

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

## 'Choose One of Five' by Edith Sampson

### The Speech

- Watch the speech, delivered by Andrew Scott

<https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/speech/choose-one-of-five>

Duration: 13 minutes 20 seconds

- Discuss students' initial responses.

### Context

Edith Sampson was the first African American delegate appointed to the United Nations in 1950. Whilst at New York School of Social Work, she distinguished herself in her criminology class; subsequently her professor encouraged her to take up a career in law.

In 1927 she was the first woman to graduate from Loyola University. In 1934 she established her own practice and became one of the first women to argue before the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1947 she became assistant state's attorney in Cook County during which time she became affiliated with a number of organisations. She was President of the: Women's Progressive Committee; the Chicago Professional Women's Club; and the Afro-World Fellowship. She was also associated with the South Side Boy's Club; the South Side Community Centre; the NAACP; the League of Women Voters; the Chicago Urban League; and the National Council of Negro Women in which she chaired its executive committee.

In 1962, Sampson was elected as associate judge of the Municipal Court of Chicago. She was the first African-American woman to be elected as a judge in the USA. Sampson retired from the bench in 1978.

- Discuss with students the extent to which the details of Edith Sampson's professional life demonstrate that she followed Option 5.

### Content

- Watch the speech again.
- Using the table below, ask students to summarise in their own words the five options she lays out.
- Ask students to reflect on how these options may apply to their own lives.

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

Option	Summary
1	E.g. Lead a dull and apathetic life, disengaging with any challenging issues. Focus on contentment by immersing oneself in bland entertainment and company.
2	
3	
4	
5	

## Language and Structure

- Ask students to read a copy of the speech and explore the rhetorical devices used. **A transcript of the speech is included at the end of this document.**
- Provide students with the chart below. Ask students to make a note of the rhetorical devices Sampson employs when describing each option.
- This exercise could be done individually with each student completing the full table or by splitting the class in to groups and allocating one of the options to each group and asking them to feedback to the rest of the class.
- Discuss how these devices persuade us which option we should choose.

Options	Language	Figurative language	Semantic Fields	Images
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

## Discussion

- Ask students whether they agree with how Sampson presents each option and whether option 5 should be the most valued.
- Discuss whether students find the speech inspirational, to what extent are their responses related to the content of the speech as opposed to how it is delivered.
- Discuss whether students believe these options are still available. If so, are they available to everyone?

## Extension Task

- Ask students to research Maslow's hierarchy of needs and compare and contrast his theory with Sampson's argument.

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

## Useful Links

### Websites

[Edith Sampson](#) – A biography

[Women's Legal History](#) – A list of professional facts and accomplishments

[Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) – A five stage model of motivational theory

[Time to Get Uncomfortable](#) – Removing ourselves from the echo chamber

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

## CHOOSE ONE OF FIVE Edith Sampson | 30 May 1965

*This is an edited version of the Commencement Address Edith Sampson gave at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois.*

You graduates have every right to expect penetrating words of profound wisdom. Unfortunately, though, I am going to have to disappoint you and present to you a multiple-choice test the last of your college career.

The only consolations that I can offer in presenting the test are that you may consult texts freely, the test is self-scoring, and you have a lifetime at your disposal now to complete it.

This exam will be proctored, though. The proctors will be two – the community in which you live and, hardest taskmaster of all, your inner self.

The question: What do you do with your education now that you have it – and now that it is beginning to become obsolete even as you sit here?

Choose one of five possible answers.

Choice One:

Put your diploma in a convenient drawer and close the drawer. Put whatever textbooks you've accumulated in a bookcase and close the bookcase. Put your mind to the dailiness of earning a satisfactory livelihood and close your mind.

I should warn you that it will take a bit of doing to follow this course with the rigour that it deserves. You will have to take care not to read anything except, in the case of men, the sports pages or, in the case of women, columns of household hints.

You'll have to choose your friends with extreme care to make sure that you don't rub up against any stimulating personalities.

You'll have to build your own defences against a world of complex realities that will insist on trying to intrude on you at the most inconvenient times.

But it can be done. I've known college graduates who have achieved it. They've wrapped themselves in an apathy so thick that they're in position to say in all truth, "No opinion," to any pollster who might question them on any subject.

It's a choice that's available to you. Choice one.

Choice Two:

Go forth into that waiting world, carefully assess the prevailing opinions, and then conform.

Forget this theoretical nonsense they've been feeding you here.

You'll have your degree. That certifies you're educated. Let it go at that.

You can scan the whole of the daily newspaper, as long as you make sure it's a newspaper that agrees with you and all other right-thinking citizens on all critical issues.

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

You are even permitted, if you take this choice, to buy two books a year as long as you make sure they're best best-sellers. Reading the books is optional.

You don't have to be nearly so selective in making friends if you go this route instead of the first one.

After all, about 80, perhaps 85% of the people with whom you'll come in contact fit nicely in this choice-two category. It isn't that they're particularly talented at blending into the background. They are the background.

You, too, can be a pillar-of-society conformist. No strain, no pain.

Well, almost no pain. The anguish of those moments in your middle age when you lie sleepless at 2 a.m. or 3 and wonder whatever happened to all your bright ambitions.

That anguish and those moments don't count too much.

Most of the time you can be comfortable with choice two, and who could ask for more than that?

Choice Three:

Refuse to relax into the commoner forms of conformity. Find yourself, instead, a clique of the elite, an "in" group, and conform yourself to it.

You might imagine, from that bare description of this choice, that this would be a difficult thing to do. It isn't at all.

There are just two requisites:

First, you must have a speciality of your own, some field – or, better, part of a field – in which you're expert. It might be something in the arts – music before Vivaldi, for instance, or the epic poetry of Afghanistan.

On the whole, though, it's better if your speciality is a little more practical, intellectual but money-making. Then to the speciality, whatever it is, you add a dedication to everything that is advance guard and an amused contempt for everything else that isn't.

You mustn't read the daily papers, or at a minimum you mustn't admit it if you do.

No best-sellers, of course - that goes without saying, although you should read enough to be able to say it nauseated you so much you couldn't finish it.

Choice Four:

Choice four, though, offers an alternative for those who cannot erase their political-social-economic consciousness. Join an extremist group.

There is real effort involved in this at the very beginning. You have to study the various groups that present themselves and make your initial commitment. The beauty of this choice, though, is that once you've made it, you can turn off your thinking and let yourself be carried by the forward surge of what is obviously a significant movement.

Say you link yourself to the far right. Your enemies are immediately identified for you – they're all the people who don't agree with you.

You know immediately what to oppose – income taxes, aid to foreign nations, movements for mental health, and any squeamishness about dropping nuclear bombs at will or whim.

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

Say you link yourself to the far left. Your enemies are immediately identified for you. They're all the people who don't agree with you.

You know immediately what to oppose – all business corporations, no exceptions; all deviationists; all revisionists; all efforts to help established governments resist Communist revolt.

Choice Five:

And then, finally, there's choice five. It's hard to state this one. About as close as I can come to it is this: Hang loose, but stay vibrantly alive.

This one's strenuous. This one's demanding.

Choice five would demand of you that you consider today's graduation no more than a pause to catch your breath before continuing the life-long job of education. It would demand of you that you be your own unique best self. And there is no higher demand than that.

Choice five entails wide-ranging reading and deep-probing thought.

It calls for a contradictory thing - a mind that is constantly open to new facts that dictate change but at the same time is resolutely committed to what seems best at any given point of time.

It calls for human involvement, a compassionate concern for everyone on this fast-shrinking little planet of ours and for the generations to come.

It calls for the resolute rejection of all stereotypes and insists on the thoughtful examination of even the most widely held assumptions that are too easily taken for granted.

If only choice five involved only one thing or the other thought or action - it would be ever so much easier. It doesn't, though. It involves both. And as if that weren't bad enough, this choice usually brings with it a certain amount of inner ache, because this way is a lonely way.

But those who make choice five are never fully comfortable.

They are nagged at by their realisation that they could be wrong.

They're prodded by their recognition that they've still so much more to learn and even more than that to understand. They're made restless by their knowledge that no matter how much they do, there's still ever so much more left to be done.

Choice-five people have to live constantly with an acceptance of the fact that there are no simple answers in this world because there are no simple questions.

This makes life exciting for them, challenging, at least intermittently rewarding. But comfortable? No.

I would not urge choice five on any of you graduates. It asks so much of you.

Any of the other four will see you through to age 60 or 65, retirement, and a modest pension. They might easily do better than that and make you rich. In dollars, that is. Five is there, though, one of the multiple choices on the test.

If any of you in this class makes that fifth choice, I wish you'd let me know about it. You I'd like to know better.