

TEACHER GUIDE

1944 DOC. #2: FDR "Fala Speech"

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

FDR began his 1944 campaign with a speech to the Teamsters Union on September 23 in Washington, D.C. This speech became one of the best known of his presidency and was known as "the Fala address" because of the reference to his dog, Fala. In his remarks, FDR lashed out at the Democrats for lying about his administration and for endorsing New Deal programs that they had previously attacked.

Before this speech there had been some concern about Roosevelt's health. People worried about his continuing ability to lead in a forceful way while World War II was still being waged and American troops were dying overseas. FDR knew that all the media would cover this first major speech of his campaign and he put a lot of effort into its content and delivery. Afterwards, even many of his critics in the press like the anti-New Deal *Time* magazine said that Roosevelt still had "the old magic" (Troy 183). Once again it was Roosevelt's personal charm that had won admiration.

These excerpts are from the opening of his speech and from the best-known passage near the end. Together they make up slightly more than 10% of Roosevelt's total speech.

> **Project** the documents and **have students read** the excerpts on the student document.

QUESTION	What are the main messages that Roosevelt is communicating? Give evidence from the text.
SUGGESTED ANSWER	The Republicans are two-faced, only supporting Labor around election time.
EVIDENCE	text: "attack labor as unpatriotic" then "change their tune" (2nd paragraph)
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Republicans have made personal attacks on Roosevelt and his family.
EVIDENCE	sarcastic story about Fala (3rd paragraph)
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Voters should stick with Democrats in a time of war.
EVIDENCE	text: "the same will and the same skill and intelligence and devotion that have already led us so far along the road to victory" (final line in excerpt)
QUESTION	What techniques does Roosevelt use to communicate with voters?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	He speaks as though the listener is an old friend.
EVIDENCE	text: "Well here we are together again"; jokes about how everyone is getting older

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PowerPoint Slide
Text on student handout

SUGGESTED ANSWER	He mixes ridicule, humor, and seriousness.
EVIDENCE	starts out acting familiar and making jokes, then tells a sarcastic story about Fala, and ends on a serious note about the war
SUGGESTED ANSWER	He appeals to unity.
EVIDENCE	use of first person plural—"we" and "us"—throughout
QUESTION	Who are the target audiences for this speech? Explain how you know.
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Target audiences include the Teamsters who were present and labor audiences across the country, and the general public.
EVIDENCE	FDR focused on the Republicans' weak stand on labor issues right away knowing that union members would react
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Another target audience would be the general public.
EVIDENCE	Roosevelt knew that his first speech of the campaign would be covered nationally by the media
QUESTION	The accompanying photo shows FDR flanked by the Presidents of the AFL and Teamsters Unions. What messages does this give about Roosevelt? What is your evidence?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	FDR is a friend to the labor movement and he is warm and funny.
EVIDENCE	his companions are labor leaders; he has a relaxed smile in front of the microphone; the man to his right is laughing and smiling at his comments

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The American Heritage Dictionary defines charisma as "a rare quality or power attributed to those persons who have demonstrated an exceptional ability for leadership and for securing the devotion of large numbers of people." What other presidential candidates have had charisma? Does charisma make a good President?

Discuss how and why humor can be used effectively to attack an opponent.

Do you think the *New York Times* took an editorial position on Roosevelt's reelection bid by running the text of his speech?

Discuss the advantages of an incumbent President in gaining free media coverage. Is this fair?

ADDITIONAL INFO

Of his three opponents for reelection—Landon, Willkie, and Dewey—it was only Dewey that Roosevelt personally disliked. This was in part because Dewey was the only one who had made personal attacks on Roosevelt and his family. FDR was particularly angered by Dewey's suggestion that there was a Communist influence on his administration. Roosevelt called the 1944 campaign "the meanest campaign of his life" (Boller 262). The Teamsters speech was the first of five major speeches that Roosevelt made in the fall of 1944. He spoke both to respond to his critics and to demonstrate that his health was not an issue.

The Fala speech provoked unexpected praise from his critics and criticism from his followers. *Time* magazine was usually anti-FDR in their coverage but they praised the Fala speech: "He was like a veteran virtuoso playing a piece he has loved for years, who fingers his way through it with a delicate fire, a perfection of tuning and tone, and an assurance that no young player, no matter how gifted, can equal. The President was playing what he loves to play – politics" (Boller 263).

On the other hand some of his long-time supporters were disappointed. Although the White House mail ran 8 to 1 in favor of this speech, 80% of letters to the editor at the time criticized it. Mrs. Watkins of Owensboro, KY, wrote asking Roosevelt not to give any more campaign speeches: "You are so far above such things, and I hope to keep my memory of you as this ideal President" (Troy 184).

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Attack
Class/Labor
Media Bias