

## Kennedy's Inaugural address

On January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy assumed the office of president of the United States. In his brief yet eloquent inaugural address Kennedy called upon the people of the nation and the world to unite in the pursuit of peace and freedom.

**W**e 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.

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. . . .

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 . . . 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.

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.

This much we pledge—and more.

To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United, there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided, there is little we can do—for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder [apart].

To those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. . . .

To those peoples in the 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

What's the first American goal laid out by Kennedy in his address?

Would this be an appropriate theme for an inaugural address this coming January?

Why or why not?

The paragraph at left (starting with "Let every nation know...") – what do think it means?

Kennedy's rhetoric repeatedly discussed being united and divided. What does this remind you of?

What do you think Kennedy means by "iron tyranny"?

required—not because the Communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. 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 our border, we offer . . . a new alliance for progress—to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty. But 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.

To that world assembly of sovereign states, the United Nations, our last best hope in an age where the instruments of war have far outpaced the instruments of peace, we renew our pledge of support. . . .

Finally, to those nations who would make themselves our adversary [enemy], we offer not a pledge but a request—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. We dare not tempt them with weakness. For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed. . . .

So let us begin anew—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 let us never fear to negotiate. . . .

In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than in mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each gen-

How does Kennedy equate political freedom with financial equality?

“...this hemisphere intends to be the master of its own house.” What do you think this means?

Why do you think Kennedy pledged support to the United Nations?

What’s he referencing when he discusses “accidental self-destruction”?

eration 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 of a long twilight struggle, . . . a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself. . . .

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 this responsibility—I welcome it. 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.

And so, my fellow Americans—ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.

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.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. 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.

List three themes covered by Kennedy that would not be applicable to Obama's 2009 inaugural address.

The "trumpet" paragraph – what's Kennedy trying to do here?

How does Kennedy see America in the "long history of the world"?

Here's the famous part. Does it work for you?

Why or why not?

Next, list three themes covered by Kennedy that would have been applicable to Obama's 2009 inaugural address.

Now imagine that you're on Obama's speechwriting team, and your job was to help craft his inaugural speech. What five things would you cover, in order of importance?

1.

4.

2.

5.

3.

How would you take this message to the American people? Sketch out a rough outline below.