

National Theatre



The Power of Speech

Learning Guide



Michael Sheen as Nye Bevan. Photo by Johan Persson, 2024

Speeches and speech writing: developing oracy in your classroom

These resources were developed by experienced English and Media Teacher and oracy specialist Kathryn Lam. They are designed for teachers to use to support the development of oracy skills in the classroom with students in Key Stage 4 and above. They can be used alongside the study of the National Theatre production of *Nye* or as standalone resources.

In addition to these resources, you might like to explore our extension resources which explore the use of rhetoric in drama, using examples from National Theatre and National Theatre Collection productions.

Link to GCSE:

The resources here reflect the demands of the English Programmes of Study and develop and consolidate skills needed for GCSE reading and writing assessments. Further, the resources here could be used to support the spoken language endorsement.

These resources can be adapted to be delivered in single lesson or a series of lessons creating a short scheme of learning for non-fiction reading skills and persuasive/transactional writing skills.

Contents

About Nye Bevan	4
The need for oracy	5
Warming up	7
finding your voice	
Nye Bevan's rhetoric	10
exploring the voices of others	
Extracts from Bevan's speeches	12
Implementation	16
developing your voice	
Example mind-map/plan	17
Speech planning sheet	18
Delivery	20
performing your voice	
Assessment criteria	21
my voice is powerful	

About Nye Bevan

From campaigning at the coalfield to leading the battle to create the NHS, Aneurin ‘Nye’ Bevan is often referred to as the politician with greatest influence on our country without ever being Prime Minister.

Born on 15 November 1897 in Monmouthshire, Bevan was the son of a coal miner and a seamstress. He was one of ten children, only six of whom survived childhood. He left school at the age of 13 and, like his father, initially worked as a miner. He quickly became involved in local miners’ union politics and was elected Chairman of the Union Lodge at the age of just nineteen. From there he went on to become a local Labour councillor and won a scholarship to the Central Labour College in London. On returning to Wales, he endured several years of unemployment, before being elected as MP for Ebbw Vale in 1929.

As an MP, Bevan regularly went into battle with both the opposition and his own party. He fought against a system that perpetuated poverty and injustice and was a critic of Winston Churchill during World War Two. In 1945, Prime Minister Clement Attlee appointed Bevan as Minister for Health and Housing. Bevan is probably most famous for founding the National Health Service in 1948.

As a child, Bevan had a severe stammer, which he learnt to manage through reciting long passages by famous writers. He is often noted as someone who became a great orator in spite of his stammer and was a particular hero of fellow stammerer and more recent Labour politician, Ed Balls. Ed Balls gave the tenth annual Aneurin Bevan Lecture, in which he discussed this. You can find the speech [here](#).

When interviewed by the [Guardian](#)’s Kate Wyver in February 2024, playwright Tim Price said ‘If you were going to ask a small child what a politician should be, Nye was it. He got into politics because he wanted to make a difference and he didn’t compromise until he’d made it.’

If you would like to find out more about Bevan’s life, you can read about it on the [Aneurin Bevan Society website](#).

The need for oracy:

In today's rapidly changing world, the ability to effectively communicate, articulate ideas, and engage in meaningful dialogue has become more crucial than ever. As highlighted in the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) document "Speak for Change," oracy, the development of speaking and listening skills, holds immense significance in secondary classrooms.

Oracy serves as the cornerstone of academic success, social mobility, and personal empowerment for students across diverse backgrounds and abilities. In the secondary classroom, where students are navigating complex subject matter and grappling with diverse perspectives, the need for robust oracy skills cannot be overstated.

Effective oracy skills empower students to express themselves with clarity, confidence, and conviction, enabling them to participate actively in classroom discussions, debates, and collaborative projects. By honing their ability to articulate ideas, ask probing questions, and engage in respectful dialogue, students cultivate critical thinking, empathy, and leadership qualities essential for success in school and beyond.

Furthermore, oracy fosters inclusive learning environments where all voices are valued, respected, and heard. It provides a platform for students to share their unique perspectives, challenge prevailing assumptions, and contribute meaningfully to the collective pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

In the dynamic landscape of the 21st century, where communication technologies are reshaping how we interact and connect with one another, the cultivation of oracy skills takes on added significance. By equipping students with the tools and confidence to navigate diverse communication contexts, including digital platforms, the secondary classroom prepares them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent global society.

In light of these considerations, it is evident that oracy holds immense potential to enrich teaching and learning experiences in the secondary classroom, empowering students to become articulate, engaged, and empathetic communicators poised to make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world at large. Like the skills of reading and writing, oracy skills must be discretely and explicitly taught.

These values of inclusivity, empowerment, and critical engagement echo, support, and consolidate the democratic socialist views championed by Nye Bevan. As a leading advocate for social justice, equality, and democratic participation, Bevan recognized the transformative power

of effective communication in advancing his vision of a more equitable and compassionate society. In embracing oracy as a fundamental aspect of education, Bevan's democratic socialist ethos is upheld, empowering students to become articulate, engaged, and empathetic communicators poised to challenge injustice and champion the common good.

Warming up — finding your voice:

The first thing necessary in speech writing is finding your voice. Use these exercises to prepare students for voicing their ideas. Creating an environment that is welcoming and low stakes can encourage even the most reluctant speaker to contribute to discussion. As teacher facilitating ownership of ideas and opinions, recognising even the smallest contributions can help to create the climate for oracy and empower students.

Helpful thinking:

- These activities can be used individually as a warm up to a single lesson or used together as an oracy lesson that introduces key thinking and the topics of the unit.
- You may wish to consider the physical layout of your room to enable you to best create opportunities for speaking and listening: would a circular layout or horseshoe be more conducive to discussion? Grouped tables rather than linear?

Depending on your class' experience of oracy and time available, you may wish to use a range of the below oracy activities:

1. **Word association games** - give students a word linked to the topic or theme; students should respond with the first word that they associate with this prompt.
2. **Description drawing** — these could be photos or paintings that link to this topic or another topic you want to use to contextualise your students' thinking. In pairs, Student As can see an image that they then describe to Student Bs. After drawing compare to the actual image. Pairs then swap and repeat the process with a new image. After the final comparison between the drawn image and the original, consider which was easier, describing or drawing from instruction? What made for successful partnership? Students consider how do these communication skills help them in your lesson and subject, other subjects in school and outside of school?
3. **Survival** — each student chooses an everyday item, they can say it or write it down. Next, give them a survival scenario — stranded on a desert island, fighting off a zombie apocalypse, responding to a natural disaster. Students in 3-4s persuade their group that their item is the most effective for survival. Feedback to whole class.

4. Where do you stand? — Give students a statement linked to the topic or theme. Students place themselves on a continuum set up in the room; one end is completely agree, the other is completely disagree. Taking a selection of students, ask them to justify and explain their view on the statement — why do they think this? Encourage students to build or challenge the ideas given by other students to help develop their skills of justification and evaluation.

Helpful ideas:

- Ask a student from the most extreme end of the continuum to explain their thinking, invite a student at the alternative viewpoint to respond to their thinking.
- Begin with statements that engage your students' interests to encourage participation such as:
 - Homework is an important part of school life.
 - All social media should raise their age limit restrictions to 16+.
 - Young people only care about the views of influencers and getting likes on social media.
 - Access to fast internet is a fundamental human right in the 21st century.

If you wish to develop this further, you could use some suggested topics linked to the work of Nye Bevan suitable for all ranges of ability:

- Healthcare is a fundamental human right, and every individual should have access to free and comprehensive medical services, regardless of their financial status.
- We need to use taxes so people should not have to pay for healthcare and everyone can access it.
- The government has a responsibility to actively address income inequality and ensure a fair distribution of wealth to promote social justice and equality.
- The government should make sure everyone has a fair chance to have enough money and opportunities so everyone can have a good life.
- Labor unions play a crucial role in advocating for workers' rights and should have the legal right to engage in negotiating with employers.
- Workers should be able to work together and ask for better pay and conditions at work.

- Teenagers should be allowed to vote at 16 to allow all parts of society representation in the democratic running of the country.
- Everyone should have a say in how the country is run and the government should listen to what people say.
- Colonialism and imperialism are unjust systems that infringe upon the rights and sovereignty of colonised peoples.
- It is unfair for some countries to control others and take away their freedoms, imposing their own laws and views. Each country should be able to make their own choices.
- All efforts should be made to promote decolonization and self-determination.
- We should help countries that were once colonies or run by another country to become independent and make their own choices.
- International cooperation and diplomacy are essential for resolving conflicts and addressing global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and human rights violations.
- Countries need to work together and talk to each other to solve big problems like pollution and poverty.
- Government policies should prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable members of society, including children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities, to ensure their well-being and dignity.
- The government should make sure that people who need help the most, like children and the elderly get what they need to live a good life.
- The welfare state plays a vital role in providing a safety net for individuals and families facing economic hardship and should be expanded to offer more comprehensive social services and support.
- The government should make sure there is help available to those who don't have much money such as giving them food and shelter.
- Socialism offers a viable alternative to capitalist systems, promoting collective ownership of resources and the equitable distribution of wealth to benefit society as a whole.
- Society shouldn't just focus on making money for a few people. We should share resources and make sure everyone has what they need.

Nye Bevan's rhetoric — exploring the voices of others

Exploring rhetorical devices

Rhetoric can be described as the art of effective speaking and persuasion by implementing a range of linguistic devices.

A helpful mnemonic to remember a range of rhetorical techniques is:

PERSUADE

- P** Pronouns — using 'you', 'we', 'us' can create a relationship between the speaker and audience making your argument more personal.
- E** Emotive language — encouraging your listener to have an emotional response to your ideas will help to make your message increasingly persuasive.
- R** Rhetorical questions/repetition/rule of three — these techniques emphasise your key messages, and encourage your listener to consider their own views on the topic.
- S** Statistics — makes your argument more convincing and credible.
- U** Use of an authority figure — using the voice of an expert adds trustworthiness and credibility to your ideas.
- A** Anecdote/alliteration — using anecdotes encourage your listener to identify with your perspective and can be increasingly relatable. Alliteration will help to emphasise key phrases for your listener to consider.
- D** Description and imagery — creating a vivid picture for your listener encourages engagement and
- E** Exaggeration — using superlatives and exaggeration draws attention to key points and can create an emotional impact.

Developing students' knowledge of these techniques can be done through matching the technique to the definition/explanation of effect. Further to this is to identify these techniques in an existing speech of Nye Bevan. As a prominent figure in British politics, Bevan was a staunch advocate for social justice, equality, and the welfare state. In the below extracts of speech, Bevan is advocating and promoting the formation of the NHS.

To help anchor students' knowledge and understanding of the text, encourage an active reading that initially identifies explicit information by using the following prompts as appropriate. This is a short task that, with repetition, can be applied to any text or extract and can form good practise for all students but especially those who need further support.

Who? Who is the text referring to? Who is involved?

What? What is the big idea of the text? What is wanted?
What is the purpose?

When? When is this happening? When is it referring to?

Where? Where does this happen? Where does this relate to?

Depending on time allowed the following task of identifying rhetorical devices could be extended to practise reading skills.

How does Bevan convey his feelings and perspectives about the National Health Service in his speech?

You could:

- Identify the writer's feelings and perspectives.
- Identify the methods the writer uses.
- Support your response with references to the text.

Extracts from Bevan's speeches

Here is an extract from Bevan's Speech On The Second Reading Of The NHS Bill 30 April 1946.

Source: House of Commons Debates, vol. 422, cols. 43-63, 30 April 1946.

'We ought to take pride in the fact that, despite our financial and economic anxieties, we are still able to do the most civilised thing in the world: put the welfare of the sick in front of every other consideration. Let no one ever doubt that this is a Bill which has been the subject of the most careful examination, and not only in this House but outside it, and that there is no vested interest in the country that has not had ample opportunity of examining its provisions. But the principle of the Bill has not been challenged. The opposition to the Bill has proceeded from two main causes. One is the opposition of powerful vested interests. I remember the meetings at the Carlton Club. I remember how the British Medical Association behaved. I remember all the powerful forces that were brought into being to prevent the passage of this Bill. But I would like to remind the medical profession that they are there not only to represent their own interests but to represent the interests of the sick. I would like to remind the British Medical Association that it is up to them now to see that the health of the people is properly looked after. If they fail in that, the people will look after their own health.'

Can you find examples of:

- Personal pronouns?
- Emotive language?
- Repetition?
- Direct address?
- Exaggeration?
- Anecdotes?
- Rule of three?

On the next page you will find an annotated version of the same speech.

‘We ought to take pride¹ in the fact that, despite our financial and economic anxieties, we are still able to do the most civilised thing in the world²: put the welfare of the sick in front of every other consideration. Let no one ever doubt³ that this is a Bill which has been the subject of the most careful examination, and not only in this House but outside it, and that there is no vested interest in the country that has not had ample opportunity of examining its provisions. But the principle of the Bill has not been challenged. The opposition to the Bill has proceeded from two main causes. One is the opposition of powerful vested interests. I remember⁴ the meetings at the Carlton Club⁵. I remember how the British Medical Association behaved. I remember⁶ all the powerful forces⁷ that were brought into being to prevent the passage of this Bill. But I would like to remind the medical profession that they are there not only to represent their own interests but to represent the interests of the sick. I would like to remind the British Medical Association that it is up to them now to see that the health of the people is properly looked after. If they fail in that, the people will look after their own health.’

1. **Personal pronouns** ‘we ought to take pride’ encourages the listener to share in the honour of being a forward- thinking civilised society
2. **Exaggeration** ‘the most civilised thing in the world’ highlights the caring nature of this society and something that we should aspire to.
3. **Direct address** ‘Let no one ever doubt’ and ‘I would like to remind the medical profession’ gives Bevan authority which shows him to be working for a moral and honourable cause.
4. **Repetition** ‘I remember...’ emphasises the range of challenges that have faced Bevan’s impetus to have this Bill passed.
5. **Anecdotes** ‘meetings at the Carlton Club’, ‘how the British Medical Association behaved’ ‘the powerful forces’ demonstrate the lengths that those opposing this Bill had gone to to try and stop it.
6. **Rule of three** ‘I remember’ section emphasises the difficulties that the Bill has had to overcome; it reinforces his unending efforts and unwavering determination to make this happen.
7. **Emotive language** ‘all the powerful forces’ gives a sense of mystery and sinister powers attempting to stop the Bill passing.

Here is a section of Nye Bevan's speech on the second reading of the NHS Bill on April 30, 1946.

Source: House of Commons Debates, vol. 422, cols. 43- 63, 30 April 1946.

‘And so I come to the last danger: that this House, which represents the great traditions of British democracy, may be misled by the clamorous propaganda of the British Medical Association. Let us not be misled by them. Let us remember that this Bill is not a Bill to reform the British Medical Association. That is not our business. It is a Bill to provide the best health service that modern civilization can devise, for every man and woman and child in this country, no matter who they are or what their position in life. Let us not be misled by the arguments about the Medical Association. This Bill is not directed against the doctors in any way. It is not directed against private practice. It is directed towards one thing only: providing a comprehensive health service for the people of this country.’

Can you find examples of:

- Personal pronouns?
- Emotive language?
- Repetition?
- Exaggeration?
- Rule of three?
- Emotive language?

‘And so I come to **the last danger**¹: that this House, which represents the great traditions of British democracy, may be misled by the **clamorous propaganda**² of the British Medical Association. **Let us not be misled**³ by them. **Let us**⁴ remember that this Bill is not a Bill to reform the British Medical Association. That is **not our business**. It is a Bill to **provide the best health service that modern civilization can devise**⁵, for every man and woman and child in this country, no matter who they are or what their position in life. **Let us**⁶ not be misled by the arguments about the Medical Association. This Bill is not directed against the doctors in any way. It is not directed against private practice. It is directed towards one thing only: providing a comprehensive health service for the people of this country.’

1. **Emotive language** ‘the last danger’ suggests that there is risk and threat open to wider society if this Bill is not passed.
2. **Exaggeration** ‘clamorous propaganda’ suggests that the arguments from the British Medical Association are noisy lies.
3. **Repetition** ‘Let us not be misled’ suggests that there are people actively attempting to lie to people which Bevan uses to emphasise how he is on the side of good.
4. **Personal Pronouns** ‘let us’ and ‘not our business’ shows a sense of community and strength to his message and ideals.
5. **Emotive language** ‘provide the best health service that modern civilization can devise’ could make the listener feel like they are part of a noble, honourable and desirable ideology.
6. **Rule of three** ‘Let us’ acts as a call to action, encouraging the listener to be galvanised and spurred on to support this Bill.

Implementation — developing your voice

In this section students will develop a persuasive speech. From previous activities, students have developed a knowledge and understanding of the conventions of persuasive, transactional writing, now is their opportunity to implement this learning. This can be in response to either their own interests or in relation to one of the previous discussion prompts from the **where do you stand?** Activity depending on your class and your intended outcomes such as purpose and audience.

Content and organisation

Generating appropriate ideas: this is often the trickiest part of the process! Some possible approaches:

- Give students a statement (as above) as a stimulus.
- Give students images of emotive images of problems such as poverty, refugee camps, food banks, climate change.
- Watch appropriate TedTalks online or watch or listen to recordings of other public speakers such as Nye Bevan, Emma Watson, Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai.
- Students can mind map their ideas: this can be modelled by the teacher to encourage metacognition. There should also be discussion about how, once generated, ideas can be sequenced according to priority.

Structuring ideas and writing rhetoric

Once students have generated ideas, structure plays an important role in ensuring that they are convincing and detailed. A suggested structure is as outlined here.

What is the problem as they see it as an overview?

3 possible issues/solutions.

Final call to action.

After mapping out their ideas, students can then use the checklist of rhetorical devices and varied sentences to help.

Example mind-map/plan

Central Idea/
Statement

International cooperation and diplomacy are essential for resolving conflicts and addressing global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and human rights violations.

Problem

Even though there are shared problems across the globe such as, not enough collaboration happens which means there is not a single, cohesive approach.

Issue/
Solution

Issue/Solution:
not enough is
being done about
climate change.
Countries need to
work together.

Issue/Solution:
inequality is
created when
people around the
world do not have
enough money.
Countries should
work together
to improve living
conditions.

Issue/Solution:
some countries
have problems
with issues like
discrimination,
violence and wars
which threaten
people's rights
and safety.
We need to
strengthen global
organisations
like the United
Nations.

Problem

Final Call to Action: it's up to us to make a difference, working together, speaking up for what's right, raising awareness of the issues people face. Stand together to join voices.

Speech planning sheet

Varied Sentences		My example
Structures:	Example:	
Some; others	Some countries prioritise their own interests at the expense of the world's well-being; others see the urgency of working together to combat climate change.	
2 pairs	Old-fashioned and primitive, thoughtless and barbaric, poverty has no place in our modern world.	
3 adjectives	Lost, abandoned, misunderstood, innocent people have suffered the consequences of poverty.	
Emotion word, comma	Furious, I continue to urge that we strengthen international cooperation.	
If, if, if, then	If we could see sense, if leaders willed it, if citizens got behind it, then we could truly make progress.	
Outside. (Inside.)	Outside poverty is portrayed as an individual failing (Inside, it reflects systematic injustices).	
Double-ly (adverb)	Passionately and intently the campaigners continue to cry for justice.	
3 bad — question?	Arrogant, stupid, insensitive — is this how we see address the challenges of injustice?	

Technique	Definition	Example
Personal Pronouns	The writer talks to the reader using 'you' 'we' and 'us'.	
Emotive language	language that makes the reader feel something.	
Rhetorical question	a question that doesn't need to be answered and make the reader think.	
Statistics	using number facts to back up an idea.	
Use of authority figures	Makes your argument more convincing and trustworthy.	
Description and imagery	Use of metaphors and similes.	
Exaggeration	Going over the top to emphasise and prove your point.	
Repetitions/ group of 3	3 words or phrases.	

Delivery: performing your voice

After students have crafted their speeches, the next stage is delivering them in an effective and powerful way. Depending on your class this may be a single performance of speeches or it may be that students will take these away to practise and polish their delivery. This is often the point where students find it uncomfortable to speak in front of an audience, therefore starting with low stakes activities with a small audience can create the inclusive environment needed and can be managed to best suit your students.

Warm up Vocals

Here the purpose is to practise using our voice in different ways so what is being said is not important, only the delivery. To this end, giving students nonsense to perform such as a tongue twister, lorem ipsum place holder text or an extract from an encyclopaedia will work well here. These activities can be performed in small groups to aid student confidence or in pairs that perform tasks at the same time so as to limit attention to a single student:

- Tongue twisters — delivered in different ways such as a head teacher, a team manager at half time, a parent telling off a child...the list really is endless here and should be an opportunity for students to have fun.
- Sirens — performing a nonsense text, students start at their lowest vocal range and gradually slide up to their highest and then back down again, sounding like a siren.
- Power of the pause — using a nonsense text, students perform their speech considering where the most impactful places for pauses to help them ‘sound’ persuasive. Later using their own speech, this activity can be extended. When students have a comma in their work, they can take a step to the side; when their work has a full stop they take a step forward. The aim of this activity then become raising the awareness of students to the pace of their delivery.
- Volume button — using a nonsense text, students start almost inaudibly whilst you or another student controls the volume button moving to the very loudest voices. Those in control of the volume button can experiment turning it up and down. It is important to highlight to students that this isn’t about shouting but voice projection. You may wish to explore diaphragmatic breathing.
- Fast forward — A variation of the game above, instead of volume students go from the very slowest that they can deliver their speech to the very fastest. Emphasise to students that their words should still be understandable.

Assessment criteria — my voice is powerful

Students should be encouraged to reflect on their performances. This can be done informally through discussion or adapted to a more formal moment of metacognition for students.

Reflecting on your successes by using the following criteria.

Was I...

- Audible? Could be audience hear me?
- Did I vary the speed of my delivery throughout my speech?
- Did I vary the volume of my speaking to interest my audience?
- Did I use a range of tones to match my ideas?
- Did I use pauses to help my listener think about what I was saying and/or reflect on their own ideas?
- What skills have I practised in doing this?
- How will this help me in this subject and others at school?
- How might these skills help me in the future? Outside of school?

Explore more about how to look after, warm-up and use your voice effectively with [these short films](#) from the National Theatre Voice department.

This learning resource was written by education consultant Jane Ball.

For more information about the National Theatre and our work with schools, visit nationaltheatre.org.uk