Voices With History

Use context and sound to prepare a meaningful recitation.

12.P.CP.2.e "Build background knowledge by reciting all or part of significant poems and speeches as appropriate by grade level. (I/C)"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline words or phrases you would emphasize in a recitation, and number 1, 2, and 3 beside three pauses you would use. Let the historical details and repeated language guide your choices.

Preparing the Gettysburg Address

1 Reciting a historic text is more than reading it aloud. A speaker must notice how sound, repetition, and pauses carry an argument to listeners. In 1863, Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address at the dedication of a cemetery for Union soldiers killed at Gettysburg. The address is only about two minutes long, yet it connects the Civil War to the Declaration of Independence. When a student prepares an excerpt, background knowledge matters: the audience, occasion, and central claim help the speaker decide which words deserve emphasis. A memorized passage should sound like thought, not like a list.

2 Lincoln opens with "Four score and seven years ago," a phrase that points listeners back 87 years, to 1776. His first sentence says that the nation was "conceived in Liberty" and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. A reciter who understands this reference can make the opening purposeful rather than antique-sounding. Later, Lincoln repeats "we cannot" three times before saying that the living must dedicate themselves to the unfinished work. The repeated phrase builds pressure, so a brief pause after each "cannot" can clarify the movement of his reasoning.

③ Recitation also requires ethical attention to a text's stakes. Lincoln spoke while the Civil War continued, and the Gettysburg battlefield had become a national cemetery. His closing promise, “that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth,” names the democratic purpose he believes the war must protect. Do not turn such a sentence into a slogan. Let the parallel phrases be clear, then slow slightly on “shall not perish” to show the claim's urgency. A useful preparation note can name the historical situation, the audience, one sound pattern, and one deliberate delivery choice.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What earlier event does “Four score and seven years ago” point listeners toward, and why does that knowledge matter for a reciter?

2. According to paragraph 1, what three kinds of background knowledge help you decide which words deserve emphasis?

3. What repeated phrase in paragraph 2 calls for a brief pause after each repetition, and what effect does that pause create?

4. For the closing quotation, which words should a reciter slow down on, and what idea should that choice show?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose 6 to 10 consecutive lines from a significant public-domain poem or speech, and identify the author, title, and date. Write a three-sentence performance note that explains the historical setting or audience, the central idea, and exact words you will emphasize or pause around, then recite the excerpt.

ANSWER KEY # Voices With History

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline words or phrases you would emphasize in a recitation, and number 1, 2, and 3 beside three pauses you would use. Let the historical details and repeated language guide your choices. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What earlier event does "Four score and seven years ago" point listeners toward, and why does that knowledge matter for a reciter?	**It points to 1776 and the Declaration of Independence. Knowing this connection helps the reciter make the opening sound purposeful.**
2	According to paragraph 1, what three kinds of background knowledge help you decide which words deserve emphasis?	**Knowledge of the audience, the occasion, and the central claim.**
3	What repeated phrase in paragraph 2 calls for a brief pause after each repetition, and what effect does that pause create?	**"We cannot." A pause after each repetition builds pressure and clarifies Lincoln's reasoning.**
4	For the closing quotation, which words should a reciter slow down on, and what idea should that choice show?	**Slow on "shall not perish" to show the urgency of protecting democratic government.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Source: Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus” (1883)

“Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.”

Lazarus wrote this poem in 1883 for an art auction that raised funds for the Statue of Liberty's pedestal. Her speaker presents the statue as a welcoming beacon for immigrants, so I would emphasize “world-wide welcome” and pause after “Mother of Exiles.” I would slow on “mild eyes command” to contrast the statue's calm authority with the energetic image of lightning.

For Part 2, accept equivalent wording that identifies the stated historical context and delivery choices. For Part 3, accept any accurate public-domain selection of 6 to 10 consecutive lines with a source and three sentences that address context, meaning, and specific performance decisions. The model uses six consecutive poem lines with three separate performance-note sentences. Observe the assigned recitation and check text accuracy and the explained emphasis or pause choices; students may keep the text in view.