

Presidential Speech Analysis

Overview

Description

In this assignment, students are asked to read and view a presidential State of the Union speech, interpret its meaning and intent, critique the strength of the arguments, and apply their knowledge to analyze which sources of presidential power the president relied upon in each major section of the speech. Students will outline the speech to facilitate analysis and will do research to set the speech in the cultural and political context of its time.

Final Product: Students will prepare a 3-5 page written report analyzing the speech and specifying which presidential powers, formal and implied, the president relied upon for each major section of the speech.

Subject

Government

Task Level

Grades 10-12

Objectives

Students will:

- Perform research and analyze primary and secondary sources.
- Interpret and evaluate policy arguments.
- Outline the main points of a presidential speech.
- Apply knowledge of presidential powers to specific policy proposals.
- Write about the results of this analysis.

Preparation

- Read the Instructor Task Information and the Student Notes.
- Prepare student copies of the Student Notes pages.
- Obtain a video recording of a recent presidential State of the Union speech to provide students with a visual frame of reference for a joint session of Congress and a State of the Union address. Show 10 to 15 minutes to class. Video and transcripts of speeches are obtainable from C-Span State of Union Archive and other sources.

- You will assign students a State of the Union address to analyze. Internet access for three State of the Union addresses are provided below (Presidents William J. Clinton in 1995, George W. Bush in 2007, and Barack Obama in 2009. These State of the Union addresses were selected because they have the most useful materials for this assignment. The Clinton 1995 Speech and George W. Bush Speech 2007 were selected because they represent speeches given after the opposition party captured control of the Congress.
- President Obama's 2009 State of the Union address can be found at the White House website at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/remarks-of-president-barack-obama-address-to-joint-session-of-congress/ and also from C-Span State of the Union Archive (<http://www.c-span.org/Executive/State-of-the-Union.aspx>).
- The addresses of the two earlier presidents can be accessed at a site of the Government Printing Office: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/pubpapers/search.html>.
 - William J. Clinton: Click the Browse button at the left; click this president's name. Go to Book I, January 20 to July 31, 1993. Under Document Categories List, click Addresses to the Nation, then Joint session of Congress.
 - George W. Bush: Click the Browse button at the left; click this president's name. Under 2005, Book 1, click Document Categories List. Under Addresses to the Nation, Click State of the Union.
- You may decide to assign these speeches to students or allow them to select another one that interests them the most. If allowing students to choose, try to get a variety of presidents covered and speeches that represent different time periods or political circumstances (party control of Congress). Make a copy of each speech for your own reference.

Prior Knowledge

Students will need to have a solid understanding of the powers of the executive office and also be comfortable reading material from a variety of sources. They should be aware of the U.S. Constitution provision (Article II, Section 3), which is the legal source of the State of the Union message. They should be able to outline and analyze a lengthy speech and draw conclusions about its content. Students should be able to research a topic independently. If they cannot, you may build these skills into this CRA but count on additional class time to cover effective research techniques, evaluation standards, and including sources within a text.

Key Concepts and Terms

- Bipartisan
- Domestic policy
- Executive agreement

- Executive order
- Executive privilege
- Foreign policy
- Formal powers
- Implied powers
- Item veto
- Joint session of Congress
- Midterm elections
- Partisan
- Pocket veto
- Presidential agenda
- State of the Union address (Article II, Section 3 of the Constitution)
- Treaty

Time Frame

Allow for one class period to discuss the assignment and an additional 30 minutes for students to access and print out their speeches (if this is determined to be an in-class activity). Students' research, analysis, and writing of their reports should take an additional two weeks outside of class. Peer or instructor reviews of rough drafts may be done in or out of class. This assignment can be modified to meet the needs of different classroom schedules and student ability levels. Total estimated class time is one to two hours and two weeks of out-of-class time.

Instructional Plan

Getting Started

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Discuss the purposes of presidential speeches.
- Be able to describe the parameters of an assignment.

Procedure

1. Introduce the assignment by playing a cut from a video segment of a recent State of the Union message showing both the introductory portion and some later segment of the speech where the president is discussing policy. Discuss the president's purpose in that latter part of the speech. Broaden the discussion to focus on presidential speeches in general. Ask students to distinguish between policy arguments or proposals and emotional or purely political statements.
2. Introduce the assignment to students. Make sure they understand what is expected of them in this assignment.

Investigating

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Use primary and secondary source documents to research a time period.
- List and analyze presidential powers, both formal and implied.
- Outline a presidential speech.
- Analyze a speech to isolate policy proposals from political rhetoric.
- Organize collected research and analysis.

Procedure

1. Have students access the Internet site of the specific speech you have chosen for them to analyze. Have them print a copy of the speech for later use.
2. Direct students to do research to determine important issues in the country at the time the speech was written. What foreign affairs were of concern? Was the economy a problem?

3. Direct students to do research to determine political context of speech. Did the president's political party control both bodies of Congress (House and Senate), only one body, or did the opposition control Congress? Did this speech take place at the front-end of a presidential term, did it take place at the start of a second term, or did it take place after a midterm election in which the president's party lost seats in Congress?
4. Have students use their textbooks and other sources to enumerate the presidential powers, both formal and implied. One source that might be helpful is Learner.org, out of the Annenberg Center:
http://www.learner.org/courses/democracyinamerica/dia_7/dia_7_topic.html.
5. Have students carefully read and outline the State of the Union address they have been assigned. As they read and outline, have them note:
 - a. The speech in the context of its time.
 - b. Which statements in the speech represent specific requests for policy change and which are made for political or emotional appeals.
 - c. Which presidential powers apply to the policy proposals in the speech.
 - d. Which policies in the speech, if any, are beyond the power of the presidency to act independently and require congressional approval.
6. Have students organize their speech outlines and research notes about the time period, presidential powers, and application of powers to the State of the Union address to determine the focus of their report.

Drawing Conclusions

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Organize written information to make a persuasive and cohesive argument.
- Write clearly and coherently.
- Incorporate feedback from a peer or instructor review into the final draft of their report.
- Include a Works Cited page in their report.

Procedure

1. Have students prepare a draft of their report.
 - a. Students should introduce the report by setting the speech in the context of its time (cultural and political partisan context, devotion to domestic vs. international policy, etc.).

- b. For each policy initiative in the speech, students should link the initiative to the formal or implied power that is most relevant to accomplish the goal. How many initiatives were proposed?
 - c. Students should make a separate list of those policies proposed which require Congressional approval. How many separate proposals were advanced by the president?
 - d. The report should conclude with an evaluation of the speech as a whole, in light of the power of its appeals and its proposed policies. This evaluation should involve length, rhetoric memorable lines (if any), partisan/nonpartisan nature of the speech and whether the president limited his proposed agenda to several key proposals or proposed many new initiatives.
2. The writing of this report should be done as homework, although an in-class demonstration of how to do this with one of the policy proposals might be appropriate.
3. Have students prepare a final version of the report after receiving feedback from either peer or instructor review. Have students add a Works Cited page to the end of the report.

Scaffolding/Instructional Support

The goal of scaffolding is to provide support to encourage student success, independence, and self-management. Instructors can use these suggestions, in part or all together, to meet diverse student needs. The more skilled the student, however, the less scaffolding that he or she will need. Some examples of scaffolding that could apply to this assignment include:

- Using the Purdue Owl (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>) and other helpful resources, instruct students who need background information on how to find, evaluate and include research in an essay.
- Provide instruction on paraphrasing, summarizing and incorporating direct quotations if necessary.
- Provide practice for including sources within an essay if necessary.
- Pair or group students during the research process to facilitate the process.
- If necessary, prompt students to understand that there are three phases to the *Investigating* part of the assignment:
 - Researching the context of the time.
 - Specifying both formal and implied presidential powers.
 - Analyzing the State of the Union address, beginning with an outline.
- Instruct students to create an outline of their research to check their progress and organize their thoughts.
- Consider teaching and assigning graphic organizers to help students make sense of their research. For example, a T-chart style could help students delineate between political appeals and requests for policy change.
- Add a dedicated computer lab day for students who have difficulty accessing the Internet.
- Include concrete examples of context where appropriate as a visual reminder for students.
- Advise students that they may need to read the speech more than once to get a solid overview of its scope and intent.
- Select sample speeches and analyze the content as a class.
- Practice evaluating speeches rather than just reading for the main idea.
- Provide specific guided tutoring for students in need of direction in reading and interpreting presidential speeches.
- Have available for students who need explicit support a handout detailing the formal and implied powers of the president.

- Allow students to create a presentation on their findings rather than a written response.
- Provide multiple opportunities for feedback and revisions throughout the assignment.

Solutions

The information below is intended to help you assess students' final work products. It may not represent all possible strategies and ideas. The accompanying scoring guide provides specific examples of ways a student might demonstrate content understanding and mastery of cross-disciplinary skills.

Necessary Elements

For each policy initiative mentioned in the speech, students should identify whether formal or implied powers apply or if neither one applies. The report should conclude with an evaluation of the speech as a whole, in light of the power of its appeals and its proposed policies.

Students should make use of varied, relevant primary and secondary sources. For example, students would reference their history textbooks, as well as contemporary newspaper articles, to determine that George H.W. Bush's 1992 speech took place after the United States and its allies accomplished their goals in the first Gulf War. These should all be properly cited.

Key Connections

Students should be able to accurately distinguish between political rhetoric and actual policy proposals within the State of the Union address. They should also demonstrate their ability to distinguish between actual policy proposals and claims of accomplishment of the administration.

Students should be able to accurately link policy proposals with formal presidential powers, implied powers, or neither, using evidence from their research and from the speech itself.

Students' final reports should demonstrate an awareness of the times during which the particular State of the Union address was written and how the president addressed issues of that time period. This should include not only general issues facing the nation, but also the political context, particularly the partisan makeup of the Congress addressed and/or the most recent general election results.

Each student should put forth a persuasive argument, backed by sufficient evidence, to support his or her advice to the president and evaluation of the speech. For example, the final report identifies the speech's policy initiatives and cites data about presidential powers to identify which policies are beyond the executive's scope.

Common Misconceptions

Students might be solely descriptive and not include analysis. Final papers need to include analysis. In addition, all assertions need to be supported with evidence and not unsubstantiated opinions.

Students without deep understanding of the three branches of American government could misidentify the formal vs. implied powers of the Executive Branch. Be sure students can correctly identify the difference.

Students might not have a complete or accurate understanding of the historical context and the political undertones of the speech.

TCCRS Cross-Disciplinary Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Key Cognitive Skills</i>			
A.1. Engage in scholarly inquiry and dialogue.	✓	✓	
B.2. Construct well-reasoned arguments to explain phenomena, validate conjectures, or support positions.			✓
B.3. Gather evidence to support arguments, findings, or lines of reasoning.		✓	
C.1. Analyze a situation to identify a problem to be solved.	✓	✓	✓
D.1. Self-monitor learning needs and seek assistance when needed.	✓	✓	✓
D.2. Use study habits necessary to manage academic pursuits and requirements.	✓	✓	✓
D.3. Strive for accuracy and precision.	✓	✓	✓
D.4. Persevere to complete and master tasks.	✓	✓	✓
E.1. Work independently.		✓	✓
E.2. Work collaboratively.	✓		✓
F.1. Attribute ideas and information to source materials and people.			✓
F.2. Evaluate sources for quality of content, validity, credibility, and relevance.		✓	
<i>II. Foundational Skills</i>			
A.3. Identify the intended purpose and audience of the text.	✓	✓	
A.4. Identify the key information and supporting details.	✓	✓	
A.5. Analyze textual information critically.		✓	
A.6. Annotate, summarize, paraphrase, and outline texts when appropriate.		✓	✓
A.7. Adapt reading strategies according to structure of texts.		✓	

B.1. Write clearly and coherently using standard writing conventions.			✓
B.3. Compose and revise drafts.			✓
C.5. Synthesize and organize information effectively.		✓	✓
C.6. Design and present an effective product.			✓
E.1. Use technology to gather information.		✓	

TCCRS Social Studies Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Interrelated Disciplines and Skills</i>			
C.1. Evaluate different governmental systems and functions.	✓	✓	
F.1. Use a variety of research and analytical tools to explore questions or issues thoroughly and fairly.		✓	
<i>II. Diverse Human Perspectives and Experiences</i>			
B.4. Evaluate how major philosophical and intellectual concepts influence human behavior or identity.	✓	✓	✓
<i>IV. Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation of Information</i>			
A.1. Identify and analyze the main idea(s) and point(s) of view in sources.	✓	✓	
A.2. Situate an informational source in its appropriate contexts (contemporary, historical, cultural).		✓	
A.3. Evaluate sources from multiple perspectives.		✓	
A.4. Understand the differences between a primary and secondary source and use each appropriately to conduct research and construct arguments.		✓	✓
A.5. Read narrative texts critically.		✓	

C.1. Understand and interpret presentations (e.g., speeches, lectures, informal presentations) critically.	✓	✓	
D.1. Construct a thesis that is supported by evidence.			✓
D.2. Recognize and evaluate counter arguments.		✓	
<i>V. Effective Communication</i>			
A.2. Use conventions of standard written English.			✓
B.1. Attribute ideas and information to source materials and authors.			✓

TEKS Standards Addressed

<i>Presidential Speech Analysis - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): Social Studies, Government</i>
<p>113.41.c.29. Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 113.41.c.29.A. use a variety of both primary and secondary valid sources to acquire information and to analyze and answer historical questions. 113.41.c.29.C. understand how historians interpret the past (historiography) and how their interpretations of history may change over time. 113.41.c.29.F. identify bias in written, oral, and visual material.
<p>113.41.c.30. Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 113.41.c.30.A. create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information. 113.41.c.30.B. use correct social studies terminology to explain historical concepts.
<p>113.41.c.32. Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 113.41.c.32.A. use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution. 113.41.c.32.B. use a decision-making process to identify a situation that requires a decision, gather information, identify options, predict consequences, and take action to implement a decision.
<p>113.44.c.1. History. The student understands how constitutional government, as developed in America and expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the U.S. Constitution, has been influenced by ideas, people, and historical documents. The student is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 113.44.c.1.A. explain major political ideas in history, including the laws of nature and nature's God, unalienable rights, divine right of kings, social contract theory, and the rights of resistance to illegitimate government. 113.44.c.1.B. identify major intellectual, philosophical, political, and religious traditions that

Presidential Speech Analysis - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): Social Studies, Government
<p>informed the American founding, including Judeo-Christian (especially biblical law), English common law and constitutionalism, Enlightenment, and republicanism, as they address issues of liberty, rights, and responsibilities of individuals.</p>
<p>113.44.c.7. Government. The student understands the American beliefs and principles reflected in the U.S. Constitution and why these are significant. The student is expected to:</p> <p>113.44.c.7.A. explain the importance of a written constitution.</p> <p>113.44.c.7.B. evaluate how the federal government serves the purposes set forth in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.</p> <p>113.44.c.7.C. analyze how the Federalist Papers such as Number 10, Number 39, and Number 51 explain the principles of the American constitutional system of government.</p> <p>113.44.c.7.D. evaluate constitutional provisions for limiting the role of government, including republicanism, checks and balances, federalism, separation of powers, popular sovereignty, and individual rights.</p> <p>113.44.c.7.F. identify how the American beliefs and principles reflected in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution contribute to both a national identity and federal identity and are embodied in the United States today.</p>
<p>113.44.c.8. Government. The student understands the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution. The student is expected to:</p> <p>113.44.c.8.D. identify the purpose of selected independent executive agencies, including the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and regulatory commissions, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and Federal Communications Commission (FCC).</p> <p>113.44.c.8.E. explain how certain provisions of the U.S. Constitution provide for checks and balances among the three branches of government.</p> <p>113.44.c.8.G. explain the major responsibilities of the federal government for domestic and foreign policy such as national defense.</p> <p>113.44.c.8.H. compare the structures, functions, and processes of national, state, and local governments in the U.S. federal system.</p>
<p>113.44.c.9. Government. The student understands the concept of federalism. The student is expected to:</p> <p>113.44.c.9.A. explain why the Founding Fathers created a distinctly new form of federalism and adopted a federal system of government instead of a unitary system.</p> <p>113.44.c.9.B. categorize government powers as national, state, or shared.</p> <p>113.44.c.9.C. analyze historical and contemporary conflicts over the respective roles of national and state governments.</p> <p>113.44.c.9.D. understand the limits on the national and state governments in the U.S. federal system of government.</p>
<p>113.44.c.10. Government. The student understands the processes for filling public offices in the U.S. system of government. The student is expected to:</p> <p>113.44.c.10.A. compare different methods of filling public offices, including elected and appointed offices at the local, state, and national levels.</p> <p>113.44.c.10.B. explain the process of electing the president of the United States and analyze the Electoral College.</p>

Presidential Speech Analysis

Introduction

In this assignment, you will read and analyze a State of the Union address by a president of the United States. You will research the era in which the speech was written and policy goals discussed in the speech. You will then prepare a 3-5 page report indicating which powers the president could rely upon to accomplish his goals and identifying any areas where he made promises that fell outside his powers.

Directions

Getting Started

1. Take part in the class discussion about presidential powers and the various purposes a presidential State of the Union speech can serve. Listen to the presidential speech shown by your instructor, and discuss what the president's goals were in this speech.
2. Listen carefully as your instructor introduces the assignment. Note the three components of the Investigating phase: 1) researching the time in which the speech was written; 2) enumerating the presidential powers, both formal and implied; and 3) outlining the speech and seeing which powers would be helpful in enacting its various proposals.

Investigating

1. Access the website where your assigned speech can be found. Print a copy of the speech for later use.
2. Do research to determine important issues in the country at the time the speech was written. What foreign affairs were of concern? Was the economy a problem? Take good notes and record your sources. You will be adding a Works Cited page to your report.
3. Do research to determine the political and partisan environment at the time the speech was written. Did the president's political party control both houses of Congress, just one, or neither? What were the results of the most recent elections? For example, had the president just won an election (or reelection) or was the most recent election a "midterm" election in which the president's own political party had lost or won seats?

4. Use your textbook and other sources to enumerate the presidential powers, both formal and implied. One source that might be helpful is Learner.org, out of the Annenberg Center:
http://www.learner.org/courses/democracyinamerica/dia_7/dia_7_topic.html.
5. Read and outline the State of the Union address you have been assigned. As you read and outline, note:
 - a. The speech in the context of its time.
 - b. Statements in the speech that represent specific requests for policy change and those that are political or emotional appeals.
 - c. Statements in the speech that focus on accomplishments of the administration (if it is other than the president's first State of the Union address).
 - d. Presidential powers that apply to the policy proposals in the speech.
 - e. Policies in the speech, if any, that are beyond the power of the presidency to accomplish independently and, therefore, require Congressional approval.
6. Make notes about each statement and argument made by the president and paraphrase what you think each is saying.
7. Organize the information you have collected. Project what you think your introduction to your report will consist of and which points you will want to make in the body of the report.

Drawing Conclusions

1. Write a rough draft of your report.
 - a. Introduce the report by setting the speech in the context of its time—both general current events and partisan political environment.
 - b. For each policy initiative in the speech, report on which formal or implied power would be appropriate to use to accomplish the goal.
 - c. Identify the policies proposed which are beyond the scope of the executive office and, thus, require Congressional approval.
 - d. Students should determine the proportion of the speech that was devoted to foreign policy and that proportion that was devoted to domestic policy. What proportion of the speech was focused on past accomplishments of the administration?
 - e. Conclude with an evaluation of the speech as a whole, in light of the power of its appeals and its proposed policies. This evaluation should involve a discussion of the length, rhetoric, memorable lines (if any), the

partisan/nonpartisan nature of the speech, and whether the president limited his agenda to several key proposals or proposed many new initiatives.

2. Prepare a final version of the report after receiving feedback from either a peer or instructor review. Make sure you have added a Works Cited page to the end of the report.
3. Submit the final draft of your report to your instructor.