John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address Study Guide

John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address by John F. Kennedy

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Introduction

On January 20, 1961, John Fitzgerald Kennedy delivered one of America's few standout inaugural addresses and one of the finest speeches in American history. By invoking the American dream and extending its promise to the rest of the world, Kennedy's speech was an inspirational call to action that resonates even today.

It is no coincidence that the 1961 inaugural address is continually compared to Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address as well as the "Gettysburg Address," both of Woodrow Wilson's inaugural addresses, and several of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's and Winston Churchill's finest speeches—Kennedy looked to these gifted orators and their wise and beautiful words for inspiration. According to Thurston Clarke in his book, *Ask Not: The Inauguration of John F. Kennedy and the Speech That Changed America*,

[Kennedy] knew this speech represented an extraordinary opportunity to present himself, as he chose to be seen, for the pages of history, and few presidents in the twentieth century cared more about history, or its perspective, than John F. Kennedy.

The power of Kennedy's inaugural speech lies in its brevity and lyrical succinctness—qualities common among Wilson's, Lincoln's, and Churchill's most remembered speeches. Like the times reflected in these previous speeches, the late 1950s and early 1960s were fraught with crisis. The cold war had been escalating since the mid-1940s, and the U.S. civil rights movement was reaching a fever pitch. Marked by an idealistic tone that elevated the speech above pessimistic cold war rhetoric, Kennedy's inaugural address relied on the hope and optimism of a new generation, one he believed would turn the experiences of the past into tools to change the future.

Though some skeptics continue to debate whether Kennedy or his principal speech writer, advisor, and confidant, Ted Sorensen, should be credited with the inaugural's authorship, most contend that even if Sorensen was its primary draftsman, the speech was pure Kennedy. Clarke writes,

On close examination, the Sorensen material that Kennedy incorporated into his speech turns out to be largely a compilation of ideas and themes that Kennedy had been voicing throughout his adult life, expressed in words that Sorensen had drawn from Kennedy's writings and extemporaneous speeches. In short, one finds that Kennedy was more than the "principal architect" of his inaugural address; he was its stonecutter and mason, too, the man whose beautiful language, either dictated by him or channeled through Sorensen, cemented together the grand ideas of his speech.

Those grand ideas, coupled with their eloquent expression, included, first and foremost, Kennedy's call for a reduction in cold war tensions, and, secondly, in Clarke's words, an extension of "the promises and guarantees of the Declaration of Independence to the entire world." A combination of crisis and idealism formed the basis of the inaugural address and set the tone for Kennedy's administration, which included the formation of the Peace Corps in 1961 and the acceleration of America's space program as well as

the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Bay of Pigs. In *American Orators of the Twentieth Century: Critical Studies and Sources*, Theodore O. Windt Jr. points out,

The idealism was counterbalanced by a mood of critical urgency. He described the world he faced in somber words: "In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from the responsibility—I welcome it." Thus do the two major themes of his administration merge in his Inaugural Address.

Author Biography

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born in Brook-line, Massachusetts, to Joseph P. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy on May 29, 1917, the second of nine children in a wealthy, prominent family in business and politics. Kennedy was educated at Choate Academy, Princeton University, Harvard College, and Stanford Business School. In 1940, Kennedy published *Why England Slept*, a book based on his Harvard senior thesis. A year later, he joined the navy. In 1943, Kennedy was injured when a Japanese destroyer attacked the patrol torpedo (PT) boat he was commanding. He was awarded the Purple Heart and spent the rest of the war recovering from his injuries.

Kennedy was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1946, and the U.S. Senate in 1952. In 1954, he married Jacqueline Bouvier, with whom he had three children: Caroline, John Jr., and Patrick, who died a few days after his birth. Kennedy wrote *Profiles in Courage* between 1954 and 1955. The book was published in 1956, the same year Kennedy began pursuing the 1960 Democratic presidential nomination. In 1957, *Profiles in Courage* won the Pulitzer Prize for biography. Kennedy was forty-three years old when he was elected president, which made him the youngest person elected president in U.S. history. He was also this country's first Catholic president and the first president born in the twentieth century. He delivered his inaugural address on January 20, 1961. He was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963.

The facts that Kennedy was the youngest elected president, the first Catholic president, and the first president born in the twentieth century made for a winning combination the day of his inauguration, but, during his election campaign, many equated his youth with inexperience and his religion as loyalty to the Vatican over the Constitution. These factors contributed to Kennedy's narrow defeat of Republican Vice President Richard M. Nixon in one of the closest presidential elections in United States history: Out of nearly 69 million popular votes cast, Kennedy's margin over Nixon was a mere 118,550 votes. The enduring passionate response to Kennedy's inaugural address all but blocks from the collective American memory that nearly half the country voted for Nixon in 1960.

Plot Summary

Kennedy, a scholar of history, begins his speech by addressing several of the dignitaries in attendance: "Vice President Johnson, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, President Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, President Truman, reverend clergy, fellow citizens," referring to Lyndon Baines Johnson, the new vice president; Sam Rayburn, Johnson's mentor, the Speaker of the House; Earl Warren, the chief justice; Dwight D. Eisenhower, the outgoing president; Richard M. Nixon, the outgoing vice president and Republican candidate for president against Kennedy; and Harry Truman, the only other former president at the proceedings. Using the phrase "fellow citizens" to refer to the rest of his audience goes back to the first inaugural address, on April 30, 1789, when George Washington began his speech, "Fellow Citizens of the Senate and of the House of Representatives."

He begins his remarks with a nod to another famous phrase:

We observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom—symbolizing an end, as well as a beginning, signifying renewal, as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago.

This portion of the speech echoes Winston Churchill's V-E Day speech on May 8, 1945, in which he said, "This is not a victory of a party or of any class. It's a victory of the great British nation as a whole."

Next, he alludes to both scientific advancements and the threat of nuclear war, which alternately thrilled and terrified his contemporaries, saying, "The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life." Then he invokes the belief in the Americans' divine righteousness in their aims: "And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God." He ends with a statement to temper the previous fearsome reference to nuclear annihilation with the hopeful notion that larger, more generous forces are at work in the universe.

The next segment begins, "We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution." Echoing the phrase "revolutionary beliefs" from the previous section, Kennedy emphasizes the historical significance of the country's revolutionary beginnings. He goes on to boldly state his vision of the country's mission to uphold those principles of the American Revolution:

Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has

always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Kennedy had read and repeated these ideas throughout his life. The imagery of a passing torch recalls the first Olympiads as well as George Washington's reference to the "sacred fire of liberty" in his first inaugural address. The notion of a new generation echoes the slogan Kennedy used in his 1946 congressional campaign, "The New Generation Offers a Leader." Fourteen years later, Kennedy responded to Harry Truman's concern that he lacked the maturity to be president in a televised press conference, saying, "It is time for a new generation of leadership, to cope with new problems and new responsibilities."

He continues his declaration of his vision and determination:

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

Kennedy's gift for imbuing speeches with lyricism and rhythm is evident in his alliterative phrasing here. The efficacy of his idea, though, does not rely on this poetic device. The message that Americans and their freedoms will be protected under his leadership rings loud and clear, as does the warning to potential enemies of the American way of life.

In his book *Sounding the Trumpet: The Making of John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address*, scholar Richard J. Tofel describes the next portion of the address this way:

A series of messages expressly directed at audiences around the world—Western allies, newly independent former colonies, what we would today call Third World peoples, Latin America, the United Nations, and, finally and most significantly, the Soviet Union.

The series begins, "To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends." The phrase "we pledge" is repeated in a litany of varied promises to "those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free," to "those peoples in huts and villages across the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery," because, "if a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich."

Kennedy the historian goes on to echo a phrase that resonates in American rhetoric when he refers to the United Nations (UN) as "our last best hope in an age where the instruments of war have far outpaced the instruments of peace." In his first inaugural address in 1801, Thomas Jefferson said, "this Government, the world's best hope." Kennedy had used variations of phrase—also found in Abraham Lincoln's 1862 message to Congress and Eisenhower's 1957 inaugural address—in speeches in 1954, 1960, and 1961. He pledges American support to the UN, "to prevent it from becoming merely a forum for invective, to strengthen its shield of the new and the weak, and to enlarge the area in which its writ may run."

The litany of promises ends as the new president makes a request of "those nations who would make themselves our adversary":

that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction … remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear. But never let us fear to negotiate.

Kennedy, grounding his ambitious aims in realistic qualification, cautions:

All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.

After outlining the exhaustive and monumental challenge of "creating a new endeavor," a "new balance of power," and a "new world of law, where the strong are just and the weak secure and the peace preserved," Kennedy invites the nation and the world to join him in setting their feet upon the path of change, regardless of how long it might take for change to come. Once more, Kennedy borrows from the masters by invoking Franklin Delano Roosevelt's initial "Hundred Days" in office, as well as Winston Churchill's June 1940 speech to the House of Commons, which reads in part, "Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will say, 'This was their finest hour.'"

In the next section, Kennedy begins his call to strategic action.

In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe.

Once again, Kennedy references a generation; this time, though, he uses the word to remind his "fellow citizens," his "generation," of those generations past who gave "testimony" to their "national loyalty." The words "In your hands" and "more than mine" echo Lincoln's first inaugural address while "the graves of young Americans" mirror the "Gettysburg Address" ("It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.")

The urgency increases in the following section:

Now the trumpet summons us again—not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are—but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle … against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.… Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global allianace,… that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort?

The origin of the trumpet metaphor is unclear, though Tofel argues that it is from First Corinthians 14.8, "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself

to the battle?" General Maxwell Taylor alludes to the verse in the title of his 1960 book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, which Kennedy read and admired. Regardless of its origin, Kennedy's metaphor makes plain the fact that his inaugural is, at its heart, a call to action.

As the speech reaches its crescendo, Kennedy revisits both the energy and idealism of his generation and the fire metaphor previously invoked in the phrase, "the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans."

I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

Then comes the climax, the most resonant line of the speech, and indeed of Kennedy's political career: "And so, my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." Clarke calls it "the master sentence that was a distillation of his philosophy and experience, the chrysalis of countless campaign speeches, and the logical and emotional climax of his inaugural address." The memorable words are repeated in a similar directive, this time to "My fellow citizens of the world." Kennedy tells those listening outside the United States, "Ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man."

The final words of Kennedy's inaugural address follow custom and call on God to bless and assist citizens of America and the world.

With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

Themes

Freedom

Kennedy begins his inaugural address with the words, "We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom." The lofty idea of freedom is a suitable one to invoke during any presidential inaugural address, but world events at the time of Kennedy's inauguration—the spread of communism, the very real threat of nuclear war, and the escalating violent and nonviolent events related to the American civil rights movement—lent a sense of gravity to the notion of freedom because so many Americans were either living without it or were threatened with its loss. Kennedy makes it clear throughout the rest of his speech that freedom is not something one is handed but something that must be fought for. He reminds his listeners, "We dare not forget today that we are the heir of that first revolution." He refers, of course, to the American Revolution that secured America's freedom from British rule—a battle that paved the way for the American dream.

He extends the ideals of the American dream to all the world's people, saying, "Americans [are] unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today, at home and around the world."

He then addresses "those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free." These new states include newly independent former colonies around the world. To them he pledges, "our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replace by a far more iron tyranny." He specifically pledges to help Latin American countries and adds this warning:

This peaceful revolution of hope cannot become the prey of hostile powers. Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas. And let every other power know that this hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house.

In *Ask Not: The Inauguration of John F. Kennedy and the Speech That Changed America*, Thurston Clarke writes of the notion that emerging economies should be protected from communism:

There was nothing new about this idea—Woodrow Wilson, Henry Luce, and others had voiced it before him—but it was ideally suited to a time when the United States and the Soviet Union were competing for the allegiance of eighteen new Asian and African nations, and when the United States was offering only a sterile anticommunism, while the Soviets were promising an ideology that appeared to have transformed their once backward nation into a superpower in four decades.

Improvement

Speaking at a time of great American prosperity and tremendous global anxiety, Kennedy foreshadows his administration's efforts to alleviate human suffering, saying early in his address, "man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty." He goes on to outline his philosophy of assistance for the needy, which would come to life in the form of the Peace Corps, established by Kennedy's executive order just forty days after his inauguration, on March 1, 1961:

To those people in huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required—not because the Communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. For if a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.

To our sister republics south of the border, we offer a special pledge: to convert our good words into deeds—in a new allegiance for progress—to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty.

It is clear that he hopes to establish strong Democratic societies by helping establish strong economies in the struggling world, and by doing so, to curb the growth of communism. As such, Kennedy aims to improve both the world's economic and political situation through the same means. He goes on to say, "The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world."

Sacrifice

The call to action, sacrifice, and service is a prominent theme in Kennedy's inaugural speech. He lays out lofty goals for the country, but he does not claim that they will be easy to achieve. He prepares Americans for a struggle in pursuit of difficult but worthy aims. He also invokes the many who have sacrificed in the past for equally difficult and worthy endeavors:

In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe. Now the trumpet summons us again … to bear the burden a long twilight struggle, year in and year out,… a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself…. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation.

After uttering the most famous line in his speech, "And so, my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," he adds, "My fellow citizens of the world: Ask not what America will do for you, but what together we

can do for the freedom of man." By extending the promise of freedom to the whole world, Kennedy invites the whole world to imagine it, and to fight for it.

Idealism

Kennedy buoys his vision of threat, work, and sacrifice with several grand references to American idealism—borrowed from the revolutionaries who shaped this country and laid the foundation for the American dream.

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

This passage is the first to promise hopeful change in the face of great adversity. In it, the American Revolution serves as the backdrop and the inspiration for "a new generation of Americans" committed to the ideal of freedom. But it is Kennedy's inspirational tone in phrases like "Let the word go forth," "the torch has been passed," and "proud of our ancient heritage" that speaks to his belief in the possibility of change. This powerful hope is echoed in the following passage:

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

Again, Kennedy strikes an idealistic tone by promising success in the face of all adversity. By echoing the idealistic American "can-do" spirit, he connects with and assures Americans and citizens of the world that threats to their liberty will be met with great resistance.

Kennedy's idealism is most effectively communicated by his use of the words "we" and "us." This infers that he shares with his fellow Americans and world citizens the same goal—freedom from "tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself." But when Kennedy shifts the focus from "we" to "you," he makes a hugely optimistic leap. When he asks, "Will you join in that historic effort?", he reveals his belief that if he asks, many will. When he tells his "fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," he again reveals his optimism for the future.

Historical Context

The Cold War

Kennedy's entire political career took place in the shadow of the cold war and the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union. It is little wonder then that his inaugural address emphasizes the battle for freedom in an "hour of maximum danger." His pledge that the American people would "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty" is a direct reference to the war between the communist world and the free world.

The Yalta Conference, a 1945 meeting between Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin ("The Big Three"), is widely recognized as the beginning of the cold war. Roosevelt sought Soviet assistance in the Pacific War; Churchill sought free elections in Eastern Europe; and Stalin sought to establish a base of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe for the sake of Soviet national security. Together, they attempted to devise an agenda regarding governance of postwar Germany. Roosevelt, who would die of a massive cerebral hemorrhage two months later, was accused of "selling out" at Yalta because his negotiations with Stalin led to Soviet expansion into Japan and Asia. Stalin later violated the terms of the agreement and formed the Soviet Bloc. At the time of the conference, the Soviet military, nearly three times as large as Eisenhower's forces, were established all over Eastern Europe. It was at Yalta that Churchill and Roosevelt understood the actuality of Soviet power.

After World War II ended, the Western democracies fought with the Soviet Union over their widespread takeover of East European states. In 1946, Churchill warned that an "iron curtain" was falling over the middle of Europe and Stalin divined the occurrence of a third World War sparked by "capitalist imperialist" Western forces. His assertion deepened the rift between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The cold war, which lasted from 1945 to the early 1990s, was defined by constant East-West competition, conflict, and tension brought about by military buildups, proxy wars, ideological differences, and a massive nuclear arms race. In an effort to contain communism, the United States established alliances with Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Western Europe. Although the Soviet Union and the United States never fought one another directly, the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War were all direct results of the cold war that waged between the two countries for decades.

The 1950s

In the decade leading up to Kennedy's presidential election, the United States experienced an era of great prosperity. For the first time in almost thirty years, the American economy resembled the economic livelihood of the 1920s, a credit-based

boom time in U.S. history. The homecomings of American G.I.s from World War II throughout the decade led to the baby boom. Young families made their homes in suburbs across the country and the nation looked toward a hopeful future.

But there were internal conflicts, too. The civil rights movement grew in strength and urgency throughout the decade. In 1954, the Supreme Court overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling that made "separate but equal" segregated facilities legal. The case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* outlawed these facilities and called for the integration of schools. Despite the ruling, African Americans had to fight for access to public services, the political process, and private dignity, especially in the South. Civil rights leaders staged various acts of civil disobedience throughout the 1950s, including "sit-ins," nonviolent marches, and boycotts, such as the watershed Montgomery Bus Boycott.

International conflicts that affected the United States during this time include the end of European colonialism in Asia and Africa and, most directly, the Cold War and its related nuclear arms race. The decolonization of East Asia and Africa began in earnest at the end of World War II. The process was largely nonviolent, though highly volatile in a political sense. The Soviet Union, whose leaders took a Marxist-Leninist view of colonialism, saw it as the pinnacle of capitalism and encouraged colonized territories to seek independence, especially during the progression of the Cold War. Because many nationalist movements in countries such as Cuba, Guatemala, Indochina, and the Philippines were allied with communist groups, the United States feared they would be influenced by the Soviet Union. This led to increased competition between the two countries, especially in this time of heightened decolonization throughout the world. The fear of both the threat and the spread of communism were heightened by the reluctance of Asia, Africa, and Latin America to choose sides in the conflict. Meanwhile, the United States and the Soviet Union began pursuing a course of nuclear rearmament.

Competition between the two superpowers began with geopolitical, economic, and ideological differences that led to costly defense spending in both countries and a nuclear arms race; because the Soviet Union and the United States were stockpiling nuclear weapons, other countries felt the need to increase their own inventory of nuclear warheads. This Cold War would bring the two nations to the brink of nuclear war, especially after Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and Cuban leader Fidel Castro formed an alliance in 1959 after the Cuban Revolution.

Critical Overview

According to Theodore O. Windt Jr. in *American Orators of the Twentieth Century*, Kennedy's January 20, 1961, speech is "one of the few truly memorable Inaugural Addresses in U.S. history." Its elegant lyricism, its power, and its idealism called Americans to action and inspired real change. In *Ask Not: The Inauguration of John F. Kennedy and the Speech That Changed America*, Thurston Clarke mentions the great writers, thinkers, and admirers who later revealed how touched and impressed they were by the speech. He quotes James Reston's *New York Times* editorial the day after the inauguration:

The evangelical and transcendental spirit of America has not been better expressed since Woodrow Wilson and maybe not even since Ralph Waldo Emerson…. For, like all true expression of the American ideal, this was a revolutionary document.

Eleanor Roosevelt sent Kennedy a handwritten note that read, "I think 'gratitude' best describes the kind of liberation & lift to the listener which you gave…. I have reread your words several times & I have been filled with thankfulness." Speechwriter Mike Feldman, after hearing the speech, "was inspired to read every previous inaugural and came to the conclusion that the only one possessing a similar inspirational quality was Abraham Lincoln's second." Clarke also writes that Kennedy's own wife Jacqueline compared the speech to "Pericles' Funeral Oration and the Gettysburg Address." Novelist Carson McCullers, in a message written to the president for a commemorative scrapbook of the inauguration, wrote,

I think that I have never been moved by words more than I was by your inaugural address…. It reminded me of the great speeches of FDR and Winston Churchill. Indeed, it is one of the greatest addresses of our age.

The January 21, 1961, *New York* Times published snippets from editorials from papers across the country to give their readers a sense of the national response to the inaugural address. From the article entitled, "Editorial Comment Across the Nation on President Kennedy's Inauguration" comes this opinion from Albany's *Times Union*: "The Inaugural will be recalled and quoted as long as there are Americans to heed his summons." From the *Sun* in Baltimore, Maryland:

The Inaugural address was somber without despair, firm without bellicosity, bold without arrogance…. Eloquence without substance is nothing. The address has substance…. We may have caught a glimpse into the nature of the young, cool and still somewhat mysterious new President of the United States.

And from the Salt Lake City *Tribune:*

His eloquent phrases reveal him as a determined man who does not flinch from the awful responsibilities of leadership…. (He) made a fine start…. May the response to his forthrightness and courage echo across the land.

In his own commentary, Clarke writes,

The speech is generally acknowledged to have been the greatest oration of any twentieth-century American politician. It was also the centerpiece of an inauguration that would turn out to be one of the great political events of that century, a moment when Americans would step through a membrane in time, entering a brief, still seductive, era of national happiness.

Kennedy's inaugural address still inspires transcendent praise from cultural and political luminaries from around the globe, but the most resounding response to the speech came from people whose lives were changed by Kennedy's inspirational call to action. According to Clarke, James Meredith, "a black U.S. Air Force veteran," requested an admission application from the all-white University of Mississippi "the evening after Kennedy spoke." After being denied admission, Meredith launched a campaign that included writing letters to the Justice Department and filing suit with U.S. District Court demanding to be admitted. While he was attempting to register for classes on September 30, 1962, a riot broke out on the university campus. On October 1 of that year, flanked by U.S. Marshals, Meredith finally became the university's first black student. That moment in civil rights history is just one of many moments inspired by Kennedy's memorable speech.

One of Kennedy's greatest achievements, the formation of the Peace Corps, is another living testament to the optimism of the inaugural address and the passion it inspired in many young people. Kennedy planted the seeds of the Peace Corps in a presidential campaign speech delivered at the University of Michigan on October 14, 1960. At two o'clock in the morning, Kennedy challenged the students to join his effort of affecting positive global change. On November 1 of that year, at a speech in San Francisco, Kennedy reiterated his intent to form an organization that he then dubbed the "Peace Corps." Since its inception by Kennedy's executive order on March 1, 1961, the Peace Corps has trained over 182,000 volunteers who shared Kennedy's vision of contributing to society. These volunteers have served in 138 countries around the globe. Those volunteers, and countless others moved to public service in the generations since Kennedy issued his challenge to his own generation, cite the phrase that begins "ask not" as the one that has inspired them most.

Many audio recordings of Kennedy delivering his inaugural address are available on the Internet, including through the History Place at www.historyplace.com/speeches/jfk-inaug.htm and through American Rhetoric at www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkinaugural.htm.

Kennedy's inaugural speech is also included on the DVD *Vintage JFK*, a collection of Kennedy video footage. This fifty-minute DVD is available through Quality Information Publishers.

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Project Editor
David Galens

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Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
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Permissions
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Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331–3535