

The “Wooing” of America: Winston Churchill and the Strengthening of Anglo-American Relations, 1938-1941

I. Introduction

By studying three speeches of Winston Churchill, students will analyze Churchill’s attempt to persuade the Americans of the threat posed by Hitler and his Nazi regime and the need for the Americans to abandon their isolationist policy. Churchill gave these speeches in 1938, 1939 and June of 1941.

The title of the lesson plan, “The Wooing of America,” derives from a statement of Churchill’s as recorded in Arthur Bryant’s *The Turn of the Tide 1939-1943, A Study Based on the Diaries and Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal The Viscount Alanbrooke K.G., O.M.* p. 282 (about 8 December 1941, the day after the Japanese attack on America at Pearl Harbor):

When at the Chiefs of Staff meeting next day someone continued to advocate the same cautious approach to America that had seemed politic when her intervention [in the war] was in doubt, he [Churchill] answered with a wicked leer in his eye, “Oh! that is the way we talked to her while we were wooing her; now that she is in the harem, we talk to her quite differently!” ‘It was gems such as the above,’ Brooke added, ‘that often turned some of the blackest and long-drawn night meetings into far more bearable gatherings.’

Alanbrooke, *Notes on My Life, V*, 325

II. Guiding Questions

How did Churchill go about trying to convince the American people that democracy in Europe as well as in the United States was in danger of being destroyed? How could this destruction be avoided according to Churchill? Do you feel that these speeches were effective?

Overarching Questions: In the context of American (or any country’s) foreign policy and diplomatic relationships, what role does or should the leader of a foreign country play? Is it important to know what foreign leaders are saying? How easy is this to do now and in Churchill’s time?

What are the most effective means for political leaders to convince others of the rightness of their ideas?

III. Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Understand the threat to democracy as envisioned by Churchill.
- Understand Churchill's reasoning in reaching out to the United States.
- Appreciate Churchill's style of persuasive writing and oratory.

IV. Background Information for the Teacher

Winston Churchill always felt a close relationship with America. His mother, Jennie Jerome was an American. Throughout his life he believed that a strong Anglo-American relationship was needed to preserve the democratic principle of liberty of all men. This idea was no more prevalent than with the rise of fascist governments in Europe between 1932 and 1941. In 1931 Churchill visited the United States on a lecture tour that addressed the relationship of the English-American people. When he returned to Great Britain he continued to "woo" America so as to soften their isolationist stance in regards to world affairs and especially to the threat of Nazism. A major theme in many of Churchill's speeches and magazine articles during this period was the importance of the United States in joining England in subjugating the tyrannical governments of the world.

V. Preparation for Teaching this Lesson

- For a good "quick" overview of using primary documents refer to:
<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/psources/analyze.html>
- Refer to a U.S. History textbook in order to get a brief overview of the U.S. during the 1930s.
- The following speeches will be needed for this lesson:

[Shortened versions of the speeches can be found in: Churchill, Winston S, ed. *Never Give In: The Best of Winston Churchill's Speeches*. New York: Hyperion Press, 2003 (pages given after each speech listing). The title links below are to the full online texts of the speeches]

Note: A Churchill speech may be known by several different "titles."

- [*The Defence of Freedom and Peace*](#) ("*The Lights Are Going Out*")
October 16, 1938 pp. 182-185

For an audio clip, select "We Must Arm" from the [Churchill Centre's Audio Archive](#)

For an excerpt, beginning with “We must Arm,” in psalm-style, Churchill’s preferred format for writing and delivering speeches.

- [“Hush over Europe,”](#) August 8, 1939 pp. 191-194
- [The Birth Throes of a Sublime Resolve](#) (“*The Old Lion*”) June 16, 1941 pp. 286-289
For an audio clip of the last four paragraphs, select “Broadcast to America” from the [Churchill Centre's Audio Archive](#)

VI. Suggested Activities

This lesson can be used a number of ways.

- The speeches are photo copied and handed out the day before the lesson in order to give ample time for the students to read them. On the day of the lesson the teacher would lead a discussion focusing on the enclosed questions (*See VII Assessment*)
- The class can be divided into smaller groups and assigned one of the speeches and then answer a set of questions. (*See VII Assessment*) They then can share their findings with the rest of the class
- After studying these speeches students would compare them to the World War II speeches of Franklin D. Roosevelt. (A good source would be any of his Fire Side Chats found at:
<http://millercenter.virginia.edu/scripps/diglibrary/prezspeeches/roosevelt/>

VII. Assessment

Discussion Questions (Could be used as an individual or group worksheet assignment)

The Defense of Freedom and Peace (“*The Lights are Going Out*”)

1. What does Churchill mean by the phrase that “the lights are going out”?

Liberties, such as free speech, are being oppressed by Hitler’s regime as it expands throughout Europe

2. Why does Churchill include in this speech the oppressions found in other parts of the globe?

To show the Americans that the threat of dictatorship is not just in Europe but is appearing throughout the world. How long will it be until the U.S. is threatened?

3. According to Churchill why are arms not “sufficient by them selves”?

For Churchill true strength is in the democratic principles found in both Great Britain and in the United States. Working together, these principles can be victorious.

“Hush Over Europe”

1. What does Churchill want the American people to “listen” to?

The expansion of Nazism which includes the oppression of democratic liberties.

2. How does Churchill defend against the argument that Britain is the aggressor?

The continued expansion of Germany, the power of one man to declare war (Hitler), Britain and France determination “to shed no blood except in self-defence.”

The Birth Throes of a Sublime Resolve (“The Old Lion”)

1. Who is the “old lion with her lion cubs at her side”?

Great Britain and principally the independent dominions of the British Empire (Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa)

2. What was the significance of Churchill’s ending thought “United we stand. Divided we fall.”? (What great American speech and politician is he referring to?) Why do you think Churchill used this reference?

Lincoln’s 1858 “House Divided speech.”
[\(<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/house.htm>\)](http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/house.htm)

- What are some of the common themes throughout the speeches?

Some of the themes are:

- Defense of democratic principles*
- The stopping of aggression*
- Democracy = right or good, Nazism =bad or evil*
- The need to combine forces to defeat evil (America is needed in order for this to succeed)*

- Does the tone of the speeches change from 1938-1941? If so in what ways?

Point out that once Great Britain is at war, the insistence of Churchill for American intervention is of most importance.

- What techniques did Churchill use in order to persuade American's to see his point of view?

Point out such techniques as:

-Emphasizing the sharing of "democratic principles" between Great Britain and the United States.

-Showing that the threat to democracy was as great to the United States as it was to Great Britain.

Showing that if the United States waits to long it will be fighting by itself.

- Do you think that these speeches were effective? Why?

VIII. Extending the Lesson

To extend this lesson:

- Compare and contrast life in the U.S. and in Great Britain in the later part of the 1930s. What were the causes for the U.S. isolationist policy?
- Use these speeches to demonstrate the important aspects of speech writing. When studying the speeches note:
 - The logical flow of the speech.
 - The use of imagery and emotional appeal
 - Outline the speech to show where new ideas are presented and grouped. Point out where effective imagery, examples, or emotional appeal is used.
 - Locate a recording of these speeches and listen to their delivery. How does Churchill bring the written word to life? What words or sentences does he emphasize? Why?

On a time line, place the dates of the three speeches, the attack on Pearl Harbor, the years Roosevelt was re-elected,

Web sites that are useful for this lesson as well as exploring other factors of Winston Churchill and this historical period:

- [The Churchill Centre](#) was founded in 1968 to educate new generations on the leadership, statesmanship, vision and courage of Winston Spencer Churchill.

- [Churchill and the Great Republic](#) is the website for the 2005 Library of Congress Exhibition developed in concert with the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge, England.
[Spartacus Educational](#) is a British educational site that offers a concise look at Churchill's life.
- [Churchill](#) PBS look at Churchill the man, his life, and his world.

IX. Additional Information

Grade Level:	11 th or 12 th
Subject Area:	U.S. History/AP European History
Time Require:	One or two classroom periods
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