

# A Course on Discourse

## NIE Lesson Plan

**Lesson Grade Level:** High School

**Lesson Subject Area:** U.S. History

**Essential Question:** How does media influence public opinion?

**Background Information:** Lincoln presented his Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865. This speech has been widely acknowledged as one of the most remarkable documents in American history. The London Spectator reported, "We cannot read it without a renewed conviction that it is the noblest political document known to history, and should have for the nation and the statesmen he left behind him something of a sacred and almost prophetic character."

Journalist Noah Brooks, an eyewitness to the speech, said that as Lincoln advanced from his seat, "a roar of applause shook the air, and, again and again repeated, finally died away on the outer fringe of the throng, like a sweeping wave upon the shore. Just at that moment the sun, which had been obscured all day, burst forth in its unclouded meridian splendor, and flooded the spectacle with glory and with light." Brooks said Lincoln told him the next day, "Did you notice that sunburst? It made my heart jump."

According to Brooks, the audience received the speech in "profound silence," although some passages provoked cheers and applause. "Looking down into the faces of the people, illuminated by the bright rays of the sun, one could see moist eyes and even tearful faces..., but chiefly memorable in the mind of those who saw that second inauguration must still remain the tall, pathetic, melancholy figure of the man who, then inducted into office in the midst of the glad acclaim of thousands of people, and illumined by the deceptive brilliance of a March sunburst, was already standing in the shadow of death."

**Main Lesson – Document Analysis:** Read Lincoln's second inaugural address. Log onto Pennsylvania Civil War Newspapers at <http://digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu> and access a historic newspaper that was located close to your hometown from March 5, 1865. Read the news coverage and opinions of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address.

**Read today's edition of your local newspaper** and locate an item about a current national issue. Compare and contrast presidential news coverage in 1865 and 2009.

**Read today's newspaper.** Locate an item about a current national issue. Compare and contrast presidential news coverage in 1865 and 2009.

### A Course on Discourse

Compare and contrast presidential news coverage in 1865 and 2009. Compare coverage of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address in 1865 to presidential news coverage in today's edition of the newspaper. Explain how news coverage can affect public opinion.

- Read Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address.
- Log onto Pennsylvania Civil War Newspapers at <http://digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu> and access a historic newspaper that was located close to your hometown a few days after Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865. Read the news coverage and opinions of Lincoln's second inaugural.
- Read today's edition of your local newspaper and locate an item about a current national issue.
- Identify words and rhetoric that set the tone of the author.
- Explain how media coverage can affect public opinion.

### Resource:

Pennsylvania Civil War newspapers at <http://digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu>.

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### PA Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening

1.1.11B, 1.3.11E, 1.6.11F

### PA Academic Standards for History

8.1.12B, 8.1.12C, 8.1.12D, 8.1.9B, 8.1.9C, 8.1.9D, 8.2.9B, 8.3.9A

### PA Academic Standards for Civics and Government

5.2.12D, 5.3.12J

## Second Inaugural Address Washington, D.C.

March 4, 1865

At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it—all sought to avert it. While the inaugural [sic] address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war—seeking to dissolve [sic] the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has his own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by

whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—ferently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether"

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are

in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.



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