SPEECHES

The keynote address is an important part of a dedication/rededication ceremony. The following speeches are samples for your use. In many cases your audience will consist of children and adults, so keep that in mind when planning your speech.

Sample Speech #1

It was Patrick Henry who proclaimed, “Give me liberty or give me death.” Not many of us know that this statesman also said that “no free government, or the blessing of liberty, can be preserved to any people without a frequent recurrence of fundamental principles.” It is this latter statement which is so appropriate to the dedication/rededication of the Freedom Shrine here today.

The Freedom Shrine fills the need Patrick Henry described. This Shrine is a constant reminder of the fundamental principles upon which this great nation was founded. It is a reminder of our continuing struggle to insure these principles against the enemies of freedom. The words of these documents echo our great American history and the best thing we can derive from history is the enthusiasm it raises in us.

The Freedom Shrine serves its purpose only when attention is directed to it continuously. We cannot allow such an inspirational display to become merely an attractive part of the school scenery. The Freedom Shrine best fulfills its function when it is used regularly in class work and is made the focal point of school-wide patriotic observances.

We are here today to emphasize the message of encouragement these documents hold for students, faculty and the general community. Before you leave today, pause and examine this Freedom Shrine. As you read the documents you will be reliving your country’s history. You will catch a glimpse of the spirit of the times, the greatness of the people who wrote the words and the ideals which inspired them.

These immortal words are writings of people who carved out our precious American way of life—a way of life which we all too frequently take for granted today. Do not forget the victories won for you by Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln. Reflect, remember and renew your pride in our God-given American heritage.

Through the Freedom Shrine you will gain an understanding of the sacrifices and hardships involved in the increasing struggle to win and preserve our freedom. These papers will familiarize you with the evolutionary problems of our democratic government, which through its dedication to liberty and justice, makes our republic the hope of the world.

The Freedom Shrine, exclusively a project of Exchange Clubs, was conceived in the hope and belief that it would serve as a living symbol of the rich heritage of freedom under God shared by all Americans. The security and destiny of every nation rest chiefly on the sound education of its people. Therefore, it is the wish of The National Exchange Club that the Freedom Shrine impresses upon all citizens, particularly our youth, that this heritage is theirs—not merely to enjoy and certainly not to squander—but to strengthen and enrich so that succeeding generations will inherit an even finer legacy. It is our sincere belief that the Freedom Shrine is an empowering reminder of the duties and responsibilities of American citizenship as well as its rights and privileges.

We are here today, not so much to dedicate/rededicate the Freedom Shrine itself—but to rededicate ourselves to the principles for which it stands. The Freedom Shrine is our country’s greatest visual aid in the statement of our fundamental principles which, as Patrick Henry said, is so necessary for the preservation of free government and the blessing of liberty. The Freedom Shrine is here to help you understand these principles. Make frequent use of it.
Sample Speech #2

"The Making of a Miracle"

Ladies and gentlemen, students, teachers, distinguished guests:

First of all, thank you for attending our brief ceremony today. I hope that what we do and say here will help you to better understand and appreciate something which all of us lucky enough to live in these United States enjoy in such amazing abundance. That is really what this get-together is all about — sort of a celebration of our very good fortune of this wonderful gift which we all share. We receive this gift automatically because we were born Americans.

That gift, of course, is freedom — the freedom to live our lives in just about any way we choose; the freedom to gather together wherever and whenever we want; to pursue the career of our choice; the freedom to say what we think needs saying; to practice any religion; and the freedom to do so much more.

For nearly all of us, this precious gift of freedom has come free of charge. But for others, there has been a price. Perhaps you know someone who has paid or is paying for our freedom — a soldier, a sailor, a marine, an airperson, a coast guardsperson. The men and women in our armed forces are one example of how some people dedicate a part of their lives to protect our freedom. In years past, others have also paid a high price. Thousands of Americans sacrificed all they had, their homes, property, lives — all in pursuit of human freedom.

That is one of the reasons why the Exchange Clubs of America decided more than forty years ago to assemble what we call the Freedom Shrine. We organized the effort so that Americans, especially young Americans to whom freedom comes automatically, could see for themselves how freedom was actually purchased for us. Our freedom was earned at great cost by thousands and thousands of people over a span of hundreds of years.

That is why Exchangites think the Freedom Shrine is much more than just 28 documents hanging in neat rows. If you look hard at those documents, study them, understand them and use your imagination, those Freedom Shrine plaques become transparent. They magically turn into wondrous windows through which you can see back through the centuries, deep into our nation’s past.

It is a past filled with adventure and drama, with heroes and heroines who are larger than life. The history of our nation is more than just names, dates and old fashioned faces wearing beards and bonnets. It is the fascinating story of human triumphs, failures and unflinching determination.

Consider the Mayflower Compact, called America’s first constitution, written in 1641. There’s a copy of it in the Freedom Shrine. That document was originally signed by half-starved pilgrims huddled together aboard a tiny wooden ship. These courageous men and women abandoned their homes and braved a storm-tossed ocean to seek that which they could not find at home: the freedom to worship God in their own way. Today, we call that freedom of religion. But back in the 1600s freedom of religion did not exist.

Then, there is the Declaration of Independence which was penned by a brilliant young man named Thomas Jefferson who summarized the stinging grievances of England’s colonists against their king. Writing for all Americans, Jefferson put on paper what then was just a dream — that all men are created equal. And because they are, they have the right to tell the government what to do, not the other way around. To the English King, those ideas were treason. So, in 1776 the war of revolution began.
Despite the fact that the colonists were outmanned, outgunned, untrained and considered unlikely to win, they overcame the odds and actually won the revolutionary war. But that is only the beginning of the story. Although our forefathers were certainly talented and courageous, for a time they failed to see that even free men need a plan to follow if they are to enjoy the fruits of their freedom.

So after the war, each of the 13 new states insisted on running things their own way. The new nation called America started to crack at the seams. Instead of cooperating, the states began to fight among themselves. It appeared that this brand new nation called the United States of America would soon crumble into 13 separate, snarling countries.

It was the U.S. Constitution that saved the day. In fact, if it had not been written two-hundred years ago, we might not have any freedom left to talk about. And, as far as human freedom is concerned, it may well be the most important collection of words ever put on paper.

These days it’s really hard to do a good job of completely describing the importance of the Constitution, or the Constitution’s Bill of Rights. That is because few of us have ever experienced life under any other form of government. Then we would know what it is like to have our lives controlled by a constitution other than our own. Yes, other nations also have constitutions. But ours is special.

In other constitutions the government tells the people what they are allowed to do. In our Constitution, we the people tell the government what it can and cannot do.

I hope that you will take the time to not only read the Constitution and the other Freedom Shrine documents, but I encourage you to go to the library and read the great stories behind each of the documents.

The Exchange Clubs are proud of the Freedom Shrine. We hope you will be too. This Shrine is one of thousands which exist all across America. All of them tell the same exciting story of freedom by presenting some of America’s great landmarks of work and deed which have made freedom a reality in our lifetimes. But the Freedom Shrine documents represent only part of the epic. For just as freedom is one of the most sought after of human possessions, it is also among the most fragile. Which is why we who enjoy freedom must forever guard and protect it.

Perhaps that is the most important message the Freedom Shrine brings us. It continually reminds us of the great debt we owe to those thousands of Americans who fought for and won the freedom we enjoy today. It also reminds us that freedom, after all, does not come without cost. And, if we the people are to keep it, we the people must always be prepared to defend it.