SOME HISTORY

SAT PREP NOTES 6: RHETORICAL FEATURES IN THE GETTYBURG'S ADDRESS

(Web resource: https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Gettysburg-Address/rhetorical-devices-used-in-the-gettysburg-address/)

Allusion

The phrase "four score and seven" is an allusion, or reference to another person or document. Here Lincoln is echoing the Bible's language for the life of a human. Psalm 90 gives the standard life as "threescore years and ten." Lincoln uses other allusions throughout his speech. He concludes his first sentence with a more explicit allusion to the Declaration of Independence by using the line "that all men are created equal." This is also an appeal to a shared value, the value of equality.

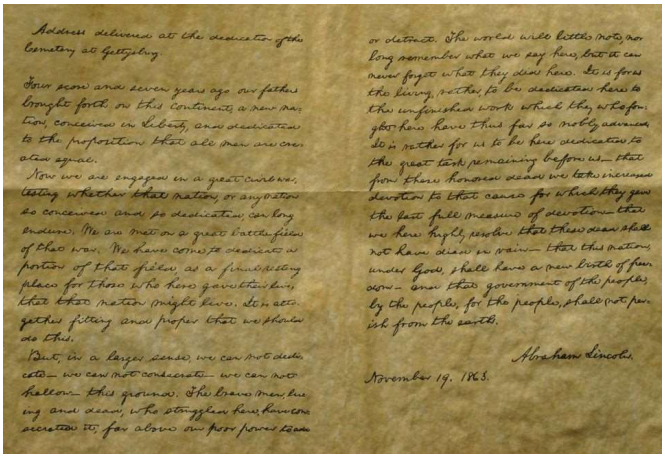
Psalm 90:10 The days of our years are ***threescore years and ten;*** and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Allusion

As Lincoln opens his speech with an allusion to the Declaration, he closes it with an allusion to the Constitution. The Preamble to the Constitution begins with the words "We the people." By using "the people," Lincoln alludes to that crucial document. He thus links the two great founding documents of the United States as he is trying to link the splintered country. Lincoln also uses his allusions to create structural unity in his speech. He opens with an allusion to the Bible, and in his final sentence refers explicitly to God. Opening and closing with religious references, and opening and closing with references to the country's foundational documents, creates an especially strong sense of unity.

Archaic Language

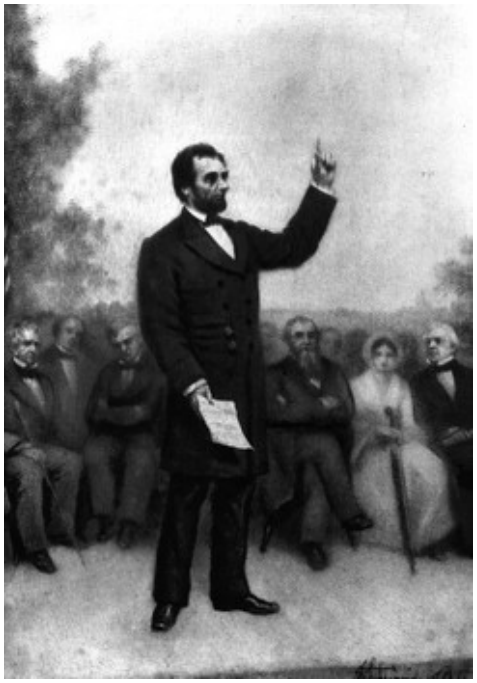
Lincoln opens the speech with archaic language, the phrase "four score and seven." Using archaic language, or language older than is used in daily life, is a rhetorical marker. This phrase signals that what follows will be distinct from daily discourse because the language used is special and elevated.



Contrast

Lincoln uses contrast in his second paragraph: some died so that others, and the entire nation, could live. The specific structure of this contrast, starting with the negative element and ending with the positive, is a rhetorical tradition. It is a way of emphasizing the second term.

Lincoln continues his use of contrasts in the third paragraph: "living and dead," "add or detract," and so on. He follows these simple contrasting pairs with a larger contrast or antithesis, arguing the world won't remember what he says, but it will remember what the dead soldiers did. This section combines multiple contrasting concepts: living and dead, speech and deed, remembering and forgetting, which moves from simple contrast to a larger rhythm.

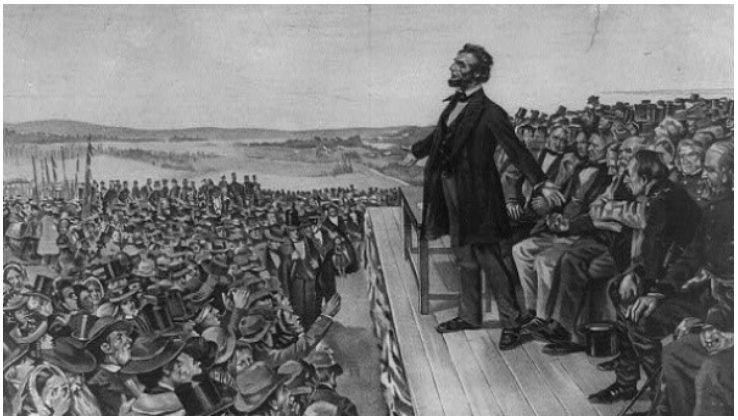


Classical Rhetorical Authority

Classical rhetoric identified three primary sources of rhetorical authority: ethos, logos, and pathos. When Lincoln refers to the Declaration of Independence, he appeals to shared values, namely the value of equality. By starting with a statement his entire audience perceives to be true, Lincoln borrows the authority of that assumed truth for the rest of his speech. This generates and applies ethos: rhetorical authority that depends on the identity and character of the speaker. He also introduces a logical argument—logos—in this first paragraph: the idea that the nation was dedicated to a specific proposition.

Classical Rhetorical Authority

Lincoln's second paragraph applies the other classical source of rhetorical authority, pathos, or an appeal to emotion. By addressing emotionally charged topics (death, bravery, struggle, sacredness), Lincoln evokes emotion in his audience. He ends the second paragraph with another reference to shared values: the idea that it is appropriate to honor those killed in war.



His first paragraph also applies the rhetorical quality of *kairos*, being timely or particularly appropriate for a specific audience and place: Lincoln locates his speech in a specific place and time and draws persuasive power from that particular setting. The simplest element of *kairos* is often overlooked: Lincoln is giving a speech during war. He intends this speech to rally support for his cause; however, he goes beyond this. In establishing this specific position, Lincoln redefines it. Lincoln and his audience are not just at Gettysburg to dedicate a national cemetery, important as this task may be. They are there to establish a relationship with the Declaration of Independence: these men fought and died to carry out the mission of the Declaration.

Euphemism

Lincoln uses euphemism in his second paragraph when he calls a cemetery a "final resting place." The battlefield he was dedicating as a cemetery had been more like a slaughterhouse. When the Battle of Gettysburg was done, the corpses of more than 7,000 men and 5,000 horses or mules lay rotting in the field.

Inclusive Language

Lincoln follows his opening phrase with inclusive language, using the phrase "our fathers." Given the rate of immigration to the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries, this was not literally true for many of Lincoln's listeners, whose fathers and mothers would have moved to North America after the founding of the republic; however, by using inclusive language, he invites everyone to join a shared American heritage.

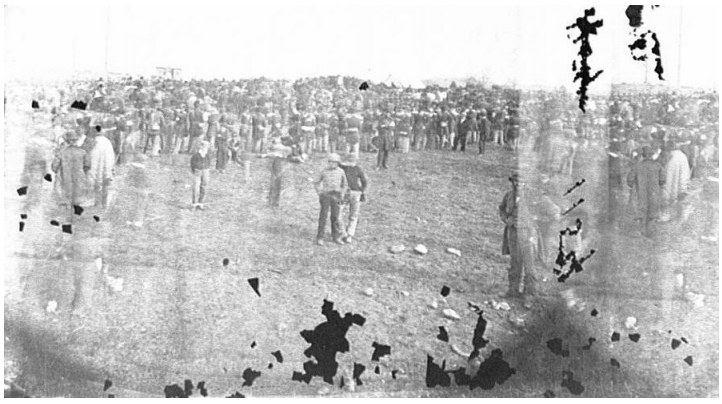
Lincoln opens his second paragraph with more inclusive language, stating, "We are engaged in a great civil war." Though Lincoln was president at the time he gave this address, and his fellow speaker was one of the most famous in America, in referring to his audience as "we" he elevates them all to the same level.

Metaphor

Metaphor means using language in a nonliteral fashion, linking two things in a way that shows they share some characteristic. Metaphor often uses a physical image to illustrate a more abstract concept. Lincoln uses metaphor when he speaks of the nation's fathers conceiving the nation, or bringing it forth: this starts an extended biological metaphor of conception and birth that Lincoln continues through the speech. He returns to this biological metaphor in his final line, referring to a "new birth of freedom." This provides yet another source of structural unity.

Repetition

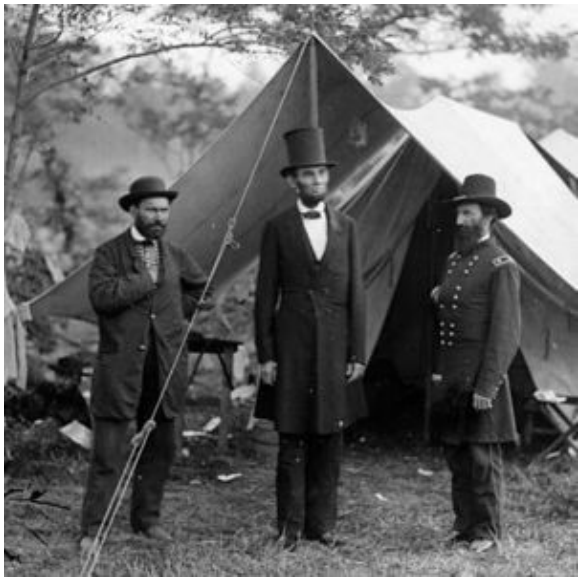
Through his second paragraph, Lincoln uses "we," repeating it several times. This establishes a pattern of anaphora, a rhetorical technique in which the same word starts several clauses, verses, or sentences. It also establishes the first of Lincoln's several triads or triplets in the speech: the first three sentences in the second paragraph all start with "we." Grouping ideas this way gives Lincoln the chance to emphasize this concept. In the middle of a civil war, when the nation is sharply divided, repeating "we" emphasizes and creates a shared national unity.



In his third paragraph Lincoln uses anaphora again, starting each clause with "we can not." In doing so, Lincoln constructs another triad/triplet. This one emphasizes what he and the audience "can not" do, underscoring its importance. Using multiple verbs to express the same concept, as Lincoln does here, is a rhetorical technique called *disjunctio*. Speakers use it to slow a speech and guide listeners to dwell on a concept.

Shared Knowledge

In his opening line, Lincoln refers to shared knowledge (another rhetorical technique, also called a commonplace), as he alludes to another document. He assumes his audience will know the Declaration of Independence was signed 87 years before the ceremony at Gettysburg.



Speech Structure: Greek Funeral Oration

Though his audience could not have known it, Lincoln applied rhetorical devices to this famous speech before he spoke a word through his choice of structure. Lincoln organized his speech using the classical rhetorical structure of the Greek funeral oration. In those speeches it was common for speakers to spend the first portion praising the dead (the *epainesis*), and the second portion giving advice to the living (the *parainesis*). Lincoln does this here.