Grades 11–12 Playlist: Purpose

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6:

- Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

Welcome

Examining an author's purpose aids in understanding the content of any given text. Why did the author write this book? How does that purpose speak to its audience or enhance the reader's comprehension? The answers to such questions allow readers to determine how the author's style and rhetorical decisions help contribute to the power, beauty, or effectiveness of the text.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- analyze and evaluate effective rhetorical devices used by an author to support a purpose.

- understand how style and content work together to advance the ideas in a text and how they contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.
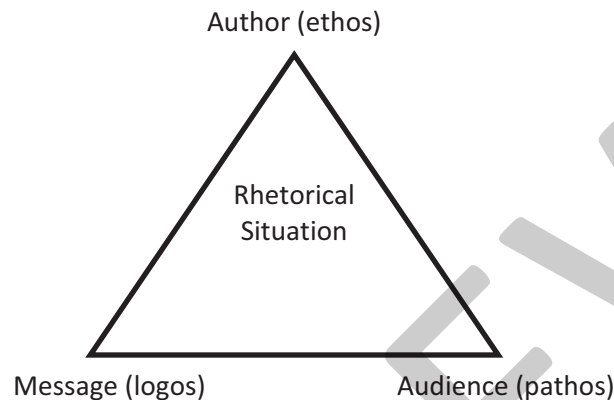
Review

Key Terms

- In the fields of rhetoric and composition, **context** refers to the set of circumstances that surround a specific situation.

- The context can include or embody the **purpose**, or reason, for an author writing a particular text.

- **Rhetoric** is the act of analyzing all language choices that a writer, speaker, reader, or listener might make to increase the effectiveness or meaning of the text.

- An author's **style** refers to the way in which a literary or informational text is written.

- **Rhetorical devices** are compositional techniques used to accomplish an author's purpose, such as to persuade, inform, entertain, or describe.

  ◦ Authors commonly use Aristotle's **rhetorical appeals** as a device to accomplish their purpose through *ethos* (credibility), *pathos* (emotion), or *logos* (logic).

- Another Aristotelian technique is called the **rhetorical triangle**, which suggests using the following three elements when analyzing texts: the author (how he or she may use his or her personal character or authority to influence their audience); the audience (how their knowledge, beliefs, and

attitudes may influence their understanding); and the subject matter (how the types of evidence or means of support influence content).

◦ When these elements are taken into consideration as a whole, it reveals the full context of the **rhetorical situation**.

Author (ethos)

Rhetorical
Situation

Message (logos)   Audience (pathos)

Watch!

For a closer investigation of the key terms, the following videos provide a more in-depth explanation into the background, logic, and application of Aristotle's rhetorical concept and using the rhetorical situation for textual analysis:

- https://www.youtube.com/embed/9s0LqAdqkV0

Exploring the Standard

An author's purpose can vary depending on the context of a text. For example, if a student needs to email a teacher about making up a missed assignment, the student knows from experience to use more formal language, correct grammar, and follow common letter etiquette such as having a salutation, or greeting (Dear Ms. Johnson...), and a valediction, or closing (Sincerely, Jane). Because the student is addressing a superior or someone with higher authority, the context of the rhetorical situation dictates that the student should adapt the language and rhetorical choices in general to better appeal to the audience. When reading informational texts, the reader can apply the same process of analyzing the situation. Who is the targeted audience? How could the author better appeal to that audience? How does that affect how the author discusses the content at hand?

Practice!

To practice identifying an author's purpose in an informational text, complete this activity:

- https://www.opened.com/question/a-student-is-reading-an-informational-pamphlet/1069536

Teaching Notes: Purpose

The goal of RI.11-12.6 is for students to determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. To pair with the video watched in the playlist, select another excerpt from *The Souls of Black Folk,* by W.E.B. Du Bois, for students to read (possibly as a homework assignment) and, in groups, have them develop answers to typical rhetorical analysis questions such as:

    *   Identify the author's main idea/thesis of that excerpt.

    *   What are the main supporting points of the thesis?

    *   Given the targeted audiences, why did the author make certain choices regarding modes of development, structure, supporting evidence for ideas, and word choice and tone?

    *   Locate the author's rhetorical appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos. Are all three used? Why or why not?

    *   Do students think the author effectively achieved his purpose?

    Then have each group present their findings by summarizing their responses and conclude with an explanation of why such findings were important for understanding the text. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the text? How does recognizing these strengths and weaknesses aid in reader comprehension?

2. Direct students to conduct their own research, finding two articles that concern a similar topic or theme of their interest (or of your choice), but express different points of view. Divide the class into groups of four or five, asking students to discuss how the authors spoke to their targeted audiences within their rhetorical situations. Remind students to focus on how the key details in the articles contributed to the development of the purpose.

Writing Prompts

1. Assign students a grade-appropriate excerpt from an informational text, such as a poignant speech, an organization's pamphlet/brochure, or a company's advertisement, and have students write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical situation through the use of the rhetorical triangle (context, author, audience). How does the author appeal to his or her audience (logos, pathos, ethos)? How does each author tailor language for his or her purpose? And last, have students assess the effectiveness, both the strengths and weaknesses, of the author's argument. Students should support their answers with at least two examples from the text.

2. Have students write a post-activity (one of your or their choosing) reflection on using the rhetorical analysis. Were there aspects that were more difficult than others? How did the analysis help in their understanding of