

Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill: A Contrast in Leadership

Neville Chamberlain's Declaration of War on Germany, September 3, 1939

Winston Churchill's first Radio Broadcast as Prime Minister on the BBC, May 19, 1940:

“Be Ye Men of Valor”

A History Lesson by Martha Curtis

Class time: one 40-minute period.

Objective 1: Compare and contrast the rhetorical styles of Britain's two wartime prime ministers.

Objective 2: Introduce Winston Churchill's leadership skills.

Objective 3: Clarify the actual beginning of WWII in Europe – understand that the date when WWII started depends on the theatre of action.

MATERIALS

- An Internet connection to hear the two speeches.
- For students, photocopies of Churchill's speech and questions (if used)
- Projection of original document, if used.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE LESSON PLAN:

- Part 1: Introduction to the lesson plan.
- Part 2: Background for teachers, context, questions and a link to the audio version of Chamberlain's “Declaration of War on Germany.”
- Part 3: Background for teachers, context, questions and a link to the audio version of Churchill's “Be Ye Men of Valor.”
- Part 4: Written Assessment.
- Part 5: Extending the Lesson Plan.
- Part 6: Student handout of Churchill's Speech, “Be Ye Men of Valor”
An annotated version of the speech: **“Be Ye Men of Valor,” (Annotated)**
- Part 7: Original Document: A page of the speech, beginning paragraph 8, is on page 10, below, and [here](#).

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON PLAN

In this lesson students will hear, evaluate and contrast two important wartime speeches—Neville Chamberlain's September 3, 1939 “Declaration of War on Germany” (five minutes of PM speaking, five minute government announcements) and Winston Churchill's first Broadcast to the British People after becoming Prime Minister (May 19, 1940, 11 minutes).

This lesson examines the role of leaders in the morale and war effort of a nation.

It should be introduced in the curriculum during Germany's invasion of France, after Churchill has become Prime Minister. Students should already know the events of the winter of 1939-40: the joint invasions of Poland by Germany and the USSR, the "phony war", the winter war (USSR's invasion of Finland) and Hitler's invasions of Denmark and Norway to secure his north Atlantic flank.

This lesson contains background for the teacher, links to the speeches, questions to pose to the students or for discussion, and a handout (with immediate background) of the Churchill speech.

Additionally a primary document is available: the original "psalm-style" copy for paragraphs 8 & 9 of Churchill's "Be Ye Men of Valor" speech (The Churchill Archives Document ID CHAR_09_144_024). See under **Churchill, Winston. "Be Ye Men of Valor" Single Page Primary Document** [here](#).

His private office secretaries set out Churchill's speeches in the blank verse style that they referred to as "speech form "or" psalm style. This format might aid any orator as it offers a clear, visual guide to phrasing.

PART 2: NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN'S DECLARATION OF WAR ON GERMANY
September 3, 1939

www.bbc.co.uk/archive/ww2outbreak/7917.shtml

(A five-minute speech followed by a five-minute government announcement)

Background/context:

Note: A full time line of WWII in Europe is [here](#).

1936

March 7 German troops occupy the Rhineland, breaking the Treaty of Versailles

1938

March 13 Germany completes its 'Anschluss' (union) with Austria.

August 12* Germany mobilizes its military

September 30 Munich Agreement

October 15 German troops occupy the Sudetenland (German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia)

1939

March 15/16 The Germans occupy the rest of Czechoslovakia, breaking the Munich Agreement

May 22 Germany and Italy sign a 10-year alliance, the "Pact of Steel."

August 23 Germany and the Soviet Union sign a Non-Aggression Pact

August 25 Britain and Poland sign a Mutual Assistance Treaty

September 1 German troops invade Poland

September 3 Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declare war on Germany

September 5 United States proclaims its neutrality

*In 1938 Hitler insisted on annexing Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland, which contained 3.5 million ethnic Germans. Czechoslovakia had mutual protection treaties with France (which was unprepared for any war) and the Soviet Union, which had signaled it would help defend Czechoslovakia IF Britain and France were to do so as well. (Historians debate this point)

To avert war in Europe, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain sent an ambassador to convince the Czechs to give in to Hitler's demands. Chamberlain himself visited Hitler three times and in Munich on September 30 agreed to allow Hitler to absorb the Sudetenland in return for a promise that Germany would make no further territorial demands. This agreement was celebrated throughout Europe. Chamberlain appeared on the balcony of Buckingham Palace with the King and Queen, streets were named after him in France, and many wanted him to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

NOTE: A short audio link of Chamberlain's speech on returning from Munich is available <http://www.history.com/audio/chamberlain-secures-peace-in-our-time> (1:08)

Remind students of the importance of radio (known as the “wireless” in Britain) in World War II. Families would gather round the radio to hear the news of the war. I suggest you allow the students to listen to the Chamberlain speech without text—he speaks clearly and it is short. Immediately following Chamberlain’s speech is a five-minute announcement from the government to civilians, outlining rules for air raids, gas mask use, and the suspension of entertainments and sporting events.

At this time there was no recording of speeches given in the House of Commons. The best recordings are of speeches broadcast on BBC radio (British Broadcasting). In several instances, Churchill was asked by the BBC to read a speech previously delivered in the House of Commons. It is generally agreed that these lack the energy and power of the original deliveries.

After the broadcast, ask the students the following questions:

1. How does Chamberlain justify his decision to declare war?
2. What is the tone of the broadcast?
3. Describe Chamberlain’s speaking voice.
4. What information does Chamberlain transmit?
5. What war directives does the government announce to British citizens?
6. In September 1939 there is no TV, no Internet, no computer. Imagine your family lives in London at the time. What would be the immediate impact on your lives from the broadcast? How might the impact of this war differ from that of the “Great War” or World War I as it from now on will be called?

**PART 3: WINSTON CHURCHILL'S FIRST BROADCAST AS PRIME MINISTER
MAY 19, 1940 • BBC RADIO**

www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/winstonchurchillbemenofvalor.htm

Background on How Churchill became Prime Minister:

(Note: there is immediate background to the speech on the student handout, along with the text of the speech).

Churchill was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty on September 3, 1939, after Britain's declaration of war. In April 1940 Hitler invaded Denmark and Norway. The fall of Norway toppled Chamberlain. In a speech in parliament Leo Amery, quoting Oliver Cromwell 300 years earlier, addressed Chamberlain as follows:

This is what Cromwell said to the Long Parliament when he thought it was no longer fit to conduct the affairs of the nation: "You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go."

Chamberlain's likely successor was Lord Halifax, who pointed out that as a peer, a member of the nobility and the House of Lords, he would be unable to sit in the House of Commons. The position was offered to Winston Churchill on May 10, the same day Hitler launched his invasion of France.

Note to teachers: After resigning as Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain served in Churchill's five-man War Cabinet and fully supported Churchill's decision to fight, not negotiate with, Germany (as Lord Halifax favored). Chamberlain's cancer was diagnosed in July, though the doctors withheld this news from him. Chamberlain, weak and in pain, resigned his post in late-September and died on November 9, 1940. Churchill eulogized Chamberlain on 12 November in the House of Commons. A link to the text of the speech is [here](#).

After the broadcast ask the following questions:

1. What images do you recall?
2. What was the overriding message of this speech?
3. What is the tone of the speech?
4. What information does Churchill transmit?
5. What events does Churchill foresee?

6. What is to be the role of the British people in the war?
7. Imagine you were listening to this in England in May 1940—what might be your reaction? What emotions would this evoke?
8. Both speeches communicate bad news. Contrast the speeches and the styles.

PART 4: WRITTEN ASSESSMENT

How do these speeches illuminate the leadership styles of Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill? Consider the extent to which each is informational and inspirational.

PART 5: EXTENDING THE LESSON PLAN

Churchill “look[s] with confidence to the stabilization of the Front in France.” Research the events that followed, and consider whether Churchill’s faith in the French was misplaced. What contributed to his misjudgment? How costly was this to the war effort?

For further study of Churchill’s rhetorical skill and its role in strengthening the resolve of the British people, see [“His Speeches: How Churchill Did It”](#) by Dr. Stephen Bungay. Read [“Their Finest Hour”](#), the speech of June 18, 1940 highlighted by Bungay.

PART 6: STUDENT HANDOUT OF CHURCHILL'S SPEECH

“Be Ye Men of Valour”

By Winston S. Churchill

BBC, May 19, 1940

His First Broadcast as Prime Minister to the British People

Background:

By May 14, the news from the front was uniformly bad. The Germans had broken through the French defences at Sedan, and everywhere the French forces were reeling under a devastating barrage from land and air. "At almost all points where the armies had come in contact," Churchill later wrote, "the weight and fury of the German attack was overwhelming." Holland fell on May 15, and Churchill flew to Paris on the same day to confer with the French leaders. It was evident that the military situation was near to catastrophic, and that the military commanders and political leaders were resigned to overwhelming defeat. Churchill agreed to send ten fighter squadrons to France, thereby imperilling the situation in England, as a desperate attempt to restore the spirits of his ally. On May 19, the Cabinet was informed that Lord Gort was "examining a possible withdrawal towards Dunkirk." In these sombre circumstances, Churchill made this, his first broadcast as Prime Minister to the British people.

I speak to you for the first time as Prime Minister in a solemn hour for the life of our country, of our empire, of our allies, and, above all, of the cause of Freedom. A tremendous battle is raging in France and Flanders. The Germans, by a remarkable combination of air bombing and heavily armored tanks, have broken through the French defenses north of the Maginot Line, and strong columns of their armored vehicles are ravaging the open country, which for the first day or two was without defenders. They have penetrated deeply and spread alarm and confusion in their track. Behind them there are now appearing infantry in lorries, and behind them, again, the large masses are moving forward. The re-groupment of the French armies to make head against, and also to strike at, this intruding wedge has been proceeding for several days, largely assisted by the magnificent efforts of the Royal Air Force.

We must not allow ourselves to be intimidated by the presence of these armored vehicles in unexpected places behind our lines. If they are behind our Front, the French are also at many points fighting actively behind theirs. Both sides are therefore in an extremely dangerous position. And if the French Army, and our own Army, are well handled, as I believe they will be; if the French retain that genius for recovery and counter-attack for which they have so long been famous; and if the British Army shows the dogged endurance and solid fighting power of which there have been so many examples in the past -- then a sudden transformation of the scene might spring into being.

It would be foolish, however, to disguise the gravity of the hour. It would be still more foolish to lose heart and courage or to suppose that well-trained, well-equipped armies numbering three or four millions of men can be overcome in the space of a few weeks, or even months, by a scoop, or raid of mechanized vehicles, however formidable. We may look with confidence to the stabilization of the Front in France, and to the general engagement of the masses, which will enable the qualities of the French and British soldiers to be matched squarely against those of their adversaries. For myself, I have invincible confidence in the French Army and its leaders. Only a very small part of that splendid Army has yet been heavily engaged; and only a very small part of France has yet been invaded. There is a good evidence to show that practically the whole of the specialized and mechanized forces of the enemy have been already thrown into the battle; and we know that very heavy losses have been inflicted upon them. No officer or man, no brigade or division, which grapples at close quarters with the enemy, wherever encountered, can fail to make a worthy contribution to the general result. The Armies must cast away the idea of resisting attack behind concrete lines or natural obstacles, and must realize that mastery can only be regained by furious and unrelenting assault. And this spirit must not only animate the High Command, but must inspire every fighting man.

In the air -- often at serious odds, often at odds hitherto thought overwhelming -- we have been clawing down three or four to one of our enemies; and the relative balance of the British and German Air Forces is now considerably more favorable to us than at the beginning of the battle. In cutting down the German bombers, we are fighting our own battle as well as that of France. My confidence in our ability to fight it out to the finish with the German Air Force has been strengthened by the fierce encounters which have taken place and are taking place. At the same time, our heavy bombers are striking nightly at the tap-root of German mechanized power, and have already inflicted serious damage upon the oil refineries on which the Nazi effort to dominate the world directly depends.

We must expect that as soon as stability is reached on the Western Front, the bulk of that hideous apparatus of aggression, which gashed Holland into ruin and slavery in a few days, will be turned upon us. I am sure I speak for all when I say we are ready to face it; to endure it; and to retaliate against it -- to any extent that the unwritten laws of war permit. There will be many men and many women in this Island who when the ordeal comes upon them, as come it will, will feel comfort, and even a pride, that they are sharing the perils of our lads at the Front -- soldiers, sailors and airmen, God bless them -- and are drawing away from them a part at least of the onslaught they have to bear. Is not this the appointed time for all to make the utmost exertions in their power? If the battle is to be won, we must provide our men with ever-increasing quantities of the weapons and ammunition they need. We must have, and have quickly, more aeroplanes, more tanks, more shells, more guns. There is imperious need for these vital munitions. They increase our strength against the powerfully armed enemy. They replace the wastage of the obstinate struggle; and the knowledge that wastage will speedily be replaced enables us to draw more readily upon our reserves and throw them in now that everything counts so much.

Our task is not only to win the battle - but to win the war. After this battle in France abates its force, there will come the battle for our Island -- for all that Britain is, and all the Britain means. That will be the struggle. In that supreme emergency we shall not hesitate to take every step, even the most drastic, to call forth from our people the last ounce and the last inch of effort of which they are capable. The interests of property, the hours of labor, are nothing compared with the struggle of life and honor, for right and freedom, to which we have vowed ourselves.

I have received from the Chiefs of the French Republic, and in particular from its indomitable Prime Minister, M. Reynaud, the most sacred pledges that whatever happens they will fight to the end, be it bitter or be it glorious. Nay, if we fight to the end, it can only be glorious.

Having received His Majesty's commission, I have formed an Administration of men and women of every Party and of almost every point of view. We have differed and quarreled in the past; but now one bond unites us all -- to wage war until victory is won, and never to surrender ourselves to servitude and shame, whatever the cost and the agony may be. This is one of the most awe-striking periods in the long history of France and Britain. It is also beyond doubt the most sublime. Side by side, unaided except by their kith and kin in the great Dominions and by the wide empires which rest beneath their shield - side by side, the British and French peoples have advanced to rescue not only Europe but mankind from the foulest and most soul-destroying tyranny which has ever darkened and stained the pages of history. Behind them - behind us - behind the Armies and Fleets of Britain and France - gather a group of shattered States and bludgeoned races: the Czechs, the Poles, the Norwegians, the Danes, the Dutch, the Belgians - upon all of whom the long night of barbarism will descend, unbroken even by a star of hope, unless we conquer, as conquer we must; as conquer we shall.

Today is Trinity Sunday. Centuries ago words were written to be a call and a spur to the faithful servants of Truth and Justice: "Arm yourselves, and be ye men of valour, and be in readiness for the conflict; for it is better for us to perish in battle than to look upon the outrage of our nation and our altar. As the Will of God is in Heaven, even so let it be."

*Note: Text and background from The Churchill Centre: www.winstonchurchill.org
Many of Churchill's speeches are available at this website.*

PART 7: A PAGE FROM "BE YE MEN OF VALOR"
Figure 1 Copyright Chartwell Trust CHAR_09_144_024

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