



# “The Public Must Understand Agriculture”

Initiated by Zack Ellington

“Where will my next meal come from? That’s a silly question!” you say. “We have plenty of food in this country.” Yes we do have plenty of food. Even today, two of three human beings in the world do not get enough to eat. And the situation may get worse...” -- David Weaver, 1952

## Background

This lesson focuses on the rise agriculture in the United States in the 1950s. It asks students to consider trends in agricultural technology that have shaped the first half of the twentieth century, through analysis of a speech given by David S. Weaver who was the Agricultural Extension Service director at North Carolina State University in the 1950s and early 1960s. For more about Weaver see <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/findingaids/mc00026> (click the Summary tab at the top of the page).

## Document

The speech from David Weaver that is featured in this lesson is available on NC State Libraries *Cultivating a Revolution* at <http://d.lib.ncsu.edu/collections/catalog/mc00026-001-bx0001-002-000>

## Grade Level Target

This lesson has been designed for 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but could be adapted for elementary or high school.

## Content

Following World War II, the United States experienced a labor shortage in agriculture, which threatened the prospect of meeting demand for food. As a result, federal and state governments enacted policies to encourage agricultural research and education and further the push to increase the productivity of farmers through technology. This research resulted in many new tools available to the agriculture industry in the 1950s, where increased productivity from these endeavors meant that fewer farmers were able to produce such an abundance of food that the United States greatly expanded its agricultural exports, selling the excesses to other nations.

## Implementation and Common Core

This lesson includes two activities and should take one day to complete. The lesson supports Common Core ELA/Literacy standards in Reading (RH.6-8.2) and (RH.6-8.5).

# Activity 1 – Reading the Speech

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In this activity, students will carefully read Weaver’s speech in order to better understand the state of agriculture in the United States in the 1950s. Below is a brief background on Weaver’s speech. This information should be useful for teachers, but should not necessarily be shared with students before they read the speech. The idea is for students to develop knowledge about the speech from their reading as opposed to the teacher telling students what to think about the speech. This is an important part of the close reading that the Common Core seeks to promote in classrooms.

## *Background on the Speech*

In this speech, David Weaver, director of the North Carolina Extension Service, reflects on the state of agriculture in North Carolina. He first examines issues facing agriculture and how technology and research has addressed some of these problems, even surpassing expectations in certain instances. Additionally, Weaver applies his knowledge of the current research in agriculture and other fields, and examines how this technology would impact the agriculture in the United States in the future. Weaver’s analysis emphasizes trends toward automation, research, and reliance upon technology to increase productivity.

## *A Close Read*

The first task is for students to closely read Weaver’s speech. Close reading has different meaning to different people. In this activity, we will apply some of the ideas about close reading put forward by reading scholar Tim Shanahan, who advocates for close reading that is informed by three basic ideas.

“The basic notions of close reading that everyone seems to agree on are: (1) close readings involve interpretations of what a text conveyed both in terms of the message coded into the text by the author and the choices that the author made in how to convey that message—in other words the key ideas and details and the craft and structure are treated as a unity; (2) close readings require a lot of attention to the text itself; (3) close reading usually will require at least partial re-readings of the text. How these play out should not be easily described, because they should vary a bit each time depending on the demands and qualities of the text to be read closely.”

For more see [http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/2013/03/why-discussions-of-close-reading-sounds\\_2091.html](http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/2013/03/why-discussions-of-close-reading-sounds_2091.html)

The structure of a text matters when deciding on a close reading strategy. The text in this activity, Weaver’s speech, is four typewritten pages and about 1,200 words long. The speech is not particularly complex in terms of sentence structure and vocabulary, but the messages being conveyed by Weaver and the fact that this text is a speech make the text more complex than it might first seem. For that reason, teachers might use a technique that asks students to read the text twice. On the first reading, students should look for big ideas that represent Weaver’s overall message. The second reading should focus on supporting ideas or the secondary messages that Weaver was attempting to communicate.

There are many ways to support close reading. In general, teachers may or may not want students to write as they read (using strategies such as annotating or writing in the margins). Alternatively, teachers may want for students to write or discuss only after they have finished reading. For this activity, given the nature of this document, we suggest the following strategy.

On the first read, students should read the entire speech in class during a 10 minute quiet reading session. After they finish reading, students should write down three big ideas that they think Weaver was trying to communicate.

On the second read, students should have a paper and pencil in hand and should write down the supporting messages that Weaver communicates as they find them in the text. This reading should take about 15 minutes.

Remember, it's important not tell students what these messages are before they read, but they should know something about the context of this speech such as when and where and to whom the speech was delivered.

After students have completed their two close readings, teachers can conduct a brief discussion to surface some of the ideas students have about the Weaver speech and the messages he was attempting to convey in the speech.

### *Common Core Connection*

This activity supports Common Core Reading Standard in History/Social Studies 6-8.2 - *Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions* (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/6-8/2>). Students will be able to practice this skill when reading Weaver's speech and determining the messages he was attempting to communicate in the speech.

# Activity 2 – Working with the Speech

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After completing activity 1, students should understand some of the messages Weaver was attempting to communicate in his speech.

## *Evaluating the Speech, Beginning with Predictions*

In his speech, Weaver makes several predictions. Students may have noted these predictions as they completed their close reading in activity 1. To begin activity 2, students should return to those predictions and determine whether or not Weaver got it right. One prediction had to do with population. Ask students to re-read page two of the speech and write down a description of Weaver's prediction about population growth. In sum, Weaver suggested that the U.S. population was increasing 2.5 million people per year and at that rate the U.S. population would be 230 million in 15 years.

Students should access population data from a source such as

[http://www.npg.org/facts/us\\_historical\\_pops.htm](http://www.npg.org/facts/us_historical_pops.htm) and investigate Weaver's claim.

## *Grappling with the Consequences of Technology Revolution in Agriculture*

Now that students have some practice evaluating a message in Weaver's speech, they should be ready for a more complex part of the speech. On pages 2 and 3 of the speech, Weaver delivers what some students may have identified as an important message, that the United States was undergoing a technology revolution in agriculture and the consequences of that were significant. Students should return to that message. Students should re-read the text of the speech beginning on page two with the sentence, "Agriculture has been going through a technology revolution.." and ending at the end of page two.

Pose the following question to students for a general discussion. How did the shift toward automation in agriculture affect farmers? Student should return to their work on Weaver's messages from activity 1 and record their answers to this question, based on what they have read from Weaver.

## *Grappling with the Consequences of Technology Revolution in Agriculture*

In this last part of activity 2, students should focus on the four things Weaver suggested that his audience could do to help farmers. Weaver described these four things on page four of his speech. Students should re-read this list of four action items and then use the text from Weaver's speech to locate information Weaver shared with his audience in previous portions of the text to set up these four ideas. First, students should summarize the four things that Weaver said people could do to help. For example, the first one was to think about public agricultural policies. As students return to the text looking for the places where Weaver talked about the four things people can do to help, such as learning about public agricultural policy, they will be examining the structure of Weaver's argument. As a part of the activity, students should learn about the structure of Weaver's speech. In sum, Weaver opened with an explanation of the current context of agriculture and the problems that resulted. Weaver then detailed facts related to those problems. He concluded with a call to action that drew together the details Weaver discussed in the proceeding sections. For example, Weaver called on people to "tell your

friends the facts about American agriculture” and actually included some of those facts earlier in the speech.

### *Common Core Connection*

This activity supports Common Core Reading Standard in History/Social Studies RH.8.6.5 - *Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).*

(<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/6-8/5>). Students will be able to practice this skill when determining the structure of Weaver’s speech.