

'SPEECH TO THE TROOPS AT TILBURY' BY QUEEN ELIZABETH¹

(SPEECH)

My loving people,

We have been persuaded by some that are careful of our safety, to take heed how we commit our selves to armed multitudes, for fear of treachery; but I assure you I do not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people. Let tyrants fear, I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good-will of my subjects; and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field. I know already, for your forwardness you have deserved rewards and crowns; and We do assure you in the word of a prince, they shall be duly paid you. In the mean time, my lieutenant general² shall be in my stead, than whom never prince commanded a more noble or worthy subject; not doubting but by your obedience to my general, by your concord in the camp, and your valour in the field, we shall shortly have a famous victory over those enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people.

Notes:

1. Delivered by Elizabeth to the land forces assembled at Tilbury (Essex) to repel the anticipated invasion of the Spanish Armada, 1588.
2. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; he was the queen's favorite, once rumored to be her lover.

Questions for “Speech to the Troops at Tilbury” by Queen Elizabeth

LEVEL 1

General Understanding

- What is the rhetorical situation of this speech? How do we know?
- What event is about to take place? How do you know?

Key Details

- What can you infer about the social status of the queen’s audience?
- What concerns might her subjects have about her? Which parts of the speech reveal this?
- What is the audience’s attitude toward women as leaders? Be sure to use evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- What might some of her subjects be expecting in exchange for their service?

LEVEL 2

Vocabulary

- What is the tone of the passage? Point to specific words or phrases that support your thinking.
- Why does the queen say, “Let tyrants fear”? What purpose does this serve?
- Where does the queen say she places her “chiefest strength and safeguard”? What purpose does this statement serve?

Structure

- This is a very short speech, fewer than 400 words. Why would the queen choose to spend so few words on such an important topic?
- Where does Queen Elizabeth consider the opposition’s viewpoint on her suitability as a leader? Why does she do this?

Author’s Craft

- How does Elizabeth use emotion, or pathos, to appeal to her audience? Where do you see it?
- How does Queen Elizabeth create credibility or ethos in her speech?
- How does Queen Elizabeth create “common ground” with her people? Use specific lines from the text.
- Why does she address her audience as “my loving people”?
- At one point in the speech, Queen Elizabeth says, “I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general.” Does she contradict this statement later on in the text? Why would she do this?

LEVEL 3

Author's Purpose

- Why does the queen mention that she has been warned against meeting with her own people?
- Though she places herself on the same level as her subjects, where in the speech does Queen Elizabeth reveal the inequalities of power in the text?

Intertextual Connections

- Think of other successful speeches you have read, such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" or the Gettysburg Address.
 - Consider the rhetorical situation of each speech, and compare the use of rhetorical strategies to Queen Elizabeth's.
 - How do the audience and purpose change the use of techniques?
 - Which remain the same?

LEVEL 4

Opinion With Evidence or Argument

- This speech is considered one of the most successful pieces of rhetoric delivered up until its time, especially given the social context in which it was delivered.
 - On a separate piece of paper, evaluate the effectiveness of Queen Elizabeth's speech. Was it convincing or not? Provide specific evidence (at least two quotations) to support your thinking.