Activity 2: Speech Analysis for Barbara Bush and Michelle Obama

In this Activity students will watch/read sections of two graduation speeches by former first ladies, Barbara Bush and Michelle Obama at Wellesley in 1990 and Oberlin in 2015. They will analyze those speeches for key rhetorical concepts and elements.

1. Chart—provoke interest and a response—source material-claims and evidence

**Speech One, Barbara Bush, Wellesley, 1990**

[Barbara Bush Wellesley Speech, 1990](https://abcnews.go.com/US/video/barbara-bushs-memorable-speech-wellesley-college-54555730)

Thank you very, very much, President Keohane. Mrs. Gorbachev, Trustees, faculty, parents, and I should say, Julia Porter, class president, and certainly my new best friend, Christine Bicknell -- and, of course, the Class of 1990. I am really thrilled to be here today, and very excited, as I know all of you must be, that Mrs. Gorbachev could join us.

These -- These are exciting times. They're exciting in Washington, and I have really looked forward to coming to Wellesley. I thought it was going to be fun. I never dreamt it would be this much fun. So, thank you for that.

More than ten years ago, when I was invited here to talk about our experiences in the People's Republic of China, I was struck by both the natural beauty of your campus and the spirit of this place.

Wellesley, you see, is not just a place but an idea -- an experiment in excellence in which diversity is not just tolerated, but is embraced. The essence of this spirit was captured in a moving speech about tolerance given last year by a student body president of one of your sister colleges. She related the story by Robert Fulghum about a young pastor, finding himself in charge of some very energetic children, hits upon the game called "Giants, Wizards, and Dwarfs." "You have to decide now," the pastor instructed the children, "which you are -- a giant, a wizard, or a dwarf?" At that, a small girl tugging at his pants leg, asked, "But where do the mermaids stand?" And the pastor tells her there are no mermaids. And she says, "Oh yes there are -- they are. I am a mermaid."

Now this little girl knew what she was, and she was not about to give up on either her identity, or the game. She intended to take her place wherever mermaids fit into the scheme of things. "Where do the mermaids stand? All of those who are different, those who do not fit the boxes and the pigeonholes?" "Answer that question," wrote Fulghum, "And you can build a school, a nation, or a whole world." As that very wise young woman said, "Diversity, like anything worth having, requires effort -- effort to learn about and respect difference, to be compassionate with one another, to cherish our own identity, and to accept unconditionally the same in others.

You should all be very proud that this is the Wellesley spirit. Now I know your first choice today was Alice Walker -- guess how I know! -- known for The Color Purple. Instead you got me -- known for the color of my hair. Alice Walker's book has a special resonance here. At Wellesley, each class is known by a special color. For four years the Class of '90 has worn the color purple. Today you meet on Severance Green to say goodbye to all of that, to begin a new and a very personal journey, to search for your own true colors.

In the world that awaits you, beyond the shores of Waban -- Lake Waban, no one can say what your true colors will be. But this I do know: You have a first class education from a first class school. And so you need not, probably cannot, live a "paint-by-numbers" life. Decisions are not irrevocable. Choices do come back. And as you set off from Wellesley, I hope that many of you will consider making three very special choices.

The first is to believe in something larger than yourself, to get involved in some of the big ideas of our time. I chose literacy because I honestly believe that if more people could read, write, and comprehend, we would be that much closer to solving so many of the problems that plague our nation and our society.

And early on I made another choice, which I hope you'll make as well. Whether you are talking about education, career, or service, you're talking about life -- and life really must have joy. It's supposed to be fun.

One of the reasons I made the most important decision of my life, to marry George Bush, is because he made me laugh. It's true, sometimes we've laughed through our tears, but that shared laughter has been one of our strongest bonds. Find the joy in life, because as Ferris Bueller said on his day off, "Life moves pretty fast; and you don't stop and look around once in a while, you're going to miss it."

(I'm not going to tell George you clapped more for Ferris than you clapped for George.)

The third choice that must not be missed is to cherish your human connections: your relationships with family and friends. For several years, you've had impressed upon you the importance to your career of dedication and hard work. And, of course, that's true. But as important as your obligations as a doctor, a lawyer, a business leader will be, you are a human being first. And those human connections --- with spouses, with children, with friends -- are the most important investments you will ever make.

At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, winning one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a child, a friend, or a parent.

We are in a transitional period right now -- We are in a transitional period right now, fascinating and exhilarating times, learning to adjust to changes and the choices we, men and women, are facing. As an example, I remember what a friend said, on hearing her husband complain to his buddies that he had to babysit. Quickly setting him straight, my friend told her husband that when it's your own kids, it's *not* called babysitting.

Now maybe we should adjust faster; maybe we should adjust slower. But whatever the era twenty -- whatever the era, whatever the times, one thing will never change: fathers and mothers, if you have children, they must come first. You must read to your children, and you must hug your children, and you must love your children. Your success as a family, our success as a society, depends not on what happens in the White House, but on what happens inside your house.

For over fifty years, it was said that the winner of Wellesley's annual hoop race would be the first to get married. Now they say, the winner will be the first to become a C.E.O. Both -- Both of those stereotypes show too little tolerance for those who want to know where the mermaids stand. So -- So I want to offer a new legend: the winner of the hoop race will be the first to realize her dream -- not society's dreams  -- her own personal dream.

And who -- Who knows? Somewhere out in this audience may even be someone who will one day follow in my footsteps, and preside over the White House as the President's spouse -- and I wish him well.

Well, the controversy ends here. But our conversation is only beginning. And a worthwhile conversation it has been. So as you leave Wellesley today, take with you deep thanks for the courtesy and the honor you have shared with Mrs. Gorbachev and with me.

Thank you. God bless you. And may your future be worthy of your dreams.

**Speech Two, Michelle Obama, 2015**

[Michelle Obama at Oberlin, 2015](https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=michelle+obama+oberlin+speech+video&qs=n&sp=-1&pq=michelle+obama+oberlin+speech+video&sc=0-35&sk=&cvid=789AE964002E431F911E508825826F46&sid=26992977B6D96D9524102414B7096C28&jsoncbid=0&ru=%2fsearch%3fq%3dmichelle%2520obama%2520oberlin%2520speech%2520video%26qs%3dn%26form%3dQBRE%26sp%3d-1%26pq%3dmichelle%2520obama%2520oberlin%2520speech%2520video%26sc%3d0-35%26sk%3d%26cvid%3d789AE964002E431F911E508825826F46&view=detail&mmscn=vwrc&mid=A5EF565386692CEAADE9A5EF565386692CEAADE9&FORM=WRVORC)

May 25, 2015

Remarks by the First Lady of the United States

11:05 A.M. EDT

MRS. OBAMA: Hi! (Laughter and applause.) How are you all doing? (Applause.) Are you sure? (Applause.) Well, let me just tell you, it is beyond a pleasure and an honor to be here with all of you today.

I want to start by thanking President Krislov for that very kind introduction, as well as all of the trustees, the faculty, the staff here at Oberlin. I also want to tell you how proud and how moved I am to receive this honorary degree from this particular school—the first college in America to officially embrace the admission of black students, and the first co-ed school to grant bachelor’s degrees to women. (Applause.)

I should be here today. Oberlin is likely the only college in America that I could have attended nearly two centuries ago, and I am honored to be part of the extraordinary legacy of this great institution. (Applause.)

I also want to take a moment on this Memorial Day to pay tribute to all of the brave men and women who have sacrificed their lives so that we could sit here today, at peace, with rights and freedoms that others around the world can only dream of. I am so proud to honor these American heroes today—and every day—for their extraordinary service to our nation. (Applause.)

And I’m also a little giddy to be joined on stage by another one of my heroes, Marian Wright Edelman. (Applause.) Her moral leadership on behalf of children in this country has inspired me throughout my career, as well as my husband, the President of the United States. (Applause.)

And, graduates, I think we should give another shout-out to your families, of course, all the families. (Applause.) These are the folks who pushed you and supported you. They answered your late-night phone calls even when you were just calling for money. (Laughter.) So on behalf of your students, I just want to show you all some love today, as well. Thank you for creating these fabulous individuals. Well done. (Applause.)

And finally, most of all, I want to congratulate the Oberlin Class of 2015! (Applause.) Look at you! You made it! You’re here! You’re looking good! (Applause.) And I know you worked hard to make it to this moment, didn’t you? (Laughter.) Staying up late writing those papers, studying for exams. Spent hours practicing and performing. You went to countless happy hours, and happy-happy hours at the Feve I hear—(laughter)—I’m going to try one of those burgers for lunch today; that’s all I’m going to have—(laughter)—where of course, parents, that’s where they studied some more.

And on top of all of that, you spent thousands of hours giving back to this community—tutoring kids, playing music for seniors, serving food to folks in need, and of course, mentoring the local young people back there—I see you all—through the Ninde Scholars Program. So proud of you all back there.

And that’s, as the President said, why I’m here today. (Applause.) As he mentioned, my office did this wonderful competition to highlight colleges that are helping underserved young people graduate from high school and then go on to higher education. So by providing tutoring and ACT prep classes, financial aid workshops, and so much more, your Ninde Scholars Program stood out as a shining example of how schools like Oberlin can lift first-generation students into college.

So I’m here today because I’m proud of you all. I really am. I’m inspired by your commitment to service and social justice. And I’m impressed by the community that you all have created here—a warm, supportive, inclusive community that embodies the values that define this school.

And even amidst the joy and excitement of graduation, I know that you may be feeling some real sadness about leaving this community behind. You may also be feeling some real anxiety about venturing out into the world beyond these walls. And I’m not going to lie to you—for many of you, this is going to be a pretty big transition. In fact, I think Dr. Martin Luther King described it well in his commencement address in ’65 when he declared, “Today you bid farewell to the safe security of the academic environment. You prepare to continue your journey on the clamorous highways of life.”

And the truth is, graduates, after four years of thoughtful, respectful discussion and debate here at Oberlin—those seminars where you explored new ideas together, those late-night conversations where you challenged each other and learned from each other—after all of that, you might find yourself a little dismayed by the clamor outside these walls—the name-calling, the negative ads, the folks yelling at each other on TV. After being surrounded by people who are so dedicated to serving others and making the world a better place, you might feel a little discouraged by the polarization and gridlock that too often characterize our politics and civic life.

And in the face of all of that clamor, you might have an overwhelming instinct to just run the other way as fast as you can. You might be tempted to just recreate what you had here at Oberlin—to find a community of like-minded folks and work with them on causes you care about, and just tune out all of the noise. And that’s completely understandable. In fact, I sometimes have that instinct myself—run! (Laughter.)

But today, graduates, I want to urge you to do just the opposite. Today, I want to suggest that if you truly wish to carry on the Oberlin legacy of service and social justice, then you need to run to, and not away from, the noise. (Applause.) Today, I want to urge you to actively seek out the most contentious, polarized, gridlocked places you can find. Because so often, throughout our history, those have been the places where progress really happens—the places where minds are changed, lives transformed, where our great American story unfolds.

For example, think back to the struggle for women’s suffrage and the story of a leading suffragist and Oberlin alum named Lucy Stone. (Applause.) People screamed at her. They spat on her. They even threw prayer books at her as she tried to speak. Her opponents declared that letting women vote was “unnatural,” would lead to child neglect and all kinds of social ills. So I’d say that debate was pretty polarized, wouldn’t you?

And think about President Roosevelt’s struggle to pass the New Deal a few decades later. FDR’s plan for Social Security was called “socialist,” a “fraud on the workingman.” One opponent even stated that it would “end the progress of a great country.” So that debate was pretty contentious, too.

And in the years before Dr. King addressed those Oberlin graduates in ‘65, he and his colleagues faced fire hoses and dogs in Montgomery, beatings on a bridge in Selma, insults and assaults as they sat quietly at lunch counters and marched peacefully down public streets.

And if you think today’s gridlock is bad, let me remind you that it was a good century between the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and the passage of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s. And of all the women at the Seneca Falls women’s suffrage convention in 1848, just one lived to see women cast their votes. Just one.

But these folks didn’t let the ugliness and the obstacles deter them. They didn’t just give up and retreat to the comfortable company of like-minded folks, because they understood that this is how democracy operates. It is loud and messy, and it’s not particularly warm and fuzzy. And believe me, I know this from personal experience. (Laughter.) Over the years, I’ve occasionally run into the noise myself. But I’ve come to realize that most of that clamor is really coming from just a handful of very loud folks out on the fringes.

See, the truth is that the overwhelming majority of people in this country are open-minded and big-hearted. They are smart enough to see through that noise, and they are so hungry for voices that rise above it—smart, compassionate, thoughtful voices like yours.

Now, the process of democracy might not always be as fast or as smooth as we’d like. But the fact is, it works. Generation after generation, this country has become more equal, more inclusive, more fair, more free. My life and so many of your lives are a testament of that truth. But that has only happened because folks like all of you left their comfort zones and made their voices heard.

Just look at the story of Oberlin College. The founders of this school didn’t just decide to admit women and African American students and then pat themselves on the back and say “job well done.” No, even in those early days, folks here at Oberlin were attending anti-slavery meetings, shivering on rough wooden benches in unheated, unfinished buildings. They were joining the Equal Suffrage League and speaking out for women’s right to vote.

They were leading civil rights marches and sit-ins, organizing exchange programs with historically black colleges and universities, and so much more. Because they knew it wasn’t enough to welcome women and African American students to Oberlin if they would only graduate in four years to be second-class citizens in their own country. They knew that our policies matter. They knew that our laws matter. And I know, as President Krislov understands, that electing the right folks matters—it matters a lot.

Now, I don’t know whether your President knows what I was going to say today, but I know that he had some kind words for you all about this issue. But it’s no coincidence that we’re both urging you to get involved in civic life. Because we both know that you cannot fully achieve your goals of service and social justice if you turn away from politics and public policy.

You see, it’s wonderful to volunteer at your local homeless shelter—please do that—but you also need to attend the city council meetings and make sure the zoning laws don’t shut that shelter down. (Applause.) Are you thinking of teaching in an under-served school? If so, I’m glad to hear that. So many kids need you. But you’ve also got to elect good people to your school board and state legislature, because they decide whether you have the resources you need to inspire and empower your students. (Applause.)

Are you planning to rally for marriage equality on the steps of the Supreme Court? I certainly hope so. (Applause.) But I also hope you will knock on doors and make some calls to elect a President who shares your values. Because that President will ultimately choose the justices who decide those cases in the first place. (Applause.)

And finally, while peaceful protest can be powerful, if we truly want to reform our criminal justice system, then we need to come together and do the hard work of changing our laws and policies to reflect our values. (Applause.)

Now, will this be easy? No, of course not. It will be hard. It will be stressful and frustrating, and you’ll probably have to make some painful compromises along the way. After all, Lucy Stone spent years speaking out for partial suffrage -– for allowing women to vote only on things like school issues and local issues—because she realized that full suffrage was just too controversial.

And FDR? Well, after facing all kinds of opposition, he eventually agreed to a Social Security plan that covered only 60 percent of workers. Was he thrilled about that? Probably not. But in the end, FDR realized that 60 percent was a whole lot better than zero percent.

Now, did these compromises make these leaders sellouts? Traitors to their cause? I don’t think so. Instead, I think they knew that if they could just get everyone to take that first step, then folks would keep on moving in the right direction. And they also understood that often, the biggest, most dramatic change happens incrementally, little by little, through compromises and adjustments over years and decades.

And I know that these days, that can seem counterintuitive, because we live in such an instantaneous age. We want everything right away—whether it’s an Uber or your favorite TV show—and we want it tailored to our exact preferences and beliefs. We fill our Twitter feed with voices that confirm, rather than challenge, our views. If we dislike someone’s Facebook post, we just un-follow them, we un-friend them.

And even here at Oberlin, most of the time you’re probably surrounded by folks who share your beliefs. But out in the real world, there are plenty of people who think very differently than you do, and they hold their opinions just as passionately. So if you want to change their minds, if you want to work with them to move this country forward, you can’t just shut them out. You have to persuade them, and you have to compromise with them. That is what so many of our heroes of history have done.

Folks like Lucy Stone and FDR, they didn’t get caught up in their egos or their ideology. They didn’t say “it’s my way or the highway.” Instead, they knew where they wanted to go, and they were strategic and pragmatic about getting there. Because in the end, they understood, as the political scientist Joseph Nye once said, that “The absolutist may avoid the problem of dirty hands, but often at the cost of having no hands at all.”

And, graduates, with a degree from this amazing school, and all the status and connections that degree confers, you don’t get to have no hands. No, you don’t get to be precious or cautious or cynical. No, not when the earth is warming and the oceans are rising. You don’t get to be cynical. Not when too many young people still languish in communities ripped apart by violence and despair. Not when women still make less than men for the same work. Not when millions of girls across the globe never set foot inside a school. (Applause.) No, not when many young people just like you -- the men and women we honor this Memorial Day—have sacrificed their lives for your freedom to make your voice heard. You don’t get to have no hands.

You see, in his speech to those Oberlin graduates 50 years ago, Dr. King urged them, as Julia said, not to sleep through the civil rights revolution that was raging across this country. And, graduates, climate change, economic inequality, human rights, criminal justice -– these are the revolutions of your time. And you have as much responsibility and just as much power to wake up and play your part in our great American story. Because it is absolutely still possible to make a difference. The great moments of our history are not decades in our past; they’re happening right now, today, in our lifetimes.

Just think about the folks who are winning those battles state by state, city by city to ensure that everyone in this country can marry the person they love. (Applause.) Think about how just 10 years ago, gay marriage was legal in just one state in this country—just one—and today, it is legal in 37 states and Washington, D.C. (Applause.)

Think about those elections in 2008 and 2012 when idealistic young people like all of you worked long hours for little money and less sleep, pounding the pavement for months, talking to folks about what was at stake. Think about the millions of folks who got out to vote on Election Day, waiting in the cold and rain in lines that stretched for hours, refusing to leave until they made their voices heard.

And finally, think about how even with all the gridlock and polarization in Washington, we have made so much change these past six years: 12 million new jobs. Sixteen million people who finally have health insurance. Historic agreements to fight climate change. Epic increases in college financial aid. More progress on LGBT rights than any time in our history. (Applause.) And today, it is no longer remarkable to see two beautiful black girls walking their dogs on the South Lawn of the White House lawn. That’s just the way things are now. (Applause.)

See, graduates, this is what happens when you turn your attention outward and decide to brave the noise and engage yourself in the struggles of our time. And that’s why, in his remarks 50 years ago, Dr. King urged the class of ‘65 to “stand up” and “be a concerned generation.” And, graduates, that call to action applies just as much to all of you today.

And I want to be very clear: Every city ordinance, every ballot measure, every law on the books in this country—that is your concern. What happens at every school board meeting, every legislative session—that is your concern. Every elected official who represents you, from dog catcher all the way to President of the United States—they are your concern.

So get out there and volunteer on campaigns, and then hold the folks you elect accountable. Follow what’s happening in your city hall, your statehouse, Washington, D.C. Better yet, run for office yourself. Get in there. Shake things up. Don’t be afraid. (Applause.) And get out and vote in every election—not just the big national ones that get all the attention, but every single election. Make sure the folks who represent you share your values and aspirations.

See, that is how you will rise above the noise and shape the revolutions of your time. That is how you will have a meaningful journey on those clamorous highways of life. And, graduates, that is how you will carry on the proud legacy of this great institution for generations to come.

So, again, I’m proud of you all. I am confident in your ability to do amazing things. And I’m honored to be here to share the beginning of the next phase of that journey with you. We will be there with you every step of the way. So go out there and make it happen.

Thank you all. I wish you the best of luck. God bless. (Applause.)

END

11:29 A.M. EDT

Notes on the Speech-Take notes on each of the following areas

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Bush, 1990 | Obama, 2015 |
| Exigence and purpose-what brings the speaker here?What is their purpose of the speech? Is this explicitly or implicitly made? (where in the speech is this?) |  |  |
| Context/Audience—where is it? What values and beliefs does the speaker share with her audience? |  |  |
| Delivery and Style-how is the speech delivered? What choices does the speaker make to  impact her audience? |  |  |
| Arrangement-how do the introduction and conclusion connect to the purpose? |  |  |
| Ethos-what does or does not give the speaker credibility with this audience? |  |  |
| Evidence-what evidence does the speaker use to support their claim? |  |  |

Write a paragraph on a separate sheet of paper in which you select one of the speeches and respond to the following three questions

* What was the speaker’s purpose?
* What rhetorical choices did the speaker employ to achieve those purposes?
* How were those strategies appropriate (or not appropriate for her audience)