



What makes a speech great?

Rhetoric

Presenter:

Great speeches have moved, persuaded and rallied people for generations. But there are some fundamental elements that go into making a speech great. Simon Lancaster, one of the country's leading speech writers reveals some of these basic rules which date back to Ancient Greece.

SIMON LANCASTER

The master of rhetoric was Aristotle back in around 350 BC and he wrote this wonderful text called "Rhetoric" which to me is still the bible. Aristotle said that rhetoric was based upon three things. You have Ethos, which is the character of the speaker. His credibility whether or not the audience trust him. And then you have pathos, which is the emotions of the audience. And then you have logos which is the reasoning of the argument.

Presenter

Rhetoric the art of persuading and pleasing people was a valued part of a traditional education and many of the key elements of rhetoric still hold good to this day. Tom Clarke is the editor of Historic 20th Century Speeches.

Tom Clarke

Traditionally rhetoric was an elite activity. What changed it was the advent of democracy where suddenly the elite had to reach out beyond their own in order to try and change people's minds. The modern age in rhetoric really begins with an address that lasted only two minutes in 1863 at Gettysburg

Presenter

Abraham Lincoln delivered the famous Gettysburg Address during the American Civil War in 1863. It stands out for its simplicity and contains all the aspirations that a modern democracy strives for.

Tom Clarke

It marked a turning point in the way that the elite if you like or the powerful, the politicians communicated with the public at large and it was just a wonderful simple speech. It was something like two hundred and sixty one words in total and two hundred and five of those

were one syllable and I love it because of that. But of course it had that terrific sound bite to die for about government of the people by the people for the people, which is technically a work of genius.

Presenter

However clever the rhetoric or skilful the speaker, Tom Clarke believes that a speech is remembered only if it captures the zeitgeist, the spirit of the time.

Tom Clarke

I think that the speeches that we really remember are those that for us define a personality or those that in some cases demolish a personality or rally a cause in a way that it's not been rallied before and so we can look back then and identify the speech as something that changed history.

“But on this January night, at this defining moment in history, you have done what the cynics said we couldn't do.”

Presenter

Barack Obama speaking in January, 2008 after he won Iowa's democratic nomination in the race for the American Presidential Election.

Tom Clarke

That had a ring of authenticity about it both because he wasn't white and also because it was of course true. Every black activist, every white racist, had said that this day would never come and him contradicting what everyone had agreed on before that simply by saying it came from him and it moved the audience and it defined the moment.