

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

As you may have learned, forms of persuasion can be found everywhere. All texts are inherently rhetorical, if not deliberately rhetorical. One way to measure to what extent a text is rhetorical is to conduct a rhetorical analysis.

In a rhetorical analysis, the researcher aims to locate and discuss the available means of persuasion situated within a text. In other words, you should locate all of the characteristics of a text which focus specifically on persuasion. Such characteristics may include: the context, the argument, its support (natural and artificial), and its counterargument. Moreover, you should insist on locating any fallacies in the argument, and/or any flaws in the support.

When conducting a rhetorical analysis, you should ask the following Q's of the text:

Context

1. Who is the author/writer/speaker? What do you know about them?
2. What is the purpose or intent of writing/creating this text? How do you know?
3. Who is the audience? Who is the text intended for? How do you know?

Genre

4. What kind of text are you analyzing (e.g. argumentative, narrative, expository/informative, descriptive, scientific, etc)? How do you know? What characteristics does it contain?
5. Is the text formal or informal? How do you know? Diction? Syntax? Point of View? Voice? Stylistic nuances?
6. What is the tone? What kind of feelings are invoked by the text? And, how do you receive such feelings? Words? Phrases? Ideas/Concepts? Subject Matter?

Claim/Aim and Support/Content

7. Does the text have a claim (or thesis statement), or does it have an aim (a focus or a main idea)?
8. What kinds of natural support are used? Physical evidence? Law/Codes? Testimony? Other?
9. What kinds of artificial support are used? Appeals? Ethos? Pathos? Logos? Where and how are these used?
10. Is there a counterargument? Rebuttal? Refutation? What is discussed? Where is this section located in relation to the text?
11. What kinds of introductory or concluding strategies are used? Are these seemingly effective? Why or why not?
12. Does the text have a definite organization or arrangement? How is the text organized or arranged?
13. Does the text contain logical fallacies? Does the text leave out information which is pertinent or important to the argument?
14. Does the text contain faulty support or fictionalized evidence/data? Is the material dated? When was it written (does the information still apply)? Are there codes/laws which can be questioned? Do codes/laws seem ethical/morally acceptable? Does the author use faulty assumptions about the audience? Where do these things occur?
15. If the text is not argumentative, then what kinds of content help the focus?

16. If the text is not argumentative, then what kinds of content seems rhetorical (specifically, persuasive)? How and why?

Ornamentation

17. Does the author use ornaments? Tropes? Schemes? Where, how, and why?

18. Does the author use source documentation? Which source documentation system is used?

19. Does the author use anything out of the ordinary to affect the audience?

EXERCISE

Read the following passage, and write a short rhetorical analysis.

Emancipation Proclamation
Abraham Lincoln

January 1, 1863

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and for ever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof respectively shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be in good faith represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall in the absence of strong countervailing testimony be deemed conclusive evidence that such State and the people thereof are not then in rebellion against the United States."

Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as commander-in-chief of the army and navy of the United States, in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do, publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof, respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana (except the parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James, Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the city of New Orleans), Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkeley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Anne, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth), and which excepted parts are for the present left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States and parts of States are, and

