

## Find the Meaning: JFK's Inaugural Speech

*John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as President on January 21, 1961. At age 43, he was the youngest person to be elected President, and the first President to be born in the 20th century. Below is part of his inaugural speech.*

**W**e dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans, born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage, and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

This much we pledge – and more.

To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided there is little we can do; for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.

To those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom; and to remember that, in the past, those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside.

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One of the most famous lines from the President's speech is: "the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans..." Explain in your own words what he means. What is the torch? Why is does it apply to President Kennedy?

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President Kennedy reminds his audience that "those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside." What does the tiger represent? How does it relate to supporting freedom?

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One of the most famous lines from the President's speech is: "the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans..." Explain in your own words what he means. What is the torch? Why is does it apply to President Kennedy? **Correct answers will vary.**

**The torch refers to leadership and political power. The new generation must defend freedom, as "heirs of the first revolution." It applies to President Kennedy as he was the youngest elected President and was the first born in the 20th century.**

President Kennedy reminds his audience that "those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside." What does the tiger represent? How does it relate to supporting freedom?

**The tiger represents the people. Kennedy is warning dictators that trying to get power by suppressing the people ends with the people rising in a revolt against tyranny. The dictator may be "eaten" by the people's desire for freedom.**