roosevelt calls the U.S. Constitution “the most superbly enduring political mechanism in the world.” How does Roosevelt support this assertion? How does his praise of the Constitution support his proposed plan for leading the country?
- Roosevelt describes the Constitution as “simple” and “practical.”
 - In addition, he states that it has “always” met the challenges presented to it since the beginning of its formation.
 - He specifically references “expansion of territory, ...foreign wars, bitter internal strife, and ...world relations” as challenges the system has overcome.
 - This is an appeal to ethos; he establishes the credibility of the current constitutional system to persuade his audience to believe that the Constitution will be able to handle the challenges that will face it in the future, and protect Americans as it has done before.
 - He also appeals to people’s pride in their Constitution.

- 15 Throughout the speech, Roosevelt uses the word “common” multiple times. Identify places in the text where this term is used and its meaning in that specific context.
- In paragraph 2, he speaks of “common difficulties”: This phrase shows that all Americans had similar problems during this time period. In this context, its effect is to emphasize to the individuals in the audience that they are not the only ones facing challenges.
 - In paragraph 17, he speaks of “common discipline”: This phrase illustrates that all Americans must share the same principles when facing the current challenges together. Without demonstrating this discipline, the individuals will fail each other and leadership will not be effective.
 - In paragraph 18, he speaks of “common problems”: This phrase emphasizes how together, the nation will address problems that may not just affect them, but their fellow citizens and the health of the country as a whole.
- 16 Roosevelt weaves multiple war-related terms and metaphors throughout this speech. What connection is Roosevelt trying to make for his audience by employing these military terms and metaphors?
- Example metaphors include: “the emergence of a war;” “lines of attack;” “armed strife;” “great army of our people;” “disciplined attack;” “wage a war;” and “invaded by a foreign foe.”
 - The current economic crisis is the “foe” and they must come together to defeat the problem.
 - They need to join forces to attack the problems in the same way an army comes together to defeat an enemy.
 - These metaphors compare the challenges facing the American people to a “war.” Roosevelt reminds his audience that they must have a “common discipline” in order to actively and effectively address the problems that face them. This may allude to sacrifices individuals must make for the good of the whole nation.
- 17 How does Roosevelt’s use of these war metaphors provide support for his plans for the country?
- Roosevelt states that he “shall ask the Congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis—broad Executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.”
 - By weaving the military metaphors through the speech, he cements in the audience’s mind that the United States is in a war-like situation.
 - According to the Constitution, the President gains additional powers during times of war.
 - By comparing the current economic crisis to a war-like situation, Roosevelt is justifying his plans to increase government power over the economy.
- 18 Roosevelt concludes his speech with “In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action. They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift, I take it.” According to Roosevelt, the people have “registered a mandate.” What does this imply to Roosevelt? How does he play with the word “present” in this last sentence?
- A mandate is a command or authority that a person or group gives to another person or group.
 - Roosevelt says that by electing him president, the people have given him the authority “to take direct, vigorous action.”
 - The American people have given him power to make decisions on their behalf.
 - He plays with the words “present” and “gift” in multiple ways. He uses “present” as “current;” as “gift;” and as “given.” The people have freely (through the election) given him the gift of authority and he is going to accept this power.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS

Give students the following writing task:

In this speech, President Roosevelt utilizes a number of different rhetorical appeals and strategies to engage his audience and build support for his plans for the country. Which appeal or strategy does he use the most effectively? Your evidence should include identification of Roosevelt’s use of specific rhetorical appeals, analysis of word choice, tone, and other literary devices.

Your response should:

- Have a clear claim that provides an analysis, not a summary, of the speech.
- Use specific examples of the techniques used in the speech to support your claim.
- Use words, phrases, or clauses to link the major sections of your text.
- Avoid colloquial or casual language to create a formal tone.
- Provide a concluding statement that supports the arguments presented.
- Be proofread to ensure correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT’S INAUGURAL ADDRESS, 1933

I am certain that my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our people impel. This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days.

In such a spirit on my part and on yours we face our common difficulties. They concern, thank God, only material things. Values have shrunk to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen; government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone.

More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return. Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment.

Yet our distress comes from no failure of substance. We are stricken by no plague of locusts. Compared with the perils which our forefathers conquered because they believed and were not afraid, we have still much to be thankful for. Nature still offers her bounty and human efforts have multiplied it. Plenty is at our doorstep, but a generous use of it languishes in the very sight of the supply. Primarily this is because the rulers of the exchange of mankind’s goods have failed, through their own stubbornness and their own incompetence, have admitted their failure, and abdicated. Practices of the unscrupulous money changers stand indicted in the court of public opinion, rejected by the hearts and minds of men.

True they have tried, but their efforts have been cast in the pattern of an outworn tradition. Faced by failure of credit they have proposed only the lending of more money. Stripped of the lure of profit by which to induce our people to follow their false leadership, they have resorted to exhortations, pleading tearfully for restored confidence. They know only the rules of a generation of self-seekers. They have no vision, and when there is no vision the people perish.

The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths. The measure of the restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit.

Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort. The joy and moral stimulation of work no longer must be forgotten in the mad chase of evanescent profits. These dark days will be worth all they cost us if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto but to minister to ourselves and to our fellow men.

Recognition of the falsity of material wealth as the standard of success goes hand in hand with the abandonment of the false belief that public office and high political position are to be valued only by the standards of pride of place and personal profit; and there must be an end to a conduct in banking and in business which too often has given to a sacred trust the likeness of callous and selfish wrongdoing. Small wonder that confidence languishes, for it thrives only on honesty, on honor, on the sacredness of obligations, on faithful protection, on unselfish performance; without them it cannot live.

Restoration calls, however, not for changes in ethics alone. This Nation asks for action, and action now.

Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources.

Hand in hand with this we must frankly recognize the overbalance of population in our industrial centers and, by engaging on a national scale in a redistribution, endeavor to provide a better use of the land for those best fitted for the land. The task can be helped by definite efforts to raise the values of agricultural products and with this the power to purchase the output of our cities. It can be helped by preventing realistically the tragedy of the growing loss through foreclosure of our small homes and our farms. It can be helped by insistence that the Federal, State, and local governments act forthwith on the demand that their cost be drastically reduced. It can be helped by the unifying of relief activities which today are often scattered, uneconomical, and unequal. It can be helped by national planning for and supervision of all forms of transportation and of communications and other utilities which have a definitely public character. There are many ways in which it can be helped, but it can never be helped merely by talking about it. We must act and act quickly.

Finally, in our progress toward a resumption of work we require two safeguards against a return of the evils of the old order; there must be a strict supervision of all banking and credits and investments; there must be an end to speculation with other people's money, and there must be provision for an adequate but sound currency.

There are the lines of attack. I shall presently urge upon a new Congress in special session detailed measures for their fulfillment, and I shall seek the immediate assistance of the several States.

Through this program of action we address ourselves to putting our own national house in order and making income balance outgo. Our international trade relations, though vastly important, are in point of time and necessity secondary to the establishment of a sound national economy. I favor as a practical policy the putting of first things first. I shall spare no effort to restore world trade by international economic readjustment, but the emergency at home cannot wait on that accomplishment.

The basic thought that guides these specific means of national recovery is not narrowly nationalistic. It is the insistence, as a first consideration, upon the interdependence of the various elements in all parts of the United States—a recognition of the old and permanently important manifestation of the American spirit of the pioneer. It is the way to recovery. It is the immediate way. It is the strongest assurance that the recovery will endure.

In the field of world policy I would dedicate this Nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others—the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.

If I read the temper of our people correctly, we now realize as we have never realized before our interdependence on each other; that we can not merely take but we must give as well; that if we are to go forward, we must move as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline, because without such discipline no progress is made, no leadership becomes effective. We are, I know, ready and willing to submit our lives and property to such discipline, because it makes possible a leadership which aims at a larger good. This I propose to offer, pledging that the larger purposes will bind upon us all as a sacred obligation with a unity of duty hitherto evoked only in time of armed strife.

With this pledge taken, I assume unhesitatingly the leadership of this great army of our people dedicated to a disciplined attack upon our common problems.

Action in this image and to this end is feasible under the form of government which we have inherited from our ancestors. Our Constitution is so simple and practical that it is possible always to meet extraordinary needs by changes in emphasis and arrangement without loss of essential form. That is why our constitutional system has proved itself the most superbly enduring political mechanism the modern world has produced. It has met every stress of vast expansion of territory, of foreign wars, of bitter internal strife, of world relations.

It is to be hoped that the normal balance of executive and legislative authority may be wholly adequate to meet the unprecedented task before us. But it may be that an unprecedented demand and need for undelayed action may call for temporary departure from that normal balance of public procedure.

I am prepared under my constitutional duty to recommend the measures that a stricken nation in the midst of a stricken world may require. These measures, or such other measures as the Congress may build out of its experience and wisdom, I shall seek, within my constitutional authority, to bring to speedy adoption.

But in the event that the Congress shall fail to take one of these two courses, and in the event that the national emergency is still critical, I shall not evade the clear course of duty that will then confront me. I shall ask the Congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis—broad Executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.

For the trust reposed in me I will return the courage and the devotion that befit the time. I can do no less.

We face the arduous days that lie before us in the warm courage of the national unity; with the clear consciousness of seeking old and precious moral values; with the clean satisfaction that comes from the stern performance of duty by old and young alike. We aim at the assurance of a rounded and permanent national life.

We do not distrust the future of essential democracy. The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action. They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift I take it.

In this dedication of a Nation we humbly ask the blessing of God. May He protect each and every one of us. May He guide me in the days to come.