

Unpacking the Message: Analyzing Modern Speeches and Letters with SOAPSTone

GRADE	SUBJECT	DURATION	DATE
11	English Language Arts	90 min	2026-07-05

LESSON FOCUS

Topic: Analyzing an author's message using SOAPSTone in a modern speech, address, or letter

Learning Goal: Unpacking the Message: Analyzing Modern Speeches and Letters with SOAPSTone: Students analyze a text's Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, and Tone to interpret its deeper meaning.

Lesson Overview

0–15 min	Engage: Teacher displays two short, contrasting public messages about the same event—one a formal official statement and the other a personal social media post. Students turn and talk to name the specific differences in who is speaking, who is listening, and how the feeling of the words changes, sharing their observations to define how context shapes communication.	15 min
15–35 min	Explore: Students read a short, modern open letter in small groups, using different colored highlighters to mark clues about the writer's identity, the urgent situation that prompted the letter, and the specific group of people the writer hopes to reach.	20 min
35–55 min	Explain: Teacher models the SOAPSTone framework using a famous modern address, thinking aloud to show how to connect the speaker's tone (using specific word choices) directly to their broader purpose, rather than just listing the elements as a checklist.	20 min
55–80 min	Apply: Students work individually or in pairs to analyze a new modern speech, completing a SOAPSTone graphic organizer and writing a short paragraph that explains how the speaker's tone helps them achieve their purpose, using at least two pieces of quoted evidence.	25 min
80–90 min	Reflect: Students write a brief exit ticket answering how their understanding of the speech's message would change if the audience or the occasion were completely different, consolidating how these elements are interconnected.	10 min

These reflection prompts support post-teaching revisions. Add notes for yourself, leave feedback, or remix this plan in CARL for future use.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Rhetorical context—including who is speaking, when, and to whom—directly shapes how a message is structured and received.
- An author's tone is not accidental; it is a deliberate choice of language that reveals their attitude toward the subject and guides the audience's emotional response.
- Analyzing the intersection of purpose and occasion helps readers uncover the deeper, often unspoken, arguments within modern public discourse.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

- Examine the relationship between a text's historical or social occasion and the specific demands of its target audience.
- Write a clear, evidence-supported analysis explaining how a text's rhetorical elements work together to achieve its overall purpose.
- Strategies for selecting and integrating direct quotes to justify analytical claims about a text's message.
- Analyze how a speaker's background and values influence the perspective presented in a modern speech or letter.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify and label all six elements of the SOAPSTone framework within a modern speech, address, or letter.
- Explain how the speaker's tone shifts across different sections of a text and how these shifts serve the author's purpose.
- Support interpretations of a text's deeper message by citing specific, relevant quotes and explaining their significance.
- Compare how two different speakers address a similar subject by adjusting their tone and appeal based on their distinct audiences.

CORE CONTENT

- The components of the SOAPSTone framework: Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, and Tone.
- Methods for identifying a speaker's implicit and explicit purpose within public addresses and open letters.
- Vocabulary for describing tone, moving beyond simple positive or negative labels to specific descriptors like urgent, nostalgic, or defiant.
- The distinction between the immediate historical occasion (the immediate trigger) and the larger cultural context of a speech.
- Strategies for selecting and integrating direct quotes to justify analytical claims about a text's message.

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- How does knowing why and when a speech was delivered change how we understand the words themselves?
- In what ways can a speaker's tone either strengthen or undermine their core message to a specific audience?
- How do modern speakers adapt their language when they know their message will be heard by both an immediate audience and a global public?

SUMMATIVE TASKS

SOAPSTone Rhetorical Analysis Essay: Students write a multi-paragraph rhetorical analysis of a modern speech, such as Steve Jobs's 2005 Stanford Commencement Address or Malala Yousafzai's 2013 UN Youth Assembly Address. In this essay, students must identify all six SOAPSTone elements, explain how the speaker's tone shifts across different sections of the text, and use at least three direct quotes to show how the speaker's tone and purpose work together to shape their deeper message.

Comparative SOAPSTone Analysis Chart and Written Reflection: Students complete a side-by-side comparative analysis chart for two modern open letters addressing a similar social issue. Students fill out the chart detailing the Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, and Tone for both texts, and then write a 300-word reflection explaining how the two different audiences forced each speaker to adjust their tone and language to deliver their message.

FORMATIVE CHECKS

- **SOAPSTone Identification Exit Ticket:** At the end of the introductory session, the teacher collects an exit ticket where students label the Speaker, Occasion, and Audience for a short, three-paragraph excerpt of a modern speech. The teacher reviews these tickets to identify students who struggle to separate the immediate occasion from the larger cultural context.
- **Tone Word Highlight and Annotation Check:** While students read the middle section of the speech, the teacher circulates with a clipboard checklist to observe and record how students highlight specific tone words and write brief margin notes explaining the speaker's attitude. The teacher conducts quick, 30-second desk-side conferences with students who only use generic 'positive' or 'negative' descriptors to help them find more precise tone words.
- **In-Progress Peer Review Checklist:** During the drafting of the analysis, students swap their working outlines with a partner. Using a teacher-provided peer checklist, partners must highlight where the writer has cited a direct quote and underline the sentence where the writer explains how that quote connects the speaker's tone to their overall purpose.
- **Tone Shift Group Discussion and Teacher Observation:** The teacher monitors small-group discussions where students map out tone shifts on a collaborative whiteboard. The teacher uses an observation rubric to note which students can explain why the speaker shifted their tone at a specific transition point in the speech and how that shift prepares the audience for the speaker's final call to action.

SUCCESS CRITERIA (PROFICIENCY SCALE)**BEG**

I can identify and label the basic SOAPSTone elements (Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, Tone) in a modern speech or letter, using simple or general descriptors for the speaker's tone.

DEV

I can explain the relationship between the speaker's purpose and their audience, and I can identify specific words or phrases that show a shift in the speaker's tone.

PRO

I can analyze how the speaker's tone and rhetorical choices work together to achieve their purpose, supporting my claims with relevant direct quotes and explaining how the immediate occasion shapes the message.

ADV

I can evaluate how a speaker strategically shifts their tone and adapts their language to address both an immediate audience and a broader global public, justifying my analysis with precise textual evidence and deep context.

MATERIALS

- Modern Speeches and Open Letters Packet

STAGE 3 Learning Experiences & Instruction

THE GALLERY AND THE WALL

A local artist paints a massive, bright mural on a crumbling brick wall in a quiet neighborhood, but paints the exact same design on a canvas for a high-end gallery downtown. The neighborhood mural sparks a community block party, while the gallery canvas sells for thousands of dollars to a private collector.

Why does the same artwork feel completely different in these two spaces?

THE TRAILER REMIX

A director releases a dramatic movie trailer with slow, tense music for a film festival crowd, but edits the same footage with fast, upbeat music for a social media ad. The film festival viewers expect a deep character study, while the online scroll-by audience expects a high-energy thriller.

How does changing the music change who wants to watch the movie?

ENGAGE**Analyzing Context Clues**

15 min

GROUPING

Pairs

STUDENT ROLE

Students compare two short public messages about a local park cleanup—one a formal email from the city council and the other a quick group text from a neighborhood volunteer.

Students compare two short public messages about a local park cleanup—one a formal email from the city council and the other a quick group text from a neighborhood volunteer. They underline words that show who is writing and who they expect to read the message. Pairs then discuss how the situation itself forced each writer to choose different words.

EXPLORE**Color-Coding the Rhetorical Situation**

20 min

GROUPING

Small groups of 3-4

STUDENT ROLE

Students read a modern open letter about environmental action, using highlighters to mark clues about the writer's identity, the urgent event that sparked the letter, and the target audience.

Groups read a modern open letter about environmental action and use three different colored highlighters to mark clues about the writer's identity, the urgent event that sparked the letter, and the target audience. They write brief notes in the margins explaining how these three elements connect. This hands-on marking helps students see that a letter is never written in a vacuum.

Recommended Worksheets: Dialectical Journal – Grades 9–12

Recommended Worksheets: Literary Analysis – Grades 11–12 (AP)

Recommended Worksheets: SOAPStone Analysis – Grades 11–12 (AP)

Recommended Worksheets: Document Analysis – Grades 9–12

EXPLAIN Modeling SOAPStone Connections

20 min

GROUPING Whole class

STRATEGY Students follow along as the teacher models how to analyze a modern address, noting how the speaker's tone shifts to match their purpose.

The teacher displays a modern address and models how to use the SOAPStone framework, thinking aloud to show how the speaker's tone shifts across different sections. Instead of just listing the elements, the teacher draws arrows on the board to connect specific word choices directly to the speaker's broader purpose. Students annotate their own copies of the speech to match the teacher's visual map.

I DO

10 min

Teacher models the SOAPStone framework using a short modern address, thinking aloud to show how the speaker's tone shifts and connecting specific word choices directly to the speaker's purpose on a shared anchor chart.

WE DO

15 min

Teacher guides the class in analyzing the first half of a modern open letter, prompting students to identify the immediate occasion and the target audience, then writing a shared analytical sentence on the board.

YOU DO

20 min

Students work independently or in pairs to analyze a new modern speech, completing their own SOAPStone graphic organizer and writing a short paragraph that uses direct quotes to explain how tone serves the purpose.

APPLY Independent SOAPStone Analysis

25 min

GROUPING Individual or pairs

AUDIENCE Students analyze a new modern speech, completing a graphic organizer and writing an analysis paragraph.

Students select a new modern speech to analyze independently or in pairs, filling out a SOAPStone graphic organizer to map out the rhetorical elements. They then write a short paragraph explaining how the speaker's tone helps them achieve their purpose, using at least two pieces of quoted evidence. This task asks students to apply their understanding of tone and context to a completely new text.

REFLECT Reflect

These reflection prompts support post-teaching revisions. Add notes for yourself, leave feedback, or remix this plan in CARL for future use.

GROUPING Individual

STUDENT ROLE Reflective learner

- How does identifying the speaker's specific audience help you understand why they chose certain words over others?
- In what ways did mapping out the tone shifts help you see the speaker's deeper purpose beyond just their main topic?
- How does knowing the immediate occasion of a speech change how you interpret its overall message?

LEARNING SUPPORTS

- Provide a curated list of modern speeches from diverse cultural backgrounds and community leaders, ensuring students see their own heritages and languages reflected in public discourse.
- Incorporate a brief partner check-in where students share how a speaker's tone made them feel personally, helping them connect emotional responses to deliberate rhetorical choices.
- Offer alternative speech options that focus on positive community building or creative expression, allowing students to avoid topics involving intense social trauma or systemic violence if needed.
- ELL supports generated for Ukrainian (ELP 2: Developing).

COMMUNICATE & REFLECT ON LEARNING

Student Self-Assessment & Reflection

- How does identifying the speaker's specific audience help you understand why they chose certain words over others?
- In what ways did mapping out the tone shifts help you see the speaker's deeper purpose beyond just their main topic?
- How does knowing the immediate occasion of a speech change how you interpret its overall message?

STAGE 4 Reflect & Revise

01 Which parts of the lesson helped students most clearly understand the central concept?

02 Which part of the lesson needs to be revised, clarified, or scaffolded differently before teaching it again?

03 What did students say, do, or produce that revealed how they experienced the lesson and where they still need support?

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