The Art of Argument: Unit Overview

ENG3U, Grade 11 English (University), Unit 2. 14 classes of 75 minutes (about three weeks).

The big question

How do great speakers persuade, and how can we argue as well as they do?

Students study rhetoric through four landmark public domain speeches: Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Frederick Douglass's “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”, Sojourner Truth's 1851 Akron speech (comparing two very different records of it) and Nellie McClung's “Hardy Perennials,” a Canadian suffrage classic. They learn SOAPSTone, the appeals, rhetorical devices and logical fallacies, then research, outline, draft and revise their own argumentative essay with MLA citations. The unit ends with an in-class rhetorical analysis and a soapbox speech. A Reading Packet with all four speeches is included.

Lessons

#	Lesson	Classes	Question	Expectations	What's inside
1	**The Rhetorical Situation**	1	Who, why, when and for whom?	R 1.1, R 1.6, OC 1.7	SOAPSTone; four appeals; Gettysburg Address
2	**The Rhetorician's Toolkit**	1	What makes words memorable?	R 2.3, OC 2.4, W 2.3	Six devices; device hunt; 100-word speech
3	**Frederick Douglass**	1	How can irony be an argument?	R 1.4, R 1.8, R 2.3	“What to the Slave…” (1852); pronouns; structure map
4	**Analysing Rhetoric**	1	How do I explain how a text persuades?	R 1.7, W 2.1, W 2.4	Rhetorical précis; analysis paragraph
5	**Whose Words?**	1	Who controls a speaker's voice?	R 1.8, R 1.7, OC 1.8	Sojourner Truth: Robinson (1851) vs Gage (1863)
6	**Hardy Perennials**	1	Can humour win an argument?	R 1.6, R 2.3, W 2.2	McClung (1915); Canadian suffrage timeline; refutation
7	**Fallacy Court**	1	How can an argument sound right and be wrong?	R 1.7, OC 1.8, OC 2.2	Six fallacies; case files; repair shop
8	**The Op-Ed**	1	What are the moves of an argument?	R 2.1, W 1.1, W 1.2	Original model op-ed; topic and claim
9	**Research Sprint**	1	Which sources can I trust?	W 1.3, W 1.5, M 1.5	SIFT lateral reading; source types; MLA 9; source log
10	**Building the Argument**	1	What links my evidence to my claim?	W 1.4, W 1.5, OC 1.5	Toulmin model; stress test; essay outline

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11	**Drafting**	1	How do I make evidence work?	W 2.1, W 1.4, W 3.4	Evidence sandwich; MLA in-text; introductions
12	**Revising for Style**	1	How do I make it persuasive?	W 2.6, W 2.3, W 2.2	Concision; sentence variety; devices; peer review
13	**Rhetorical Analysis Workshop**	1	Can I analyse a speech on my own?	R 1.7, R 2.3, W 2.1	In-class rhetorical analysis (summative 2)
14	**Soapbox and Reflect**	1	Can I persuade a live audience?	OC 2.3, OC 2.5, W 4.1	Submit essay (summative 1); 90-second speech; reflection

Assessment

Type	In this unit
Assessment for learning	SOAPSTone organizer, device hunt, pronoun tracker, précis, two versions chart, refutation tracker, case files, source log, Toulmin map, outline, drafts, soapbox feedback
Assessment as learning	Peer review, unit reflection
Assessment of learning	Researched argumentative essay (Writing) and in-class rhetorical analysis (Reading and Writing), with rubrics in the Summative Tasks file

Texts

All four speeches are public domain and are included in the Reading Packet:

- **Abraham Lincoln,** the Gettysburg Address (1863), full text
- **Frederick Douglass,** “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (1852), extended extract
- **Sojourner Truth,** Akron speech (1851): excerpts from Marius Robinson's 1851 report and Frances Gage's 1863 version
- **Nellie McClung,** “Hardy Perennials,” In Times Like These (1915), excerpts

An original model op-ed (“Let Us Sleep”) and original fallacy case files are included. Douglass describes slavery directly; the full Gage version of Truth's speech contains slurs and is excerpted without them. The McClung lesson includes a Canadian voting rights timeline showing who was excluded, and invites students to weigh McClung's achievements alongside views now recognized as racist. Teacher notes include guidance for these discussions. Consider adding a contemporary speech by a First Nations, Métis or Inuit speaker from your board's resources.

What's in each lesson

- Teacher lesson plan with expectations, timed sequence, differentiation, look-fors and answer guides
- Slides with speaker notes
- Student handouts and organizers

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- Editable Word and PowerPoint files, plus PDFs

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