

Grades 9–10 Playlist: Author’s use of Rhetoric

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6:

- Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

Welcome

Writers use **rhetoric** when attempting to persuade readers to agree with a particular perspective on an issue or topic. Rhetoric refers to the way a writer goes about conveying a persuasive message. Rhetoric can be broken into three different categories: ethos, pathos, and logos. Each of these is a different approach to persuasion. Identifying these types of rhetoric in a text helps readers better understand the author’s argument.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- determine an author’s purpose.
- identify instances of rhetoric.
- analyze how an author uses rhetoric to accomplish his or her purpose.

Review

Key Terms

- **Rhetoric** is the way in which a writer tries to persuade readers to agree with his or her perspective on a topic or idea.

Exploring the Standard

When reading a persuasive text, it is important to first identify the author’s purpose. What is he or she trying to argue? What does he or she want the reader to believe or do? Next, the reader should determine how the author attempts to persuade the audience. What rhetoric does he or she use? Does the author appeal to the reader through logic (**logos**)? Is the author more interested in an emotional appeal (**pathos**)? Or does the author attempt to show his or her expertise (**ethos**)? Often, writers use more than one type of rhetoric to persuade a reader. Understanding how the author goes about presenting his or her perspective on a topic or idea will help the reader more effectively evaluate the author’s claims.

A Closer Look: Determining the Author’s Purpose

Persuasive texts intend to convince the reader to agree with the author’s point of view on a particular topic or idea. When reading a persuasive text for the first time, focus on identifying the author’s purpose. What does the author want the reader to think after reading the text? Look for strong statements, emotional words and phrases, facts and statistics, and author statements about credentials and opinions in order to determine the writer’s perspective.



Example 1

In *Democracy in America*, a French author named Alexis de Tocqueville writes about his observations of American society and politics in the 1800s. Read the following excerpt from Chapter 3 of *Democracy in America*, entitled “Social Conditions of the Anglo-Americans.” What is the author’s purpose in this excerpt? What sentences help to show this purpose?

¹Many important observations suggest themselves upon the social condition of the Anglo-Americans, but there is one which takes precedence of all the rest. The social condition of the Americans is eminently democratic; this was its character at the foundation of the Colonies, and is still more strongly marked at the present day...

²[The] law of descent was the last step to equality. I am surprised that ancient and modern jurists have not attributed to this law a greater influence on human affairs... (I understand by the law of descent all those laws whose principal object is to regulate the distribution of property after the death of its owner.) [...]

³When the law of inheritance permits, still more when it decrees, the equal division of a father’s property amongst all his children, its effects are of two kinds: it is important to distinguish them from each other, although they tend to the same end.

⁴In virtue of the law of partible inheritance, the death of every proprietor brings about a kind of revolution in property; not only do his possessions change hands, but their very nature is altered, since they are parcelled into shares, which become smaller and smaller at each division. This is the direct and, as it were, the physical effect of the law. It follows, then, that in countries where equality of inheritance is established by law, property, and especially landed property, must have a tendency to perpetual diminution. The effects, however, of such legislation would only be perceptible after a lapse of time, if the law was abandoned to its own working; for supposing the family to consist of two children (and in a country people as France is the average number is not above three), these children, sharing amongst them the fortune of both parents, would not be poorer than their father or mother.

⁵But the law of equal division exercises its influence not merely upon the property itself, but it affects the minds of the heirs, and brings their passions into play. These indirect consequences tend powerfully to the destruction of large fortunes, and especially of large domains. Among nations whose law of descent is founded upon the right of primogeniture landed estates often pass from generation to generation without undergoing division, the consequence of which is that family feeling is to a certain degree incorporated with the estate. The family represents the estate, the estate the family; whose name, together with its origin, its glory, its power, and its virtues, is thus perpetuated in an imperishable memorial of the past and a sure pledge of the future.

⁶When the equal partition of property is established by law, the intimate connection is destroyed between family feeling and the preservation of the paternal estate; the property ceases to represent the family; for as it must inevitably be divided after one or two generations, it has evidently a constant tendency to diminish, and must in the end be completely dispersed. The sons of the great landed proprietor, if they are few in number, or if fortune befriends them, may indeed entertain the hope of being as wealthy as their father, but not that of possessing the same property as he did; the riches must necessarily be composed of elements different from his.



Teaching Notes: Author's use of Rhetoric

The goal of RI.9–10.6 is for students to identify an author's point of view on a topic and analyze how the author uses rhetoric to convey that point of view.

Activities

1. Find current events articles or opinion pieces written by authors with different viewpoints. Have students work in groups to identify each author's point of view and provide evidence from the text to support their answer. Then discuss, as a class the rhetorical strategies each author uses.
2. Visit the link below to find examples of propaganda posters from World War II. Explain to students that propaganda often uses pathos as a rhetorical strategy. Have students examine the posters and discuss what feelings they are meant to evoke in the audience (fear, pride, loyalty, etc.).
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/powers_of_persuasion_home.html
3. Watch a clip from a political debate as a class and analyze how the speakers use ethos to try to gain the audience's respect and trust. Identify examples of ways the candidates try to undermine each other's authority and credibility.

Applying the Standard

In this section of the playlist, students are given the opportunity to apply their knowledge about how authors use the three different types of rhetoric in order to convey to the reader their point of view on a topic or idea. The objective is to have students demonstrate an understanding of the purpose and use of rhetoric.

For persuasive essay ideas, visit this website:

- <http://www.ereadingworksheets.com/writing/persuasive-essay-topics/>

Additional Resources

- **“Analyzing Famous Speeches as Arguments”:** In this lesson plan, students analyze the use of rhetoric in historical speeches:
<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/analyzing-famous-speeches-arguments-30526.html?tab=4>
- **Analyzing Advertisements:** This video describes an assignment in which students analyze advertisements in order to better understand how advertisers use rhetoric:
<http://www.teachertube.com/video/analyzing-advertisements-project-description-77119>
- **Writing with Ethos, Logos, and Pathos:** This resource provides a variety of ideas for teaching rhetorical strategies in the classroom, such as analyzing product reviews:
<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/ethos-logos-pathos-21st-century-todd-finley>

