



**PLANIT**  
TEACHERS

# Analyzing Central Ideas in Historical American Speeches and Essays

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**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Class:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Due Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction

This worksheet is designed to help 15-year-old students develop their critical thinking skills by analyzing the central ideas of historical American speeches and essays. Through a combination of reading, discussion, and writing activities, students will learn to identify and evaluate the main arguments and themes presented in these significant texts.

## Activity 1: Identifying Central Ideas

Read the following excerpt from the Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln:

"Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

1. What is the central idea of this excerpt?

2. What evidence from the text supports your answer?

## Activity 2: Analyzing Textual Evidence

Read the following excerpt from the Declaration of Independence:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

1. What is the main argument presented in this excerpt?

2. How does the author use evidence to support this argument?

3. What are the implications of this argument for American society?

### Activity 3: Evaluating Arguments

Read the following excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech:

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

1. What is the central idea of this excerpt?

2. What evidence from the text supports King's argument?

3. How does King's use of rhetorical devices contribute to the overall effect of the speech?

#### Activity 4: Writing a Persuasive Essay

Choose a historical American speech or essay and write a persuasive essay arguing for or against the central idea presented in the text. Be sure to use evidence from the text to support your argument.

### Activity 5: Comparing and Contrasting

Choose two historical American speeches or essays and compare and contrast the central ideas presented in each text. How do the authors use evidence and rhetorical devices to support their arguments? What are the implications of each argument for American society?

## Conclusion

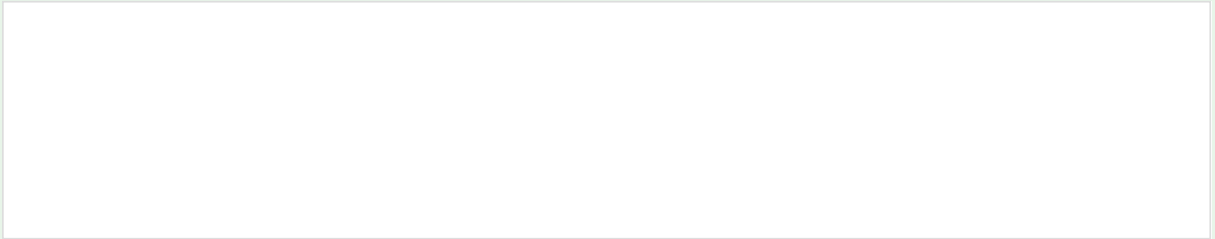
In this worksheet, you have analyzed the central ideas of historical American speeches and essays, evaluated the evidence presented in each text, and developed your critical thinking skills. Remember to always consider the historical context in which a text was written and to evaluate the arguments presented in each text.

## Assessment

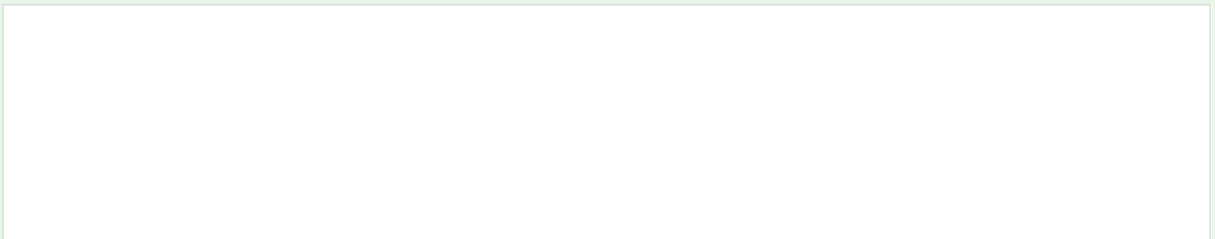
1. Participation in class discussions and activities (20 points)
2. Completion of activities 1-5 (40 points)
3. Quality of written work (30 points)
4. Use of evidence and rhetorical devices (10 points)

Choose any combination:

1. Research and write a short biography of a historical American figure who wrote a significant speech or essay.



2. Create a visual project, such as a poster or infographic, illustrating the central ideas and arguments presented in a historical American speech or essay.



3. Write a counterargument essay to a historical American speech or essay, arguing against the central idea presented in the text.

