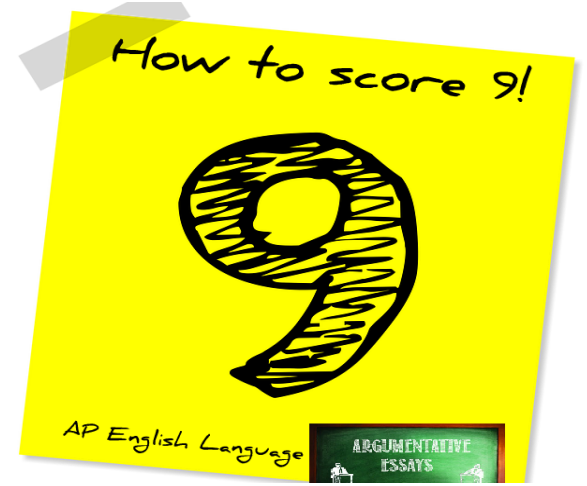


Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address student essay samples

(From the 2002 AP Lang Exam Question 1: Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address)



Score of 9

Saddened by the Civil War, President Lincoln addresses his American audience in order to convince them first, that the war is a tragedy for all, and second, that the war is not in his hands but in the hands of God and to encourage his listeners to trust in God's ultimate authority, work to end the war to achieve and maintain peace.

In his first paragraph, Lincoln uses parallel syntax and inclusive diction to put himself on a more intimate level with his audience. He compares “then,” before the war started, to “now,” during the war and says that then, his release of information of progress was in order but now, he and the public are at an equal level. He states that “the progress of our arms...is as well known to the public as to myself,” putting him and his audience on equal footing, making them more likely to listen to what he has to say as a fellow American and thus to accept his views on the tragic war. He maintains this with his audience throughout the speech.

The second paragraph and the first half of the third deal with the tragedy of the Civil War that enveloped two parts of a whole, neither of which wanted to fight and both of which only resorted to war. Lincoln employs parallel sentences and diction that seems to unify the nation in their dislike of war. He uses words like “all,” “both” “neither,” and “each” as the subjects for most of the sentences in this portion of his speech, demonstrating that the nation is still a nation and that this war is tragic because “all,” “both,” and “each” “dreaded,” “sought to avert” and “deprecated” the war. Neither party wanted it, and Lincoln uses such diction and parallel sentences to show this. For example, he starts that “neither party expected for the war the magnitude of the duration...Neither anticipated that the cause...might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease,” showing that both parts of the union were caught in the same tragic trap of war.

In the latter half of the third paragraph, Lincoln logically shows why God has not ended the war and urges his audience not to judge, but to leave judgment with God. He says that although it may seem absurd for slavery's proponents to be allowed to pray to God, that his audience and himself should “judge not that [they] be not judged,” alluding to the Lord's Prayer and appealing to his audience's Christian beliefs. He involves many principals of Christianity in this speech in order to appeal to his audience in this way. He asks a rhetorical question in lines 53-61 which, as Christians, his audience cannot answer positively. Lincoln states that “Fondly do [they] hope, fervently do [they] pray,” but that God's will overrides them. His use of parallel construction builds up the possible efforts of Lincoln and his people only to show with a “yet” that they may or may not be heeded. Also, his continuous use of “us” and “we” reinforce his brotherhood with his audience.

In the final paragraph, he urges his audience to work with him anyway towards lasting peace, doing all that they can to inch towards it, in one long sentence employing parallel construction. He wills his audience to “strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace,” giving them a list of things they can do to help the nation and its unity.

Throughout his speech, Abe Lincoln uses a kind tone to convey a message of brotherhood to his audience.

Score of 8

The Civil War marked a time period where the nation was severed into two sections: the Free North and the Slave South. During this time the United States President, Abraham Lincoln, did his best in order to hold the nation together. In his Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln gave a short speech concerning the effect of the Civil War and his own personal vision for the future of the nation. In this speech Lincoln used specific rhetorical strategies in order to convey his views of the Civil War to his audience. The rhetorical strategies included appeals to his audience's emotions, reasons, and the use of other specific rhetorical devices in order to convey his message.

Lincoln's main rhetorical strategy throughout his Second Inaugural Address was the use of an appeal to his audience's emotions. This is evident in almost all his speech as Lincoln constantly reverts back to some type of religious evidence in order to support his claim. Lincoln used religious ideals to appeal to his audience's emotions, knowing that it would draw his audience into what he was saying, as religion has a direct relationship with one's emotions. Lincoln use of religion also exemplifies the nation that he has an understanding of the time period. During this time where the country was war-torn, and many brothers were killing brothers, many people consumed with emotion turned to God. Lincoln used this to his advantage as he quoted scriptures in lines 50-52 and 68-69 to further draw his audience to him, as well as bring their attention how morally wrong the war itself was and question the overall morale of slavery. These were his main points of emphasis as he continued his utilization of religious ideals for emotional appeal. Lincoln also utilized imagery as a tool for emotional appeal in lines 46-47 and 66 in order to emphasize his main points. In both of these lines Lincoln used ideas from the cliché "blood, sweat, and tears" in order to depict to his audience the gruesomeness of the war. Through the use of imagery Lincoln gave his audience vivid pictures rather than elevated diction so that if serve to pierce their minds as well as their hearts.

Lincoln's other main rhetorical strategy was an appeal to reason. Lincoln maintained this strategy throughout his Second Inaugural Address by stating obvious facts about the war that had to register in his audience's minds. In his appeal to reason, Lincoln uses more specific rhetorical strategies such as the use of tautology, litote, and anecdotes in order to appeal to his audiences reason. This no more obvious than in the second and third paragraphs of the passage where Lincoln utilizes his appeal to his audience's reason the best. In lines 18-19 the use of tautology in, "All dreaded it, all sought to revert it" restates essentially the same idea and helps to further emphasize the fact that no one wanted the current conflict between the North and the South. Lincoln also uses a litote in the closing lines of paragraph 2 stating, "Both parties deprecated war," which not only understated the whole situation, but also helped to put more emphasis and light on the fact that this indeed was an unwanted war. In paragraph 3 Lincoln uses much of the same strategy except he diverts from his point of emphasis and uses a fictional anecdote to mention the slaves. The anecdote shows even more the war's effect on the whole country as well as emphasize the obvious fact that the conflict must cease.

Lincoln concludes his speech with another use of tautology saying, "With malice toward none, with charity for all," to further emphasize the fact that no matter who seems to be wrong, or right the fact remains that the conflict must indeed end. Lincoln's effective use of all the rhetorical strategies helped to indeed fulfill his purpose as well as give much needed support for no claim.

Score of 7

In his Second Inaugural Address, President Lincoln recited a speech designed to reunify the United States after a tumultuous Civil War. Lincoln's strategy for his speech is to look ahead to a prosperous future where the North and South are not divided. Surprisingly, Lincoln does not condemn the southern slave states for their secession and unloyalty to the Union. Rather, Lincoln reflects on the nature of the war and speaks hopefully of the future in an effort to unite the country.

Though Lincoln is cautious in his Second Inaugural Address to not appear to be malicious towards the Confederate states, he does address the conflict. Lincoln states that the confederate states were willing to jeopardize the Union and initiate the war (lines 24-26). Lincoln continues to address the reasons for the the conflict and the ensuing war, careful no to blame either the North or the South for the bloody war. Lincoln explains that neither the North nor the South predicted that the war would be as long and as devastating as it was (lines 37-39). Though the war was still occurring and was still very controversial at the time of his Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln reflects on the war in a surprisingly unbiased manner.

After contemplating the division between the North and the South, President Lincoln draws a parallel between the two sides stating that both the North and the South have the same God. Lincoln explains that the two sides worship and pray to the same God despite the fact that they are praying for victory over the other side (lines 44-48). Yet God could not answer both prayers, Lincoln explains, and in this occasion, God willed that the slaves be freed.

Lincoln ends his Address with an optimistic look to the future. In the future that Lincoln describes, the North and the South will make peace and the wounds left from the war will heal. Most importantly, though, this future will be achieves "with malice towards none" (line 70). Lincoln states that the North and South will once again be one nation without hatred or contempt towards either side.

Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address is significant because Lincoln offered an objective point of view. Lincoln did not speak of the unloyalty of the South nor did he praise the North. Rather, Lincoln's message to the nation was unification. No longer should the country be divided by the issue of slavery, but united under a president who seeks the benefit for all.

Score of 5

President Lincoln utilizes many different strategies in his address to the nation that support his overall belief that battle must be continually fought until a victor to the war can be determined. Lincoln makes references to some of the causes of the war and to the position of the Black citizens of America, making his thesis quite subtle. However, it is the referral to God that allows the reader to completely see what Lincoln wishes to convey.

The North and the South both "read the same Bible and pray to the same God," thus setting the grounds that both sides of the war are connected and governed by the same Heavenly Conductor. Both sides therefore succumb to the judgement of that God, and therefore both must accept that He alone has the right to decide which end of the Mason Dixon Line will be victorious. Lincoln then wished for his nation to pray for their cause, for in the end, it is all in God's hands.

The reference to God that Lincoln uses is the most significant rhetorical device present in his address. It creates a purpose in fighting the war that no earthly reasoning can hope to match. It is by using the superb essence of the Almighty that Lincoln states his point. God's will be done – so we must continue the bloodshed, for what we do may indeed be in the name of the Father. Dramatic and persuasive, Lincoln makes a bold statement about his strategy in a spiritually convincing way – in reference to the Christian God.