



**SPEECH!
SPEECH!**

**DRAMATISING
RHETORICAL
CITIZENSHIP**

**What would happen if people were
given the tools to speak powerfully
about the issues that matter to them?**



Photo credit: Min Yum

Speak Out! public event, London; delivery of speech about racism. November 2023.

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Speech! Speech!

“ I do hold that people can become better and worthier if they conceive an ambition to speak well, if they become possessed of the desire to be able to persuade their hearers. ”

ISOCRATES, *ANTIDOSIS* 275 (ANCIENT GREEK TEACHER OF RHETORIC, FOURTH CENTURY BCE)



Can it be better?

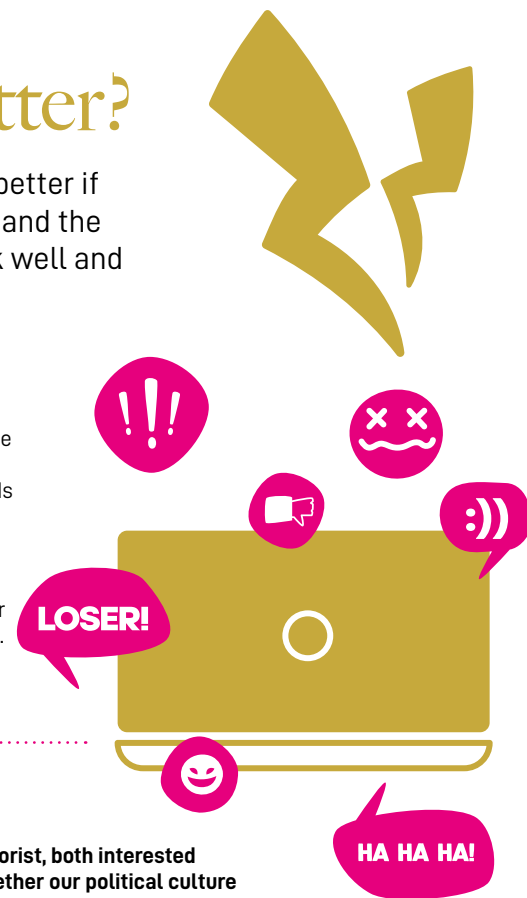
Could our political culture be better if people had the tools, the time and the opportunity to think and speak well and to listen carefully?

Two familiar scenes:

Scene one: A politician stands at a podium and delivers a speech about the state of the nation, the latest crisis or another political scandal. The handpicked audience applauds and cheers.

Scene two: Online, angry or bewildered people vent their frustrations while the politically committed attack each other for lack of character, honesty and intelligence.

This is not a healthy political culture



The need for change...

We – a Classics scholar and a political theorist, both interested in the art of rhetoric – wanted to know whether our political culture could become better through training in public speaking.

So we joined forces with a theatre company – experts in helping people take to a stage – and together we went all over England to ask people if they would like to make a powerful, persuasive and passionate political speech.

We gave people the tools of classical rhetoric to help them develop good arguments and think about how to persuade others to agree with them.

We taught them techniques for speaking clearly and feeling confident. And then we saw and heard them perform their own speeches.

The answer is... **YES YES YES YES**

Who? Where? What?

We have shared the skills of writing and delivering speeches at workshops all over England.

- We have worked with teenagers in college, women in prison and men in support groups.
- We have helped the staff of political, charitable and voluntary organisations.
- We have run workshops with members of the public at music, arts and cultural festivals.

All photos on these pages credit: Dash Arts



Writers' Block in Redruth, Cornwall; delivery of speech on regional independence to workshop participants. July 2023.



We have heard and seen political speeches made by:

- Members of the deaf community, young political activists, pensioners
- Working professionals, retired people and people relying on welfare support
- Refugees, students visiting from overseas, recent migrants
- People with ASD, ADHD, PTSD
- School students, incarcerated persons, university graduates and adults who left school with no qualifications.

People have made speeches calling for change in all sorts of areas:

- Public health, climate, justice, foreign policy
- Local government, education, transport
- Housing, energy, immigration
- Racism, gender, women's rights, sports
- Disability, the arts, the creative industries, popular culture.

Brighton and Hove



Citizens UK Brighton and Hove Chapter, delivery of speech on universal credit to workshop participants. August 2023.

Coventry



Underground Light Community Theatre workshop, participants are invited to think up topics for a political speech. May 2023.

London



Theatre Royal Stratford East, London, workshop participant explaining her speech about women's rights to workshop facilitators. September 2023.

London



St. Hilda's East Community Centre, Tower Hamlets, East London, discussion of draft speech. May 2023.

How it works

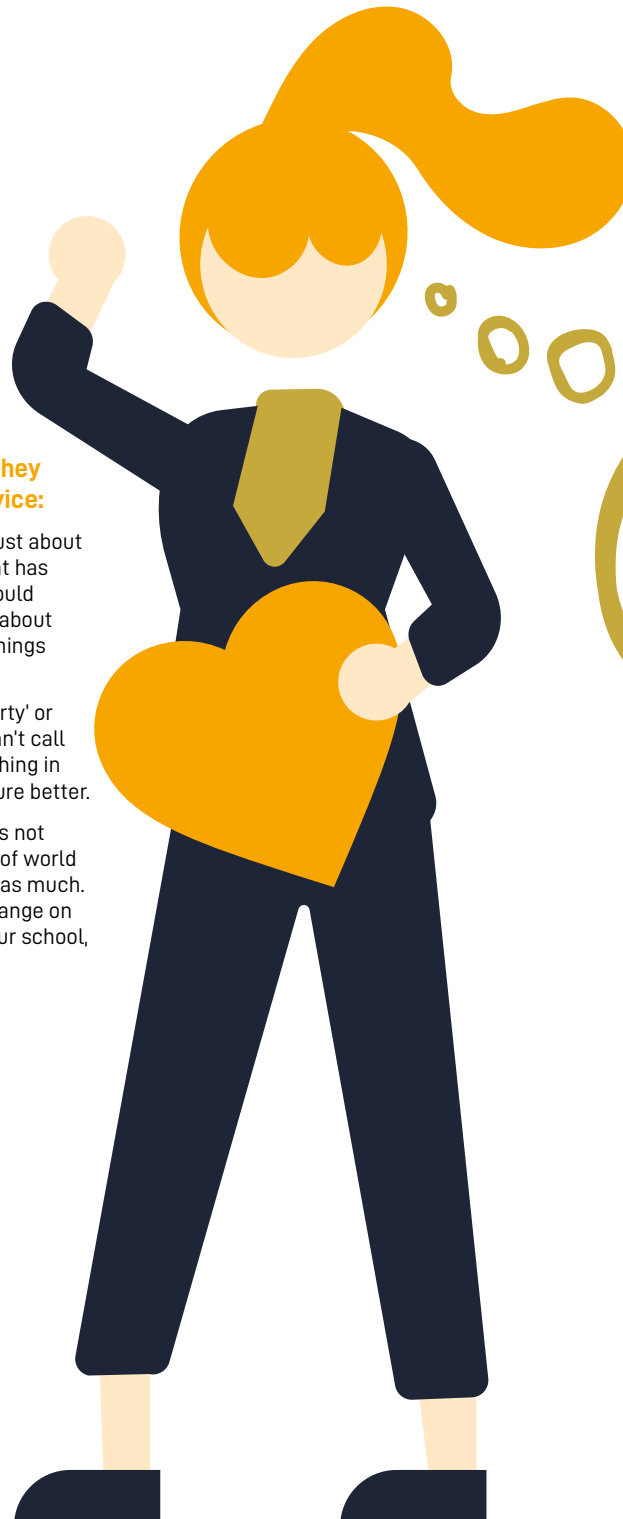
The question at the heart of our workshops is always simple: what do you want to change?

People are invited to talk about anything they want to. We give these three pieces of advice:

- 1. Look to the future:** A political argument is not just about how bad things are and who is to blame for what has happened. It is first and foremost about what could happen, what should happen: it is a proposition about something we all could do now so as to make things better in the future.
- 2. Be specific:** a speech calling for us to 'end poverty' or 'stop all wars' is likely to be vague because it can't call for anything specific to be done. Think of something in particular we could do that might make the future better.
- 3. Small is beautiful:** A great political speech does not have to be about great, grand and grave issues of world import. Local and particular issues matter just as much. We can argue for meaningful and important change on our own street, in our town, in our workplace, our school, our community.

“Political speaking urges us either to do or not to do something (...) The political orator is concerned with the future.”

ARISTOTLE, *RHETORIC* (1.3.3-4 = 1358B3-4)



Think Outside of Yourself

The most important thing in speechwriting and speechmaking is the audience.

It is great to know our own mind, what we think and what we want to do. But – great, powerful and effective speeches are shaped by the needs of the audience.

We urge people to start at the end – to think about what they want people to know, think and feel at the end of the speech that they didn't know, think or feel at the start.



In the workshops participants talk with each other to find out:

- What information other people need to be given so as to understand what is being called for and why
- How people might feel about the topic, so we know how much we have to change those feelings
- The evidence and examples which will be most meaningful to the audience.



Photo credit: Dash Arts

Theatre Royal Stratford East, London, delivery of a speech about racism, in front of the statue of playwright Joan Littlewood. September 2023.

All the right words

(and in the right order)

Once we have our ideas, evidence and arguments, we need to work out how to present them in a way which helps other people see them clearly and follow along with our thoughts.

We helped people use the speech structure developed by the ancient Greeks and Romans two millennia ago.

It worked then. It works now.

“The language of political speeches is like nothing so much as scene painting.”

ARISTOTLE, *RHETORIC* (3.12.4 = 1414A5)

EXORDIUM



Name	Purpose	Example
Exordium	This is simply the introduction. It is where you explain who you are, and what you will argue for. It is where you try to get the audience's attention, inviting them not just to listen but to think along with you.	Examples: "My name is ..."; "My brother has special educational needs (SEN) and I am arguing for better SEN testing in schools."; "Do you know how many kids in school have SEN?"
Narratio	Although this means 'narrative', it is not exactly like a story. This is where you explain the facts of the situation: what it is, what is going wrong, why we need to do something, and what your idea is for changing things for the better.	Examples: "Today, SEN testing is ... but we need to improve"; "We know that SEN testing improves children's school performance and wellbeing..."
Argumentatio	This is the meat of the argument. It is where you really focus on the evidence, where you prove that your proposal would be of benefit to us and that it would work.	Examples: "If we invest more now... then we will save money and wasted lives later"; "This has worked in ... so it can work here"; "Research from ... shows ..."
Refutatio	This is what it sounds like: a refutation. Here you anticipate the objections your audience might have, acknowledging them, but also showing why these objections are nothing to worry about at all (or do not disqualify your proposal).	Examples: "You might think we can't afford it but..."; "It hasn't worked before, you say, but the situation is different now..."
Peroratio	This is the grand finale. It is where you reiterate the core claim of the speech and build up to a powerful crescendo which brings everyone to their feet.	Examples: "Better SEN testing now!" "Spelling S-E-N should not be hard, even if you are dyslexic."



Saying it with...

Style and confidence

A good speech has a style fitting for the occasion. Ancient rhetorical theorists called this *decorum*.

Slang: for example, does not work in the same situations as formal speech, but there are times when it is the right way to talk.

Vivid language: can help audiences to really 'see' what you are talking about.

Metaphors: images, which help describe situations, can bring things to the front of the mind of your audience.

And more: Other devices give a speech rhythm and help people follow along: groups of three (tricolon: three words, three phrases, three ideas), contrasts and examples can make the message of a speech clear and, at the same time, please the ears of the audience.



Most of us are nervous if we have to give a speech. But we can learn some techniques for powerful and confident delivery. We helped participants to stand, breathe and speak with confidence, to understand the value of pause, pace and emphasis, and to practise their speech.



Photo credit: Ikin Yum

Speak Out! public event, London; delivery of speech about Cornwall. November 2023.



What participants say... *e*



It's such an exhilarating feeling when you see the words that you have written down on the page actually make the impact that you really hope they would on so many people. It's... it felt wonderful.

MAX AT SPEAK OUT! PUBLIC EVENT, LONDON. SPEAKING.

I made some eye contact with some people of colour in the audience and I could just really see that the words resonated with them which just really made me feel good about the speech and just also that it's important and the subject I was talking about is also important and very personal to people as well.

EYUM PRISCILLA AT SPEAK OUT! PUBLIC EVENT, LONDON; SPEAKING AFTER THE EVENT, 23-11 2023. FROM VIDEO.

You have, like, put your emotions into it and you're being vulnerable at the same time on stage. So, yeah, it was a totally different experience for me.

DEVIKA AT SPEAK OUT! PUBLIC EVENT, LONDON; SPEAKING AFTER THE EVENT, 23-11 2023. FROM VIDEO.

It was amazing because it's so different rehearsing it to just a small group of people than it is to performing it to a full venue, because it's just an entirely different atmosphere.

JESS AT SPEAK OUT! PUBLIC EVENT, LONDON. SPEAKING.



What audiences and organisations say...

It was good to actually come and hear things I wouldn't normally hear about or normally come across. Like a lot of most people, I get my information from either standard news sources or from social media a lot of the time. And this format was very different. And because of that, I am able to engage with things a lot in a deeper way.

ANONYMOUS AUDIENCE MEMBER AT SPEAK OUT! PUBLIC EVENT, NOVEMBER 2023. FROM VIDEO.

It was a brilliant evening and it was fantastic to meet everybody. And I think if you could have locked us all in and made us all stay and talk to each other, we'd probably all been here till about two in the morning.

ANONYMOUS AUDIENCE MEMBER AT SPEAK OUT! PUBLIC EVENT, NOVEMBER 2023. FROM VIDEO.

Dash were present. They became part of our programme. They importantly used local arts when they went into the spaces that we were already working in: the Prison Project, the Deaf Centre, etc. And actually, they became ... an extension of the work that we were doing in the communities.

LISA, CEO AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT SHAKESPEARE NORTH THEATRE

I've been teaching nearly 30 years now. This is my fifth year in prison education, and I can honestly say it was the most powerful day I've ever had in education ... the women were told that they could write about anything ... The line that stuck with me was that one of the women said: 'I feel like for the first time, a voice has been heard', and that's a really, really powerful impact on our learners.

STEVE, TEACHER AT HMP STYAL

We've had to hear a lot of difficult stories, a lot of alternative experiences, a lot of lived experiences very different to my own. But I think it's really, really important that we make sure we make spaces for these stories.

ANONYMOUS AUDIENCE MEMBER AT SPEAK OUT! PUBLIC EVENT, NOVEMBER 2023. FROM VIDEO



“The man who equips himself with the weapons of eloquence, not to be able to attack the welfare of his country but to defend it, he, I think, will be a citizen most helpful and most devoted both to his own interests and those of his community.”

CICERO, *DE INVENTIONE* 1.1

Rhetorical citizenship

As citizens of a democracy, we have political rights.

We can all take part in the political process. We can all organise and make political demands. But we will not get very far if we do not get other people to support us. That is why we need to know how to persuade them.

The concept of Rhetorical Citizenship captures the idea that some of our rights and duties are to language and argument: the right to speak and to make arguments to others; the obligation to try to understand what competing claims other citizens are making. These rights were at the foundation of the first attempts to create democratic and free societies.

To exercise those rights – and to be able to use them to contribute to the common good of our society – we need to have the right skills.

Many people feel that they do not.

But the truth is that anyone can make a powerful, passionate and potentially persuasive political speech.

Confidence in public speaking, and fluency in expression, are not natural gifts bestowed only on a few. They are learnt. They can be taught.

Given the opportunity, a few simple techniques and the chance to practise, everybody can become confident in their arguments, words and voice.

Our workshop gives people that opportunity. It shows that everyone really does have something to say.

And everyone can say it persuasively.



“The biggest favour that our society could do itself would be to work on ways of helping citizens to feel comfortable with their voices.”

STEPHEN COLEMAN, PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS; 'A MANIFESTO FOR COMMUNICATION STUDIES'



Photo credits: Dawn Kliner

Speak out! public event, Manchester, workshop participant delivering speech about Education, Health and Care plans, with panellists listening, November 2023.



Speak Out! public event, Manchester; delivery of speech about how and why we should overcome intolerance. November 2023.



Speak Out! public event, Manchester; delivery of speech sharing personal experience as a deaf person in Iran and a refugee in the UK (BSL signing). November 2023.

“Ancient rhetoric... offers a thorough, systematic approach to the teaching of communication by integrating speaking, writing, critical listening, reading, and body language with content knowledge. (...) Rhetoric must, therefore, be seen as one element of a broader curriculum in contemporary education.”

HOLMES-HENDERSON ET AL., 'RHETORIC, ORACY AND CITIZENSHIP'

Rhetoric and Oracy

Oracy is becoming a more and more important part of the curriculum.

Voice 21 say that Oracy is “an essential element of successful citizenship teaching”.

Rhetoric teaches people not how to be the loudest, most aggressive or most comedic but how to adapt arguments to audiences, how to bring them into the speech, how to make points that will resonate with others.

It asks people to think about the social context of argument and decision-making and directs people to think socially not selfishly, requiring them to reflect on how and why a proposal is good not just for them but for their audience and perhaps even for all of us.

www.voice21.org/oracy-across-the-curriculum-the-evidence



Giving a speech in front of the workshop audience greatly empowers people.

They feel heard.

They feel active as citizens.

They feel that they have learned ways of orienting their words in public, of providing arguments and evidence, which give them confidence in what they have to say.

Feedback from our workshops:

We asked our workshop participants what they had gained or learnt from the workshop, and how they felt about the workshop and about the future as a result of it.

[I have gained] confidence and better writing skills.
TEENAGER (MALE) CORNWALL

[The workshop gave me] experience composing and presenting my ideas.
TEENAGER (MALE) CORNWALL

[The workshop has given me] a better understanding of my writing and I feel a little bit more confidence after talking in front of a small group... I've gained the feeling of knowing my voice may make a difference.
ADULT (MALE) SHEFFIELD

[I have learned] to have more confidence in what I'm saying. More conviction!
WOMAN PRISONER, HMP STYAL

I'm not sure what's in store for the future but I will have the ability to voice my opinion.
UNEMPLOYED MALE (SHEFFIELD)

I feel confident, and am looking forward to a bright future.
WOMAN PRISONER, HMP STYAL

[I now feel] motivated, however still nervous about public speech. It feels less daunting though.
TEENAGER (FEMALE)

I've gained from listening to peoples' opinions and through the experience of writing a speech and forming my opinions on the subject.
UNEMPLOYED MALE (SHEFFIELD)

It built my confidence and made me think about acting on my speech.
TEENAGER (MALE) CORNWALL

[I have gained] A bit more confidence in talking in front of a group of people.
WOMAN PRISONER, HMP STYAL

[I have gained] the confidence to speak out to help others.
WOMAN PRISONER, HMP STYAL

[I feel] much more excited and I feel like I can make a difference...[it] will make me feel proud to look back at how far I have come after a lot more practice.
TEENAGER (MALE) CORNWALL

We've seen participants:

Improve their public speaking skills:

Deliver speeches with greater clarity and impact.

Increase confidence:

Develop greater self-assurance in their speaking and presentation abilities.

Develop critical thinking:

Analyse and articulate complex ideas effectively.

Enhance persuasive techniques:

Apply rhetorical strategies to effectively communicate and influence audiences.

Enhance research abilities:

Conduct thorough research to support their arguments.

Achieve real-world impact:

Use their speeches to influence and inspire others in their communities.

Feel empowered:

Gain the confidence and skills to advocate for meaningful change.

We continue to deliver workshops, so get in touch with us if you want to make a difference to your public speaking.

Further reading and watching:

Van der Blom, H. and H. Yunis (eds) (2027), *Cambridge History of Rhetoric I: Rhetoric of the Ancient World (to c. 350 CE)*, Cambridge.

Coleman, S. (2023), 'A manifesto for communication studies', *English: Journal of the English Association* 72, 278: 102–106; doi.org/10.1093/english/efad025.

Finlayson, A. (2023), 'Overlapping methodologies? Rhetoric, English Studies and the social world', *English: Journal of the English Association* 72, 278: 96–101. doi.org/10.1093/english/efad031.

Holmes-Henderson, A., Žmavc, J., and Kaldahl, A.-G. (2022), 'Rhetoric, oracy and citizenship: curricular innovations from Scotland, Slovenia and Norway', *Literacy* 56: 253–263. doi.org/10.1111/lit.12299

Holmes-Henderson, A. and K. Howard (2026), *Reviving rhetoric across the curriculum*, London.

Kock, C. and L. Villadsen (2012), *Rhetorical Citizenship and Public Deliberation*, University Park, Pennsylvania.

Millard, W. and Menzies, L. (2016), The state of speaking in our schools. Available from: www.cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Oracy-Report-Final.pdf

Speak Out! Public events closing the project Speech! Speech! Dramatising Rhetorical Citizenship: video <https://youtu.be/z7iJuDsFr9g>.



Group photo from workshop at St Hilda's Community Centre. May 2023.

Photo credit: Dash Arts

Meet the team



Project team, Manchester 22 Nov 2023. Left to right as below.

About us

Cristina Catalina: is a theatre and multi-disciplinary arts producer, translator and performer, and Senior Producer at Dash Arts. She has produced work across indoor and outdoor locations nationally and internationally, and is passionate about bringing communities, artists and audiences together in unexpected, joyful and thought-provoking ways.

Alan Finlayson: is Professor of Political and Social Theory at the University of East Anglia. He has a long-standing research interest in Rhetoric and Speechwriting/speechmaking and has taught Rhetoric at undergraduate level for many years. He has led workshops teaching speechwriting/speechmaking at a variety of locations – from music festivals to MP's offices – and to people from age nine to ninety.

Josephine Burton: is a theatre director, dramaturg, podcast host and playwright whose work confronts urgent questions of identity, history and belonging. She is known for formally inventive, politically fearless productions, among them the double Olivier Award-winning *Babel*, *Songs for Babyn Yar*, and the critically acclaimed *The Reckoning*, and for a practice rooted in intercultural collaboration, polyphonic storytelling, and what critics have called "radical hospitality." Josephine is Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Dash Arts, an international theatre company founded in 2005. It has created award-winning new work with over 10,000 artists and participants for live audiences of over 400,000 worldwide, working across theatre, music, dance and visual art.

Henriette van der Blom: is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Birmingham. She specialises in the history and political life of the Roman Republic, with a particular focus on political speech and its impacts as well as all aspects of Cicero. She has further interests in political oratory across historical periods – including current British political speech – and is the founding director of the Network for Oratory and Politics.

**EVERYONE HAS
SOMETHING TO SAY**

**EVERYONE HAS
AN OPINION READY
TO BECOME AN
ARGUMENT**

Our Project Partners

Arbourthorne Men's Social Group; Sheffield Theatres; Manchester Deaf Centre; Deaf Explorer; Theatre Royal Stratford East; Banbury and Bicester College; Oxford Contemporary Music; Citizens UK Brighton and Hove Chapter; His Majesty's Prison Styal, Wilmslow; Novus, Foundations for Change; St. Hilda's East Community Centre (Tower Hamlets); Writers' Block in Redruth, Cornwall; Underground Lights Community Theatre, Coventry; The Common Lot, Norwich.

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dasharts.org.uk

The Network for Oratory and Politics
birmingham.ac.uk/nop

European Speechwriters Network
europeanspeechwriters.org

Arts and Humanities Research
Council-UK Research and Innovation
ukri.org/councils/ahrc/

Arts Council England
artscouncil.org.uk

HOME Manchester
homemcr.org

Three Monkeys Trust
threemonkiestrust.org