

Mr. Francis
American Studies

Group Lesson: Rhetorical Analysis

I. Objectives

A major focus of AP English Language and Composition is on understanding the decisions writers make. You are to develop the ability to recognize those decisions, to understand the impact of those decisions, and to make similar conscious decisions in your own writing. To that end, you will be offering a piece of rhetoric and leading a discussion on the writing elements and effectiveness of that piece.

II. Procedure

Step 1: Agree on a piece of rhetoric to serve as the basis for discussion

The criteria for choosing your piece are as follows:

- an example of American rhetoric: the American Studies course is a chronological survey of American literature from 1620 to present day.
- nonfiction prose: the AP English Language and Composition examination focuses heavily on the writing and analysis of nonfiction prose.
- preferably a speech

Step 2: Prepare with your group to lead discussion

Consider the following questions in preparation for discussion:

- What was the historical context and the original forum for your piece?
- What rhetorical mode(s) is the author working in? (e.g., narrative, descriptive, persuasive/argumentative, expository) What secondary modes might be at work? (e.g., didactic, inspiring, hilarious, moving, infuriating, clarifying)
- What is the author's agenda?
- How can we characterize the style of the piece? (diction, sentence structure, etc.)
- What is the prevailing tone of the piece? How does the author communicate a particular attitude regarding the subject matter?
- How does the structure of the piece contribute to its effectiveness?
- What literary and rhetorical devices does the author make effective use of in the piece? What is the impact of these decisions?

Step 3: Lead the class during a forty-minute discussion of your piece

Please avoid the following during the discussion of your piece:

- Talking at the class for a period: your challenge is to elicit from your classmates participation regarding your piece, not to deliver a lecture or presentation. You might choose to start the class period with a question, by pairing students up, or by assigning a brief writing activity.
- Focusing on the piece's subject matter so much that the class neglects to look closely at the writing: your goal is to help the class to become more conscious of writing techniques. Do not allow the class to debate or rave about the subject for too long, as they will then miss the main objective of the activity.
- Focusing so much on the details of writing that the class ignores the subject matter: form and content do go hand-in-hand, and the discussion should result in a holistic understanding of the piece.

III. Requirements

Group members:

- Participate in the selection of the reading.
- Submit a photocopier-ready version of the piece, as a hardcopy and an e-mailed attachment (rich-text format preferred). This document should use a 12-point font and be single-spaced with one-inch margins all around.
- Help facilitate discussion during class. Each group member must have a clear pedagogic role during the lesson, and he or she will be assessed individually on preparedness and organization, delivery and clarity, and engagement of others. Find effective and creative ways to include all group members. Overly-forced transitions between group members are uncomfortable and will be evaluated accordingly.

Class members:

- Read the piece in advance.
- Take notes based upon your initial reactions to it as a piece of rhetoric.
- Participate actively in the discussion during class.

Writing Assignment: Rhetorical Analysis

You must choose to respond in writing to one of the pieces of rhetoric (not your group's example). This must be a focused analysis of the writing, not a summary or a critique. It should move beyond the ideas raised during the class discussion.

Please use standard MLA format. The essay must be double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around. Please use a 12-point, Times New Roman font. All papers must have an appropriate and creative title. Length guideline: 2 pages maximum. No coversheets.

Adapted from an assignment by J. Weil, Stuyvesant English Department.