

SPEECH BREAKDOWN

2ND PLACE: SIMON BUCKNALL

Speech Transcript:

Have you ever met someone where right from the start you both knew exactly where you stand? At least **you** thought **you** did.

In my school days that's how it was for **me** and James Bullock. We hated each other. **I knew that, Bullock knew that, and so do you.** [ST][R3]

Madam Contest Chair, **friends**, and **fellow former school children.** [VV]

We were at a boarding school together **deep in the English countryside.** Think Harry Potter and **Hogwarts, without the Magic, without the girls,** but definitely **with an evil Lord Voldemort.** [PD] [VV]

Or as we knew him, Headmaster. Seriously he was a, he was a monster of a man. **He was Six foot Five, that's two meters high,** just count them. **Towering over the boys** and ruling his kingdom with an iron fist. [VV]

You could hear him clear his throat from across the playground. **"RRRRRRR."** **You** guessed it, **it was paradise.** [VV]

My parents lived in Saudi Arabia, in the Middle East. A six-hour flight away, so, **I** only saw them during the holidays.

I was eight years old. But Bullock, was nine. And he was **built like a tree trunk, fists like sledge hammers, and he was always up for a fight.** [PD]x3 [VV]

I wasn't always up for a fight. **I was up for Latin lessons.** But if anyone was to dare stand up to Bullock, **you, me,** or anyone, he'd snarl right back, "You gonna make me!?" No one did. Least of all **me.** [VV]

He frightened the living daylight out of **me**. **I knew that, and so did he.** [CB]

Until one day at breakfast in the dining hall, he stole **my** favorite comic book, *Topper*. **My** grandma sent it to **me** every week. It was the highlight of **my** week.

“Give it back!”

“Why should I?”

“Cause it’s mine Bullock, just give it back.”

“You gonna make me!?” [VV]

Well just for once, **I** did. Right on the nose! Or as we’d say, right on the hooter. Now **I’m** not condoning violence, but **I** must confess, **it felt splendid.** [VV]

“RRRRRR.” [PD] **I** had forgotten about You-Know-Who. The Headmaster was also in the dining hall at the top table having breakfast, Newspaper lowered, watching **my** every move. [PD]x3 [VV]

He must have seen what had happened, but then the most **extraordinary thing...**[VV]

And things changed. It wasn’t that Bullock and **I** became friends, but **I** gained his respect. **I knew that, and so did he.** [CB]

A few weeks later **I** received a letter in the post. It was from Saudi Arabia from where **my** parents lived, but **I** didn’t recognize the handwriting. [ST]

“Son, your Daddy doesn’t love you or your Mommy anymore. He loves me. So we’re moving away to go and live together in America, and you won’t be seeing him again.”

I hid in the **cellar of the school, in the coal bunker,** and **wept.** [VV]

And then **I heard footsteps...**

“What do you want Bullock?”

“Nothing. What’s wrong with you?”

“I’m going home next weekend, I told my dad about you and my sister. They’d like to meet ya. Why don’t you come home with me?”

“Well, why not.”

[VV]

Turns out Bullock and **I** had more in common than **you** might think. **We played soccer in the park. We fed swans by the river.** And **we played a board game when it rained.** [PD]x3

We had the most fantastic weekend. Until the Sunday night when we went back to **prison...School**.

“RRRRRRR. [PD] Bucknall, my study. Your father’s on the phone.” Turns out the Headmaster had heard about the letter and had contacted **my** parents. **[VV]**

“Dad”

“Simon, the letter is not true. It was made up. It was sent by a horrible person here at work. Mommy and I still love you. And we love each other, very much.” **[VV]**

It’s been more than thirty years. Thirty years. Today **my** parents live much closer to **my** home. **1.2 miles to be exact.** Believe **me, they’re ever so close.** **[VV]**

But **I** will never forget the compassion of **my friend in the cellar, James Bullock.** The nine-year-old boy whose own parents really had separated and who understood when he read that letter.

We were destined to become great friends. And when **my** parents moved back from Saudi Arabia to England, he visited **my** home, too. And **we played a board game when it rained.** **[PD] [VV]**

Bullock and **I** truly understood one another. **I knew that, and so did he.** **[CB]**

How often in life do the great problems stem from breakdowns of understanding? The evidence is all around **us.** Fear and Hatred are strong emotions, but they’re no match for the power of mutual understanding. **[VV]**

That’s what Bullock taught **me** because **I** received help from the very last person on earth **I** could ever have expected. **[VV]**

Who in your life needs your understanding? **[VV]**

Who needs **you** to show a level of understanding that **brings courage where there may have been fear?** That, to **bring respect to where there may have been prejudice?** Where there, to **bring compassion where there may have been hate?** **[Q]x3 [VV]**

Because when **we** truly understand each other, everyone gains.

I know that, Bullock knows that, and so do you. **[R3][CB]**

SPEECH STATS:

Word Count: 848

Speech Length: 7:18

Title: What James Bullock Taught Me

Click [here](#) to watch the speech

COLOR KEY

- **Humor [H] - x 10**

This includes only parts that received genuine laughter from the audience. Laughter varies in intensity.

This speech averaged **1.36 LPMs** (Laughs Per Minute) and **84.8 WPL** (Words Per Laugh).

Some of his attempts at humor didn't work with this audience. I believe it was due to both cultural differences ("*He was Six foot Five, that's two meters high just count them!*" and "*the hooter*") and simply that the audience was engaged in the story—possibly too engaged to decipher whether it was a joke or serious part of the story. He wore a serious face for much of the speech and that may have stifled some of the attempts at humor.

- **Foundational Phrase [FP] - x 5**

Foundational Phrase for this speech: **"I knew that, and so did he."**

Other variations: **"I knew that, Bullock knew that, and so do you."** and **"I know that, Bullock knows that, and so do you."**

- **"You"; "Your"; "We"; "Us"; "Our" - x 16**

I included these words that were directly aimed at the audience, dialogue excluded (character and internal).

- **"Ladies and Gentlemen" or "My Friends" [MF] - x 2**

The speaker used "*Friends*" and "*Fellow former school children*" to address the audience.

- **Physical Descriptions or VAKS [PD] - x 20**

Descriptive physical characteristics of people and locations. The ones I included were any overt words that described the setting for where the speaker was at during the story, where the speaker wanted to take the audience, or descriptions of people in the scene.

Physical in this case is what was heard, smelled, and what was seen. It also means that "*We were at my house*" is not enough—this requires specifics that are intended to paint a

picture in the minds of the audience. I intentionally left out what was felt emotionally or metaphorically.

This was one area that made this speech unique. It included a tremendous amount of descriptive language to draw the listener into the story. It was highly successful in this regard.

Apart from the whopping 20 times Simon used words to paint a picture, he also used a lot of non-verbal showcasing of what was happening during the scene. I'll go into more detail about this in the Observations section below.

- **Callbacks [CB] - x 8**

Humorous and other. Most of the humorous moments were callbacks to SOMETHING or SOMEONE from the speech journey. Foundational phrases after the first one are essentially [callbacks](#) as well—I included them in the total. If we exclude the Foundational Phrases, there were 4 callbacks.

- **Rule of Three [R3] - x 6**

The [rule of three](#) is all inclusive. Whether used for misdirection to make a joke or not. A variation of the Foundational Phrase used the rule: *"I know that, Bullock knows that, and so do you."*

- **Questions [Q] - x 6**

Questions directly aimed at the audience (rhetorical or not). I did not include questions from in-character or speaker's internal dialogue.

The original intent of the Questions category was to include only thoughtful questions—things that made the audience reflect on their lives. However, even benign questions aimed at the audience can help build a connection to the speaker, just as addressing the audience as "My Friends" or "Ladies and Gentlemen" does.

The final series of questions used the Rule of Three.

- **Time Transitions [TT] - x 4**

Transition words that indicated that there was a time change from the speaker's point of view. The idea is to show progression from one point in the speaker's life to another. So, if there are multiple time transitions within the same story, they may or may not be counted. These can help prepare the audience for a change in the story in order to prevent confusion.

- **"I" or "Me" or "My" or "Myself" - x 43**

I originally decided to record this stat thinking that it might be useful to compare it with the amount of “You” focused words. Turns out, it is. Just not in the way I originally thought. My theory was, if this number was much greater than “You” focused words, it would show that the speaker was entirely “me, me, me” focused and not tailoring the message to the audience.

While that is a possibility, what I’ve found thus far is that it tells more about the content of the speech. More specifically, it tells us that there are personal stories being told. That doesn’t mean that the content of the stories is great, but personal stories are by no means a bad idea. **The total number counted does not include in-story character dialogue.

- **Stories [ST] - x 2**

This includes all stories told throughout the entire speech. Some stories may not be entirely true, but the idea is that the speaker is telling the audience a story that happened, either in their life or somebody else’s. This does not include metaphorical stories, intentionally exaggerated tales or things like “Imagine you are...”

In this speech there was a single journey, but within this journey there were two core stories. The first one took place in the dining hall where he earned the respect of James Bullock, by punching him in the *hooter*. The second story, arguably the foundational story, was how James earned the respect of Simon by showing compassion and understanding toward him after receiving the letter, and by doing so, taught Simon the lesson he delivered to us through his speech.

- **Vocal Variety [VV]**

Vocal Variety is a combination of vocal elements. Short of measuring the speaker’s voice in decibels, this section will make note of the most apparent changes in the speaker’s voice throughout the speech. Varying the voice means that the speaker may get louder, softer, use a higher pitch, lower pitch, use inflection, talk faster, speak with rhythm, slow down to a crawl and even purposeful pauses.

**Note that the total amount of changes which make up Vocal Variety are not counted like the rest of the Color Key sections. Instead, this section is intended only to highlight the most salient changes in the voice and to give you successful examples of Vocal Variety.

I condensed them into categories below and provided some examples for each:

Raise Voice [Louder, Higher Pitch, Inflection]

- *“He was Six foot Five, that’s two meters high, just count them. Towering over the boys and ruling his kingdom with an iron fist.”*
- *“You could hear him clear his throat from across the playground. ‘RRRRRRR.’”*
- *“But if anyone was to dare stand up to Bullock, you, me, or anyone, he’d snarl right back, “You gonna make me!?””*

Lower Voice [Quieter, Lower Pitch, Softer, Whisper]

- *"No one did. Least of all me. He frightened the living daylights out of me."*
- *"Well just for once, I did. Right on the nose! Or as we'd say, "right on the hooter." Now I'm not condoning violence, but I must confess, it felt splendid."*
- *"It wasn't that Bullock and I became friends, but I gained his respect. I knew that, and so did he."*
- *"Where there, to bring compassion where there may have been hate?"*

Speed Up [Speak Fast, Quick Burst, Rhythmic]

- *"The Headmaster was also in the dining hall at the top table having breakfast, Newspaper lowered, watching my every move."*
- *"How often in life do the great problems stem from breakdowns of understanding? The evidence is all around us. Fear and Hatred are strong emotions, but they're no match for the power of mutual understanding."*
- *"Give it back!" "Why should I?" "Cause it's mine Bullock, just give it back." "You gonna make me!?" [In-story character dialogue]*

Slow Down [Talk Slow, Slower Rhythm, Pause]

- *"I was eight years old. But Bullock, was nine." [Said with descriptive gestures]*
- *"I hid in the cellar of the school, in the coal bunker, and wept."*
- *"It's been more than thirty years. Thirty years."*
- [There were also several moments of long pauses (silence) in which he would be in the middle of a story and did non-verbal gesturing to speak for him. Those belong in this section.]

***Initials were put at end of sentence if multiple Color Key elements were in the same sentence.

Observations:

- **Props:** Used a prop (the letter).
- **Facial Expressions/Non-verbal Communication:** Non-verbal communication was a strong part of this speech's success. When he said, "But Bullock...was nine" he looked up and squinted slightly to indicate that Bullock was taller than he was (at age eight).

And for the Headmaster in the dining hall, after saying “*But then the most extraordinary thing...*” he proceeded to act out what the Headmaster did. To show us, he lowered the newspaper, lowered his glasses, and gestured with a nod as if to say “Um-hum, nice work.” He did all that without saying a single word.

Then in the cellar, after Bullock asked him what was wrong, instead of saying something like “I gave him the letter to read,” he extended the letter as if to hand it to Bullock. That was well done except for one thing. I didn’t like how he shuffled the letter behind his back from one hand to the other to indicate a character switch. He could have just started in Bullock’s character as he did after he switched it to his other hand. Seemed like an odd trick that took me out of the scene just a bit.

Another element he did well was the staging of his scenes—he was careful to not overlap them. The dinner hall with where the Headmaster was sitting was a perfect example. He made sure to move well away from the spot on the stage where he had just punched Bullock.

I found the entire speech fascinating. From the British accent, the movie-like scenes he painted, the dialogue, and finally, the originality of his message. I never lost interest.

- **Poise:** From the moment he handed James the letter there was 15 seconds of silence until James finally spoke. While reading the letter as James Bullock, he paused and looked over to Simon to show compassion, and then resumed reading the letter. This is world-class poise. We think of these moments as just part of the story, but this takes a tremendous amount of control to do well. 15 seconds is a long time to pause when it comes to speaking in front of an audience.
- **Character Dialogue:** Instead of using words like “he said” or “he replied,” he jumped straight into the character’s dialogue and immediately pulled you into the scene. The character voices were all purposefully changed as well so you could tell when a different character was speaking. Even when he read the letter aloud, he changed the tone of his voice.
- **Gurus and Side Characters:**
 - **Gurus:** James Bullock.
 - **Side Characters:** Simon’s Mom and Dad, the Headmaster, Simon’s Grandma, James’ Father and Sister, and the horrible person who sent the letter were all side characters. Side characters are part of the stories but don’t directly contribute to a learning moment. This isn’t a problem, just an observation. Side characters help give depth to a story.
 - A Guru is someone or something in the speech that teaches the speaker (and ultimately the audience) something meaningful. As a speaker, you don’t want to be the wise Guru. You want to be the dolt who learns from the guru(s), and that’s who end up teaching the audience as well. **Tip:** Self-deprecation can be an important element in allowing the guru to shine.
- **Charming:** He had a charming way of saying things. There were a few phrases in particular that were wonderful on the ear:
 - “I was eight years old. But Bullock, *was nine.*”
 - “Well just for once, *I did.*”
 - “Now I’m not condoning violence, but I must confess, *it felt splendid.*”

- "I knew that, **and so did he.**" (The time *after* he punched Bullock in the dining hall)
- **Tie the Knot:** He used the variation, "*I knew that, Bullock knew that, and so do you*" to open the speech, and "*I know that, Bullock knows that, and so do you*" to close the speech. In this case he happened to use the Foundational Phrase for this purpose, but it doesn't have to be the Foundational Phrase. The 3rd place winner counted to three with the audience to begin and end his speech. Opening and closing the speech on a similar beat seems to be a common technique and has been used by past champions as well.

Feedback / Criticism:

- **Breathing:** There was some heavy breathing before the speech and at times during the first couple of minutes of the speech. I completely understand that the energy is flowing, and breathing is the best way to control the body's response to the excitement, but perhaps this could be solved by repositioning the microphone so that it doesn't pick it up as much. It telegraphs nervousness or an uncertainty which affects how the audience perceives the speaker (i.e., not confident). Watching him, he did not appear to lack confidence, so more likely just the body's standard response to a pressure situation.
- **Suggestion:** When he says, "*Well just for once...[Imaginary punch]..I did*" he used a fist to hit his palm as if to indicate that he hit Bullock. He did this after saying "*well just for once.*" I think it lessened the impact of that moment. Everyone loves when bullies get their due. I think he should have said the entire phrase first: "*Well just for once...I did*" And **then** do a pretend punch to indicate the action. How he said "*I did*" was fantastic in comparison to how he did the imaginary punch.
- **"RRRRRRR" Noise:** The "RRRRRRR" noise he chose was odd. He did it to indicate the clearing of a throat, but that noise did not remind me of that. It sounded more like an angry person about to lose their sh@#. At least it did tie itself to a specific character, the Headmaster, which is what he intended. So, in that regard, objective achieved.
- **Slight Betrayal:** I remember feeling let down or perhaps deceived. The major conflict of the speech was the letter about his father; however, it ultimately ended up being a lie. Presumably, that's what played out for him and you simply can't change reality. And as a kid, he would have felt that heartbreak and definitely wouldn't have cared that it was a lie, but it was as if we (the audience) were lied to as well.

It's like if you were robbed at gunpoint only to find out later there were no bullets in the gun. It slightly changes the feeling of the encounter. Now you know you weren't *actually* in a life-or-death situation. Still a crappy situation, but it slightly changes its overall impact.

I'd prefer to know that my emotions weren't messed around with and that there was a *real* problem that needed to be overcome.

- **Perfection:** Simon stumbled on the final series of questions (7:22 in video) “*That...to bring respect to where there may have been prejudice? Where there...to bring compassion where there may have been hate?*”

I’ve come across several champions that have jumbled or mispronounced words, although I hadn’t seen the 2nd and 3rd place contestants in those instances. Here, though, I have had the chance to breakdown both 1st and 3rd place to compare with, and this is the first time I think it’s *possible* that it could have influenced how the judges scored speech. I only say this because of **where** it happened in the speech—right in the last twenty seconds of the speech and just before the closing line.

The rhythm of delivery he was aiming for, coupled with the rule of three, would have been extremely smooth on the ears. The hitches crinkled it up a bit, unfortunately.

If anything, the fact that I’m even considering this as a possible reason for not placing first is a testament to the speech’s quality and how much I enjoyed it. Simon should be damn proud.