

Commemorative Speeches: Tributes and Eulogies

Brief: Tribute speeches commemorative speeches that pay honor, admiration, and homage to an occasion, person, event, thing, or idea. A eulogy is a very specific type of commemorative speech that usually occurs at a person's funeral.

Learning Objective: Identify the attributes of commemorative speeches.

Key Terms:

- Commemorate: To honor the memory of someone or something with a ceremony.
- Eulogy: A speech to honor a deceased person, usually at a funeral.
- Obituary: A written biography of a recently deceased person published in a newspaper.
- Tribute: To pay honor, admiration, or homage.

Tribute Speeches

Tribute speeches are commemorative speeches that pay honor, admiration, and homage to an occasion, person, event, thing, or idea. In many cases, speakers delivering tribute speeches use emotional appeals to acknowledge the qualities and influence of the subject of the speech.

Tribute speeches are used anywhere there is a desire to praise and acknowledge the impact of someone or something. For example, a speech that acknowledges the role service members played in a military event is considered a tribute speech, as is a speech that celebrates someone on the occasion of a landmark birthday.

The Eulogy

A eulogy is a specific type of commemorative speech that honors a deceased person, usually at their funeral. Eulogies may include memories and anecdotes relating to the deceased person's life. Rather than focusing on how or why a person died, the eulogy celebrates the life they lived. Because eulogies are usually delivered by a family member or friend shortly after a loved one's passing, delivering this type of speech can be emotionally challenging. Successful eulogies honor the person who just died, but also provide comfort or inspiration to the audience.

Types of Eulogies

Some eulogies focus on the biographical elements of a person's life. Other eulogies present a more intimate view of the person's life by recounting memories that are shared between the storyteller and the deceased.

Examples from Well-Known Eulogies

President Ronald Reagan's eulogy for the Challenger space shuttle crew (1986):

I know it is hard to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen. It's all part of the process of exploration and discovery. It's all part of taking a chance and expanding man's horizons. The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave. The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them.



The crew of the Space Shuttle Challenger

Charles Spencer's eulogy for his sister, Princess Diana (1997):

Diana was the very essence of compassion, of duty, of style, of beauty. All over the world she was a symbol of selfless humanity, a standard-bearer for the rights of the truly downtrodden, a truly British girl who transcended nationality, someone with a natural nobility who was classless, who proved in the last year that she needed no royal title to continue to generate her particular brand of magic.

Ted Kennedy's eulogy for his brother Robert F. Kennedy (1968):

My brother need not be idealized, or enlarged in death beyond what he was in life; to be remembered simply as a good and decent man, who saw wrong and tried to right it, saw suffering and tried to heal it, saw war and tried to stop it.

Those of us who loved him and who take him to his rest today, pray that what he was to us and what he wished for others will some day come to pass for all the world.

As he said many times, in many parts of this nation, to those he touched and who sought to touch him: Some men see things as they are and say why; I dream things that never were and say why not.

From Concept to Action

While you can become more familiar with effective eulogies by reading or listening to other famous examples that can be found through research, you can also understand how others handle the difficult task of summarizing and honoring the lives of the recently deceased by reading obituaries published in newspapers. How do effective eulogies and obituaries balance the task of reporting facts about the person's life, such as major accomplishments, with more intangible aspects of their life, such as their character or disposition?

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

“Challenger flight 51-l crew.jpg.” Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Challenger_flight_51-l_crew.jpg. Accessed 19 June 2019. [Public Domain]

OER TEXT SOURCES:

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