

# Lesson Plan

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## Avoiding Plagiarism: The Melania Trump Speech

By Erika Luckert

*This lesson from T&W teaching artist [Erika Luckert](#) helps students understand the importance of acknowledging and citing sources, and gives them an opportunity to practice revising to avoid plagiarism.*

**Grade(s):** 9–12

**Genre:** Nonfiction, Essay

**Common Core Standards** (Refer to [ELA Standards > Writing > Grade 9–10](#) and [ELA Standards > Writing > Grade 11–12](#)):

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8  
Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; **integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.**
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8  
Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; **integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.**
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5  
**Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.** (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 9-10 here.)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5  
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**Lesson Objectives:**

Students will:

- Develop an understanding of the importance of acknowledging sources through engagement with real-world events
- Practice acknowledging sources and revising to avoid plagiarism using a model text

**Guiding Questions:**

- Why is it important to acknowledge your sources?
- How does acknowledging your source change the way an audience perceives your writing?
- What are some challenges you encounter in acknowledging or citing sources?
- What are some different ways of avoiding plagiarism?

LESSON

**Introduction:** Play the video of [Melania Trump’s speech at the 2016 Republican National Convention](#), then discuss the speech’s context with students.

As the video says, “Many spouses touch on the same themes, aiming to highlight to more human side of the candidate.” However, in this instance, not only did Melania Trump touch on similar themes to Michelle Obama’s speech from 2008, she used many of the same words. [According to the New York Times](#), the Trump campaign did not acknowledge plagiarism:

*Katrina Pierson, another spokeswoman for the Trump campaign, acknowledged that Mrs. Trump used phrases similar to those used by Mrs. Obama but insisted that the language was not copied verbatim.*

*She said in an interview with Sky News that Ms. Trump was trying to echo themes expressed publicly by prominent women including Laura Bush and Elizabeth Dole.*

*“She really wanted to communicate to Americans in phrases they’ve heard before,” Ms. Pierson said.*

However, there was wide public condemnation of the speech, and [USA Today](#) interviewed three college professors who affirmed that they would consider this a case of plagiarism and take disciplinary action.

**Main Activity:** Project the Melania Trump Speech Resource on the board, or hand out copies so that students can see the two speeches side by side.

Discuss with students: What makes this a case of plagiarism? Why do you think there was such a hugely negative public reaction?

Ask students to consider how Melania Trump might have avoided these charges of plagiarism. Brainstorm strategies and possibilities on the board.

Once students have generated some ideas, break them into pairs or small groups and ask them to rewrite the paragraph of Trump's speech so that she can't be accused of plagiarism. Students may use direct quotes, signal phrases, or other strategies that they brainstormed.

You may also ask students to create an appropriate MLA (or Chicago, APA, etc.) citation of Michelle Obama's speech. This provides practice in citation format for a less common medium (a public speech). The MLA citation of the *New York Times* article is provided as a guide in the Melania Speech Resource handout.

**Closing:** Partners present their revised speeches to the class as if they were at the Republican National Convention. The class plays the role of the public and the press, and evaluates whether each revision is safe from accusations of plagiarism.

Ask students to respond to questions such as: What were the biggest challenges you encountered in fixing Melania Trump's plagiarism? What strategies did you use? How might your revision change the way the speech would be received?

**Materials:**

- SmartBoard or other video projector
- White board markers or chalk to record class brainstorming/discussion
- Melania Speech Resource
- Paper for students to rewrite speech

**Vocabulary:** Plagiarism, citation, signal phrase, direct quote

**Multi-Modal Approaches to Learning:** Verbal-Linguistic, Visual-Spatial, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal