

SECTION: Post-Tragedy Communication

RATIONALE

Looking at the events surrounding September 11 from a communication perspective gives new insight to the tragedy. During the public speaking course, students have learned skills necessary for effective communication. This section seeks to contextualize those skills while also providing historical significance. These lessons could serve as part of a larger section on political rhetoric or broken into individual lessons to meet the needs of student coursework.

GRADE LEVEL

9-12

OBJECTIVES

- Students, as part of a group, will write and deliver an executive consolation speech as part of a post-tragedy scenario.
- Students will compare and contrast their speeches to former President George W. Bush's September 11 Address to the Nation.
- Students will analyze the response of various media outlets to the September 11 attacks and their similarities to executive consolation speeches.

LENGTH

Three days

LESSONS

- Executive Consolation Speeches LIVE
- Analyzing Bush's Address to the Nation
- Comedy After Tragedy: A 9/11 Case Study

LESSON 1: Executive Consolation Speech Writing LIVE

Start class with a short compilation of video of live news coverage of September 11. A 5-minute video like this would work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HcX3iffQcI>

Then, split the class into three groups. Tell the class that there has been a national tragedy and they should await their briefing. Separate them so that they cannot hear the other groups. Go to the first group and give them their briefing while the other groups wait. Each group takes the class period to prepare a three-minute “Address to the Nation”. Brief each group with their tragedy separately. Require the groups to assign roles to each member (i.e. scribe, researcher, editor, etc.) and let them work with minimal interruption by the instructor.

Group 1: Terrorist attack

- Bombing in Times Square on New Year’s Eve
- Suspect is unknown at the time
- Dozens injured and at least 25 killed
- Bomb was left in a trashcan
- Parts were aired on live television, as some telecasts of the event were scanning the crowd

Group 2: Mass shooting

- University of Oklahoma
- Gunman was a disgruntled student
- Name of shooter has not been released
- Victims include 11 dead and 5 seriously injured
- Murder-suicide

Group 3: Natural disaster

- Tornados across the Midwest
- Kansas was hardest hit
- At least 38 killed and countless others injured
- Millions of dollars in damage
- An elementary school was hit head-on, which accounted for the largest number of fatalities

Assignment: Write a two-minute “Address to the Nation”. Post-tragedy speeches are also referred to as “Executive Consolation,” so your aim is to console the nation while remaining emotionally strong. This could be the defining moment for a president, so take special care to stay both serious and solemn. This is a manuscript speech, considering that it is a live address to the nation and every word must be written and executed perfectly.

Provide students this URL for reference:

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/01/13/us/20110113_CONSOLATION_INTERACTIVE.html?ref=us&_r=0

LESSON 2: Executive Consolation Speeches and Viewing of Bush's "Address to the Nation"

INSTRUCTIONS

Start with a representative from each group delivering their speech.

DEBRIEFING

Q1: What did you find most difficult about yesterday's assignment?

Q2: How do you overcome the lack of information when writing the speech?

Then, show the class Bush's Address to the Nation as students read along with the transcript, which can be found here:

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911addresstothetation.htm>.

Optional: You might have students annotate the transcripts for speech parts you have covered previously.

DEBRIEFING

Q3: Why was it necessary for the post-tragedy speech to be read from a manuscript?

Q4: How was your speech similar to the president's speech? What were the differences?

WRITING PROMPT

In a paragraph, answer the following question: What line from President Bush's Address to the Nation stands out the most to you and why?

LESSON 3: Comedy After Tragedy: A 9/11 Case Study

INSTRUCTIONS

Put the quotation “Comedy is tragedy plus time” on the board as a bell ringer activity or an opening discussion.

Then, watch each of the following videos with your class. Explain the significance of each to contextualize the video before showing. You might decide to entertain a light discussion after each video or hold most of the commentary for a debriefing session at the end.

Jon Stewart’s “The Daily Show” after 9/11:

<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/1q93jy/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-september-11--2001>

SNL’s Cold Open after 9/11:

<http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/911-tribute-with-mayor-giuliani/n11612?snl=1>

CNN’s “Being Funny after 9/11” (*skip 1:20 to 2:10 to censor*)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBO_98DzyiQ

Ellen hosting the Emmys after 9/11 (cancelled **TWICE**/worried about possible attack):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=km69WeUTf44>

DEBRIEFING

Q1: Why do you think some comedians sought to validate our mourning? (i.e. It’s okay to feel this way)

Q2: Why do you think Jon Stewart decided to go off script at times?

Q3: Famed SNL performer Amy Poehler has spoken at length about her experience starting her career with the show on the first episode after the attacks. The show is a New York City institution. What was so symbolic about Mayor Rudy Giuliani being present for the opening of the show?

Q4: How does Ellen manage to get a terrified audience to laugh?

Q5: A lot of the talk about comedy after tragedy centers around the idea of getting “back to business.” What does that phrase mean to you?

WRITING PROMPT

In a paragraph, answer the following prompt: What made comedians so effective at consoling our nation after the tragic events of September 11?