Questions for Thought and Discussion

- Are there any specific speeches or orators that members of your group particularly admire (or dislike)? What is it about them that provokes these strong reactions?
- Do you sympathise with Plato’s negative view of rhetoric? What are the counter-arguments?
- Why is tricolon (the three-point list) such an effective rhetorical technique?
- It is natural to assume that speakers should ‘always say what they mean’, but are there any exceptions? Take the example of the film scene in The 39 Steps, described in the book, as a starting point for discussion.
- Can the character of a speaker affect the validity of his or her argument?
- In what ways can speakers use non-verbal symbols to reinforce their arguments?
- What does it mean to say that rhetoric is ‘a social phenomenon’?
- Have there been any recent news stories that highlight the difficulties that orators face when addressing multiple audiences?
- How does technology affect rhetoric?
- Devise a rhetorical exercise that would help speakers strengthen their skills.
- Martin Luther king was an extremely effective orator, but if you tried to speak like him you might risk sounding silly. Why?
- If a speaker uses a ghost-writer, does that make the speech less ‘authentic’?
- Why do different countries have different expectations surrounding public speech?
- What are the causes of rhetorical failure?
- Did the book change your views about what is appropriate with regards to public speaking? Did it make you feel more or less inclined to make a speech yourself?

Other books by this author

The Roar of the Lion: The Untold Story of Churchill’s World War II Speeches (Oxford University Press, forthcoming, 2013)

Further Reading

Sam Leith You Talkin’ To Me? Rhetoric from Aristotle to Obama (London: Profile, 2011)
Max Atkinson, Lend Me Your Ears: All You Need to Know About Making Speeches and Presentations (London: Vermillion, 2004)
George Lakoff and Mark Johnson Metaphors We Live By (London: University of Chicago Press, 1980)