

# Everyday Use

## Rhetoric in Our Lives

1



Copyright © The New Yorker Collection, 1976. George Booth from Cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

**MEDIA CONNECTION**

The chapter opens with the beginning of a movie script and a prediction about what will happen next in the movie. Before students read the beginning of the chapter, you may want to give them a chance to talk about the predicting they do when they watch “real” movies.

Surprisingly, using movies can help generate the type of examples and archetypes that can aid you throughout the year in the classroom. For instance, if you and your students discuss the simple but definite flaws in Captain Jack Aubrey’s relationship with his best friend, Stephen Maturin, in Peter Weir’s *Master and Commander*, your students will see that they could have made astute predictions about the characters. Then, when they read the beginning of Chapter 1, they will be more able to appreciate the authors’ prediction about the characters in the script (“They’re going to be back together before they get to the Grand Canyon”) and to grasp what the authors mean when they say, “As the writer writes and the reader reads, they negotiate through rhetorical choices they have made, and they begin to anticipate, making decisions about what’s happening and what will happen next.”

**TEACHING RHETORIC**

The term *negotiate*, though not usually associated with classical rhetoric, comes from the Latin *negotiari*, “to

Late night on Route 66, somewhere in Arizona.

Nick checks the speedometer, slows. He looks over at Kate quickly, then focuses on the road. He clears his throat.

Kate stares out her window. The corner of her mouth twitches.

NICK: So, do you think there are many cops on the road?

KATE: This time of night?

NICK (SPEEDING UP): Well . . . guess not.

Kate reaches for the radio buttons. He reaches at the same time. Their fingers touch.

NICK AND KATE (AT ONCE): Sorry.

NICK: I mean . . . for the radio.

KATE: Me too.

Kate looks out the window again. She begins to hum with the radio. Nick looks over at her again, longer this time. He begins to hum too. She turns to him now. He slows the car.

NICK: So, do you still want to go to the Grand Canyon?

What do you think is going on in this movie **scene**? If you were to explain it, your analysis might go something like this: These two people have had an argument. He wants the fight to be over, but he doesn’t want to be the first to apologize. She wants it to be over too, but she doesn’t want to give in. They’re looking for a way to say they’re sorry without saying it. They’re going to be back together before they get to the Grand Canyon. The writer of the script has used gestures, actions, and sounds, as well as words, to convey the message that these two people want to make up, and the reader of the scene gets the message, probably without any difficulty.

How this communication between the writer and the reader happens is the subject of this book. Readers and writers can understand one another so well because every day they use **rhetoric**, which might be defined initially as the art that humans use to process all the messages we send and receive. Messages are all around us—in books and magazines, in our conversation, in the news, in music and art, and in the movies we watch. When we produce messages, rhetoric helps us get ideas, emotions, and opinions across to others. When we receive messages, rhetoric helps us understand the ideas, emotions, and opinions of those around us.

The writer of the movie scene above uses what he knows from experience, **reading**, or observation to write the descriptions of how each **character** moves and acts. The reader also uses experience, reading, or observation to understand the characters’ actions and to understand what the writer is suggesting. As the writer writes and the reader reads, they negotiate through the **rhetorical**

**choices** they have made, and they begin to anticipate, making decisions about what’s happening and what will happen next.

Reader and writer decide these things, moreover, based on how they perceive the scene and how they understand the scene in context. If the movie is billed as a horror film, the last line of the scene might take on a sinister implication. If the main characters are played by comedians, readers wait for a punchline.

We all use rhetoric every day, whether we use it deliberately or not, and we all respond to rhetoric every day, whether we’re conscious of it or not. Since the world around us carries messages that get received or lost or translated or transformed, to understand rhetoric is to understand the world better and to participate in it more fully.

## Rescuing Rhetoric from Its Bad Reputation: Definitions and Examples

It’s sometimes difficult to overlook the unsavory (and undeserved) reputation that the term *rhetoric* has. Many people are most familiar with the word only in its negative sense, describing something that has style but no substance: “His speech was mere rhetoric.” Or, even worse, rhetoric sometimes characterizes a speaker’s lack of sincerity or deliberate falseness in order to coerce an **audience** to follow a wrongheaded or evil course of action. To be an effective rhetorician, in this ill-considered definition, means to hoodwink the audience, to get them to believe that what is false is actually true, and to manipulate facts or emotions to serve the speakers’ unscrupulous ends. In this sense, someone might claim that Hitler was a “good” rhetorician because he could, through his language and skillful manipulation of events, encourage people to believe the worse cause was the better one.

When someone uses rhetoric in this way, he or she is making a negative **assumption** about the ethics of the person who’s speaking. To call a **speaker** “full of rhetoric” is to suggest that he or she doesn’t have much to say or is using false and misleading language. Indeed, for many historical reasons, people also tend to think that rhetoric is the opposite of clear communication, exists in contrast to reality, and acts as a roadblock to making progress on important issues. Consider, for **example**, the following sentence from a newspaper article about parental involvement in schools.

After all of these years and all of this rhetoric, the infrastructure to help families know what to do to support this partnership that everybody talks about is still not there.

—Washington Post, *January 16, 2001*

The writer of this sentence obviously thinks that, at best, the discussions of parental involvement in the media, in school boards, and in parent-teacher associations—what the writer refers to as “all of this rhetoric”—have not helped

carry on business.” The students must see themselves as an important part of the reading process. Ask the students what the authors of the book mean by *negotiate* in “As the writer writes and the reader reads, they negotiate through the rhetorical choices they have made.” (Possible answer: *The writer and reader must “carry on business,” must exchange with each other, just as a merchant trades for goods.*)

### MEDIA CONNECTION

Most students have heard that through rhetoric Hitler rallied huge groups of Germans. In *The Triumph of the Will*, perhaps the most important Nazi propaganda film created, Hitler is seen arriving to a tremendous, frenzied fanfare of adults and children. An excellent juxtaposition to the Nazi propaganda is Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*. Both can be viewed at [www.activehistory.co.uk/films/GCSEindex.htm](http://www.activehistory.co.uk/films/GCSEindex.htm). An entire archive of Nazi propaganda can be found at [www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpraindex.htm](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpraindex.htm), which includes posters, architecture, broadcasts, and speeches.

such involvement to take place. At worst, the writer apparently believes, “all of this rhetoric” has impeded progress toward parental involvement in schools.

These definitions about the misleading, cloudy, potentially evil nature of rhetoric are, quite frankly, wrong. They are legacies of several moments in history when some influential philosophers misunderstood rhetoric.

A better definition of rhetoric, one that explains how and why communication works, presumes that a speaker or writer (or **rhetor (reh-tor)**, to use an ancient Greek term that encompasses both speakers and writers, *a term we will use throughout this book when we are referring to someone who may be a writer, speaker, reader, or listener*) is searching for methods to persuade hearers or readers *because* he or she has something valuable to say, something that arises from his or her position as an honest, inquiring, ethical person. The rhetor must be a “good person speaking well,” to use a phrase coined by the classical Roman rhetorician Quintilian.

Here, then, is a useful definition of rhetoric. Rhetoric refers to two things:

- The art of analyzing all the language choices that writer, speaker, reader, or listener might make in a given situation so that the text becomes meaningful, purposeful, and effective
- The specific features of texts, written or spoken, that cause them to be meaningful, purposeful, and effective for readers or listeners in a given situation

### IMPLEMENTING THE ACTIVITY

Students read about the three appeals that Randall Leigh makes in his attempt to borrow money. Alert students, as they read, to note the *differences* in the appeals Randall makes to each of the three characters he approaches.

NOTE: The three appeals that Randall uses—to *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*—are introduced more formally on page 11 of this chapter.

Direct students to look specifically at Brandon’s word choices. Brandon’s diction helps the reader see the three *negotiations*. For example, in his appeal to Kim, Randall asks if she

### Activity

What follows is a situation that might be quite common where you go to school. Read the scenario carefully. Then, in a group, discuss the choices involving language that Randall Leigh makes in order to be persuasive. Evaluate the specific features of his requests to his classmates.

Randall Leigh is a bright but rather forgetful person, and because of the latter, he is a compulsive calendar keeper. Nearly every day, he gets up, looks at his day planner, figures out what he needs to do when, and then heads out, either to school or to his part-time job at Computers 4 U, where he works 20 hours a week. Randall lives close enough to school so that he can walk to his classes, but he has to rely on the city bus system to get to work since he does not own a car.

One day, Randall slips up. He neglects to check his day planner until after he gets to school. He thinks he is not scheduled to work that afternoon, but, alas, he is wrong. He is due at work exactly 30 minutes after his last class—just enough time to get there on the city bus. But here is the problem: Randall has come to school flat broke—he doesn’t even have the \$1.50 bus fare it costs to get to work. He is pretty sure he can borrow the money from someone at work that will enable him to get home, but getting to work is another matter.

He decides he needs to appeal to his classmates for the \$1.50 bus fare. Seeing his buddy Brandon approach in the hallway, Randall tries his first maneuver.

“Hey, Brandon, you have to help me out,” he says. “I just realized that I have to be at work this afternoon, and I’m completely broke. I can’t call in sick, man—you’ve been there, you know how important I am to the store. I have to answer all the customers’ technical questions that the manager can’t answer, and that’s most of them. So, is there any way you can stand me \$1.50 for bus fare?”

“Sorry, dude,” Brandon replies, “I’m really short myself, and I have to take Louanne out for a burger after school today and patch some things up between us. Wish I could help out, but I just can’t.”

“Sheesh,” Randall thinks to himself, “I lose out to Brandon’s temperamental girlfriend.” But then Randall sees the object of his own affections, Kim, walking his way.

“Hey, Kim, how’s my best friend in the whole world doing today?”

“What do you want, Randall?”

“Now, what makes you think I want anything? It’s always just such a joy to see you, that’s all. You light up my life, and all that—you bring me bliss, love, companionship. Why, just to be seen with you makes me the envy of most of the guys in the school.”

“Uh, huh.”

“But since you mention it,” Randall goes on, “there would be something you can do that would make me very, very happy. You see, like the fool I am, I came to school today without any money, and I have to get to work right after class today. I don’t suppose you could spare a buck fifty for bus fare, do you?”

“Oh, Randall, all that buttering up for just bus fare?” Just then, a gaggle of Kim’s friends ambles by, and she joins them. “Ta ta, Randy,” she says. “Good luck getting to work!”

Randall is beside himself—how is he going to get the bus fare? He spies Nate walking his way. He doesn’t know Nate very well—they were partners in a bio lab once, and they got along pretty well. Randall decides to try a long shot.

“Hi there, Nate—long time no see.”

“Oh, hi, Randall. What’s up?”

“Nate, I’m in a really tight spot. You know me to be an honest, dependable guy, don’t you? Remember when we worked on the lab report together? I held up my end of the project, didn’t I?”

“Of course, you did,” Nate says. “You were the best lab partner I’ve ever had.”

“Well,” Randall proceeds, “since you know you can trust me, and you know I’m good to my word, how about lending me \$1.50, just till I see you again? See, I have to get to work right after class today, and I absentmindedly left home without any money for bus fare, and, well, if there’s anybody you can count on to pay you back, you know I’m the guy.”

“Hmmm, let me check to see if I can help you out,” Nate replies. “I might have an extra \$1.50 that I can front you.”

“could spare a buck,” connoting the miniscule amount at hand, even potentially causing Kim to feel offended at caring about such a minor amount of money.

See page 259 for comments on group work. The comments there apply to all the group activities in the book.

### RESPONSES TO ACTIVITY

Randall appeals to Brandon by sounding logical: he is important to his employer; therefore, he must show up for work. Brandon’s negative response is not a reflection of Randall’s rhetorical ability.

Next, when Brandon appeals to Kim, he makes a too-barbaric appeal to flattery, or feelings, and seems facetious. This appeal makes Kim spiteful, and she rejects him as a direct result of his poor rhetorical strategy.

Finally, Brandon makes an ethical appeal to his acquaintance Nate by citing their past experience together. He successfully convinces Nate that he will repay the \$1.50.

## What Does “Being Skilled at Rhetoric” Mean?

Once you accept the broader, more inclusive definition of rhetoric, you begin to understand that becoming skilled at rhetoric is a valuable part of your education, one that you will work on throughout your school years and beyond. Consider the following:

- Being skilled at rhetoric means being able to make good speeches and write good papers, but it also means having the ability to read other people’s compositions and listen to their spoken words with a discerning eye and a critical ear.
- Being skilled at rhetoric means reading not only to understand the main and supporting points of what someone writes but also to analyze the decisions the rhetor makes as he or she works to accomplish a purpose for a specific audience.
- Being skilled at rhetoric means being able to *plan and write* compositions, not just write them.
- Being skilled at rhetoric means being able to examine a situation—in school, in your community, in society as a whole—and determine what has already been said and written, what remains unresolved, and what you might say or write to continue the conversation or persuade readers to take action.

What all these statements add up to is that a person skilled at rhetoric needs to develop a very full menu of reading and writing techniques, strategies, and skills, and needs to be judicious in how he or she uses them. There is so much you can do when you write a paper to make it effective for readers. For example, you might open your paper with a surprising question or quotation. You might challenge your readers’ assumptions about a topic. You might write a long, complicated sentence followed by a short, abrupt one. You might rely on complex, carefully selected vocabulary that will show your reader you have an in-depth knowledge of the subject you’re writing about. Being skilled at rhetoric does not mean that you have to *use* everything you know in every composition you write. It means that you are able to take an inventory of what you *might* do to make a paper impressive and select the options that work most effectively with your readers.

## Developing Skill with Rhetoric: The Rhetorical Triangle

The best way to begin developing skill with rhetoric is to envision the basic rhetorical activity—creating a text that you hope will be meaningful, purposeful, and effective for a reader, or reading a text so that it becomes meaningful, purposeful, and effective for you—as a triangle. The **rhetorical triangle** has its roots in the work of Aristotle, a fourth-century B.C.E. Greek philosopher who wrote extensively about rhetoric. The rhetorical triangle (or **Aristotelian triad**, as some people call it) suggests that a person creating or analyzing a text must consider three elements:

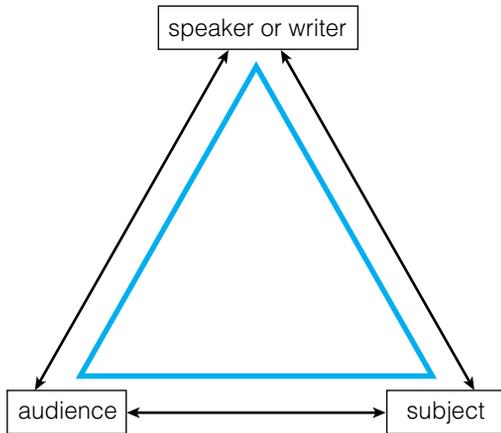
- The subject and the kinds of **evidence** used to develop it
- The audience—their knowledge, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs

### TEACHING RHETORIC

To create or analyze a text, another helpful device, similar to the Rhetorical Triangle, is the acronym SOAPS (subject, occasion, audience, purpose, speaker), which derives from a 1985 publication by Dr. Tommy J. Boley.

- The character of the rhetor—in particular, how the rhetor might use his or her personal character effectively in the text

Here is a diagram of the basic rhetorical triangle.



Rhetorical Triangle

Notice that the triangle has arrows from one point to another and that the arrows go both ways. These arrows show the dynamic nature of the rhetorical **act**. The rhetor understands something about his or her audience—who they are, what they know—and that understanding makes the rhetor highlight certain elements of his or her own character and personality and downplay others. The rhetor creates a **persona**—literally a “mask” but figuratively the character he or she wants the audience to perceive himself or herself as—based in part on who he or she presumes the audience to be and in part on what he or she knows and believes about the subject of the text: that is, on what bits of evidence or proof he or she finds most compelling and persuasive. Members of the audience, in turn, hold some beliefs, based on knowledge and past experience, about the rhetor and about the subject, and they tap into these beliefs as they listen or read. Moreover, members of the audience also use their ability to reason—to put together evidence logically—and they are persuaded by the strength of the evidence presented about the subject.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, we will use the diagram of the rhetorical triangle, initially in its basic form and later in a slightly modified form, to introduce six keys to developing skill with rhetoric. The first three keys—understanding persona, understanding appeals to an audience, and

Students who like a structured approach, particularly as they prepare for the essays of textual analysis on the Advanced Placement Language and Composition exam, can practice “doing a SOAPS” on any material. For example, Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” can be analyzed according to SOAPS as follows:

**subject:** Individual rights (as in the “motto” that he “accepts”)

**occasion:** Government infringement upon individual rights; the Mexican American War

**audience:** American citizens—particularly, citizens concerned about the Mexican American War

**purpose:** To show that individuals have a right to disobey unlawful laws and that paying taxes is a direct support of government initiatives

**speaker:** Thoreau, a haughty-sounding and well-educated American

understanding subjects—emerge from the basic triangle. The last three keys—understanding context, understanding intention, and understanding genre—grow out of the triangle in its modified form.

## RESPONSES TO ACTIVITY

*What kind of persona did Randall try to present to each of his three audiences—Brandon, Kim, and Nate?*

Randall tried to be Brandon's buddy. He acted almost too comfortable with Brandon. He almost expected Brandon to lend him the money. Randall took an authoritative stance toward Brandon by saying, "You know how important I am to the store."

Brandon tried to be suave with Kim. He used sarcasm and flattery to appeal to her.

With Nate, Randall acted more like an acquaintance than a buddy. He wanted to seem honest and dependable with Nate.

*What assumptions do you think Randall made about each of the three audiences—Brandon, Kim, and Nate—that led him to make decisions about how to present his case?*

Randall assumed that Brandon likes him. He also assumed that Brandon thinks he is important at the store.

Randall assumed that Kim would be impressed or flattered by his comments.

He assumed that Nate would be more serious with him than Brandon or Kim was. He assumed Nate is nice, might feel sorry for him, and might feel obligated to lend him the money.

## Activity

Reread the scenario about Randall Leigh and the bus fare in the previous activity (pages 4–5). Then, in a group, discuss the following questions:

- What kind of persona did Randall try to present to each of his three audiences—Brandon, Kim, and Nate?
- What assumptions do you think Randall made about each of the three audiences—Brandon, Kim, and Nate—that led him to make decisions about how to present his case?
- What kinds of plea, evidence, or proof did Randall employ with each of the audiences to try to persuade Brandon, Kim, and Nate to lend him the bus fare?
- What do you think Brandon, Kim, and Nate knew about Randall—his personality, his job, and so on—that led them to react the way they did to his entreaties?

## Key #1: Understanding Persona

A rhetor who understands persona is able to do two things. First, he or she can speak or write so that the audience perceives him or her as a distinct character, usually one who is educated, considerate, trustworthy, and well intentioned. Second, he or she can make **inferences** and judgments about the character and personality of another writer or speaker, analyzing how that writer appeals to the audience, invites the audience to interact with current or historical events, and wants the audience to act after they have finished reading or listening to the text.

Listen to this **voice** from an editorial in the *Sports Illustrated* of August 5, 2002:

Subjects we're tired of hearing about, because nothing-is-ever-going-to-change-anyhow:

1. Does the Second Amendment mean just the militia?
2. Did Shakespeare really write Shakespeare?
3. Yes, but what about the Grassy Knoll?
4. Is Oprah going to marry Stedman?
5. Should Pete Rose go into the Hall of Fame?

What can you tell so far about the position the writer is developing? How do you know it? Have you ever asked yourself any of the questions the writer

poses? They vary in seriousness, but the writer has linked them together because they're all seemingly unresolvable. The writer seems to be humorous and a little mocking, as though there's no point in writing about any of the questions he's posed. Here's the next word:

Still.

So the writer, Frank Deford, is going to write about something that he already believes to be useless. "Still," he just can't help it. He's going to write. About Pete Rose, which you've probably guessed because the piece appears in *Sports Illustrated*. You've also guessed it for a rhetorical reason—it appears last in the group of questions. The next paragraph suggests reasons that Rose belongs in baseball's Hall of Fame.

It is Hall of Fame induction time again (Ozzie Smith went in on Sunday), so we ought to at least mention the lunacy of baseball's freezing Charlie Hustle out of Casa Immortality. First of all, it is irrational to deny the man who made the most hits in history a place in Ye Olde Shrine. Second, it is stupid. Third, it is not working: the only person the ban benefits is Pete himself.

What strikes you here? Deford sets the situation for his piece—"It is Hall of Fame induction time again"—to suggest that Rose's failure to be inducted should at least be mentioned. Deford appears reasonable, listing three reasons that Rose should be admitted. What about Deford's **tone**, his **attitude** toward the subject he's writing about? Given that one of the three reasons is "It is stupid," we might see Deford continuing the tone of light mockery that his questions at the beginning suggest. The **diction** of the paragraph—"Charlie Hustle" (a nickname for Rose?), "Casa Immortality," "Ye Olde Shrine"—is informal and at the same time specialized. Baseball fans would know whether Rose was called Charlie Hustle or not, and they'd know who Ozzie Smith was.

As you might predict from the last sentence of Deford's paragraph, the writer goes on to develop his case about how Rose has benefited from being the "Official Pariah of Baseball," selling his **image** and his case in products, on talk shows, and on Main Street in Cooperstown, New York, the home of the Hall of Fame itself. Deford develops his case with anecdotes about baseball fans, with the history of baseball commissioners' unfair exclusion of other figures like Shoeless Joe Jackson in the early twentieth century, and finally with this admission:

Of course Pete Rose is guilty of betting on baseball. He's as guilty as, well, Paul Hornung, who bet on NFL games while playing in the NFL but is properly plaqued in Canton. He's as guilty as all sorts of putative baseball immortals who stoke up on steroids. But Rose was guilty only when he was a manager. Even if he bet on baseball, even if he disobeyed the infield fly rule or shot Cock Robin, there is not a scintilla of evidence that he did anything untoward when he was playing the game. Even if you fervently believe that Manager Rose soiled the National Pastime, how unfair, how Un-American, is it that the glories of his youth should be censored by the sins of male menopause? That's just not right.

*What kind of plea, evidence, or proof did Randall employ with each of the audiences to try to persuade him or her to lend him the bus fare?*

With Brandon, Randall tried to make it sound that the boss would need his help. He implied the store cannot run without him.

With Kim, Randall put himself down when he explained he was a "fool" and forgot to bring money with him. He was asking for her pity or sincerity.

With Nate, Randall used honesty and admitted he "absent-mindedly" forgot to bring his money. He also highlighted how dependable he was when the two were lab partners. This approach made Nate comfortable enough to lend Randall the money.

*What do you think Brandon, Kim, and Nate knew about Randall—his personality, his job, and so on—that led them to react the way they did to his entreaties?*

Brandon might have known Randall the best. He might have thought of Randall's situation as typical because he saw Randall as forever forgetful.

Kim might have thought he came on too strong. She probably believed he needed the money, but he was not going to get it from her.

Nate probably did not know Randall beyond the surface level. He probably thought that Randall was smart, nice, and dependable.

#### READING CONNECTION

To underscore the importance of understanding persona, consider reproducing

two public-domain speeches given by President Bill Clinton regarding the Lewinsky scandal (see pages 259–262). One is his speech on national television; the other is his speech at a prayer breakfast. The two speeches, side by side, illustrate persona very well.

### ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

The authors write, “Occasionally . . . writers use the mask of another voice for comic effect or to underscore the seriousness of a position they believe in.” To make this statement resonate for students, tell them the story of Mike Rowe, a teenager who lives in the Canadian province of British Columbia. He has a Web site at [www.mikerowsoft.com](http://www.mikerowsoft.com). Microsoft is suing him. They want him to sell his domain name to Microsoft for \$10. Mike wants \$10,000 and was insulted by Microsoft’s offer of \$10. After all, Mike was simply using the irony of his name, not intending to make money from it.

Suggest the following activity to your students: Write a one-page journal entry using “another voice for comic effect or to underscore the seriousness of a position.” It can take the form of a letter to Microsoft, to Mike Rowe, to a magazine or newspaper, to a friend, or even just to yourself. Pay attention to specific word choice and repetition of phrases; you may even use a story to make your point effectively.

Comparing Rose with other rule violators in sports who have nonetheless been honored for their accomplishments, Deford makes his logical point: there is no **logic** in denying Rose. The last paragraph slams baseball by noting that in the matter of Pete Rose, “Baseball has long had a trust exemption.” The surface logic and the light tone are both obvious as you read. You might have to read it again to hear the **irony** and underlying displeasure, even anger, at those who are responsible for making decisions about the national pastime. This is a writer who loves baseball and who believes unjust punishments sully the game.

Writers usually want the persona they develop and the voice they use to be genuine, to reflect who they really are. Occasionally, however, writers use the mask of another voice for comic **effect** or to underscore the seriousness of a position they believe in. You might be familiar with Jonathan Swift’s famous essay “A Modest Proposal” (1729), in which he mock-seriously suggests that a good solution to the economic woes of Ireland would be to begin eating Ireland’s children. His tone sounds reasonable, in contrast to the outrageousness of his proposal. Readers are led to understand the tragic plight of the Irish by reading the details of suffering and deprivation in the supposedly dispassionate voice of the speaker. As readers, we do more than sympathize. We are moved to anger and to a desire to change the situation we read about.

Writers thus use their voices—indeed, they create and sustain a tone with those voices—to affect readers’ understanding and belief. Using the term *persona*, Aristotle referred to the character that readers could discern from the writer’s or speaker’s use of words, arrangement of ideas, and choice of details. The persona was the mask that Greek actors wore when they performed, the exaggerated smile and frown masks of tragedy and comedy that you’re familiar with as a **symbol** of theater. That word today is used to show the artfulness of the speaker’s creation of voice, how deliberately the speaker should select words, tell a story, and repeat phrases in order to help listeners hear the voice that the speaker has decided will be most effective. Swift wore a mask of high good humor and reasonableness that served to underscore his appalling suggestions and reinforce the horror of poverty in Ireland. The mask you wear as a writer doesn’t hide you from your readers—it meets them head on and interacts with them purposefully and effectively.

### Activity

In his novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Mark Twain creates a scene in which a student reads the following composition to the class. Read the composition carefully, and then in your group discuss how Twain wants us, his readers, to characterize the persona of the speaker. Be sure to point out specific parts of the composition that support your **claims**.

#### IS THIS, THEN, LIFE?

In the common walks of life, with what delightful emotions does the youthful mind look forward to some anticipated scene of festivity! Imagination is busy sketching

rose-tinted pictures of joy. In fancy, the voluptuous votary of fashion sees herself amid the festive throng, “the observed of all observers.” Her graceful form, arrayed in snowy robes, is whirling through the mazes of the joyous dance; her eye is brightest, her step is lightest in the gay assembly.

In such delicious fancies time quickly glides by, and the welcome hour arrives for her entrance into the elysian world, of which she has had such bright dreams. How fairylike does everything appear to her enchanted vision! Each new scene is more charming than the last. But after a while she finds that beneath this goodly exterior, all is vanity: the flattery which once charmed her soul now grates harshly upon her ear; the ballroom has lost its charms; and with wasted health and embittered heart she turns away with the conviction that earthly pleasures cannot satisfy the longings of the soul!

### TEST PREP: CLOSE-READING QUESTIONS

See page 262 for multiple-choice questions based on the Twain passage.

## Key #2: Understanding Appeals to the Audience

A text becomes rhetorical only when an audience reads or hears it and responds to it. A key to developing skill with rhetoric, therefore, is understanding *how* a text appeals to an audience. Once again, Aristotle’s ideas are influential. In ancient Athens, as Aristotle taught his students to discuss and create speeches about important issues, he developed a system that explained to his students how to locate the “available means of persuasion” as they developed their **personae** (the plural of *persona*), understood the needs and the knowledge and experience of their hearers, and researched and developed their topics. Rhetoric, he argued, could help students accomplish their aims as they spoke, primarily to persuade hearers to a course of action based on a common search for truth.

This persuasion happens, Aristotle taught, because a rhetor makes three kinds of closely related **appeals** to his or her audience through a spoken or written text.

- A rhetor appeals to **logos** by offering a clear, reasonable central idea (or set of ideas) and developing it with appropriate reasoning, examples, or details.
- A rhetor appeals to **ethos** by offering evidence that he or she is credible—that he or she knows important and relevant information about the topic at hand and is a good, believable person who has the readers’ best interests in mind.
- A rhetor appeals to **pathos** by drawing on the emotions and interests of the audience so that they will be sympathetically inclined to accept and buy into his or her central ideas and arguments.

The rhetor does not necessarily make these appeals in separate sections of a text. A single sentence can appeal to logos, the audience’s interest in a clear, cogent idea; ethos, the audience’s belief in the credibility and good character of the writer; and pathos, the audience’s emotions or interests in regard to the

### TEACHING RHETORIC

The three Aristotelian appeals remain vital and will be revisited in Chapter 5.

To make the three appeals clear, discuss a typical “negotiation” between a high school student and parents. Ask the students to imagine themselves asking their parents or guardians for a later curfew.

- The student using logos would say not only that other friends their age have a later curfew but also that those friends still manage to fulfill all homework assignments and maintain excellent grades. The student using pathos might add that the

hour he or she wishes to be added on to the curfew is usually spent watching television and not doing schoolwork.

- The student using *ethos* would explain that with each increment in allotted curfew time over the past two years, the student has managed the same level of schoolwork without any negative repercussions. The student would also cite past examples where, because of good character, he or she avoided conflicts.
- Finally, the student using *pathos* would explain that friends are beginning to refer to him or her as a “baby” because of the current curfew.

The students should next work with the same scenario but should use all three appeals, just as Randall used different appeals earlier in the chapter.

### TEACHING RHETORIC

After students absorb the example of nonarguable and arguable theses, explore a contemporary example:

That Bill Clinton was involved in a scandal is not arguable, but that Bill Clinton was involved in a scandal that harmed the legacy of the American presidency *is* arguable. Students should be encouraged, always, to make their claims more highly specific so that their theses will be more arguable.

topic at hand. And a rhetor seldom uses one of the appeals to the exclusion of all others. Think about Deford’s piece (pages 8–9). He uses logic, or reasonableness, to argue for Rose’s induction into the Hall of Fame. But he connects his logical explanations to emotion as he comments on “the glories of his youth” and to ethics as he calls baseball authorities to task for their less than even-handed dealing with Rose’s case: “That’s just not right.”

Aristotle believed that speakers and hearers really did want to know the truth or the best course of action. He said that rhetoric is useful because “things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposite,” which makes rhetors and audience members mutually responsible as they communicate their best thoughts about a subject. The “good person speaking well,” as Quintilian put it, wants to persuade to the better course, not the worse one; Deford wants to convince his readers that inducting Pete Rose is only fair, the best course of action to take in a case that is complicated by other ethical considerations. Rhetoric works because speakers and writers and listeners and readers engage together in the process of making meaning and coming to understanding.

### Key #3: Understanding Subject Matter and Its Treatment

To become a successful rhetor—that is, to be a “good person speaking well”—you must develop skill in treating the subject matter fairly, fully, and effectively in a text. Some people might contend that the treatment of subject matter goes beyond the realm of rhetorical skill—in other words, that generating material for a text and producing the text itself are separable activities. We disagree. It is vital for a successful rhetor to comprehend that *what* he or she decides to include in a composition is intimately connected to *why* he or she is speaking or writing, *whom* he or she is speaking or writing to, and *what kind* of text he or she is composing.

To develop skill with treating subjects, a rhetor needs to understand four essential concepts. First, he or she needs to recognize that any topic, proposition, question, or issue that might generate the subject of a text must offer at least two paths of interpretation, analysis, or argument—the subject must be an “open” one. A text can never be effective rhetorically if it covers a subject matter about which everybody already agrees. So, for example, if you were taking a class on the works of William Shakespeare and you wrote a paper claiming that Shakespeare was a famous late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century English playwright, your audience might say, “Well, of course. We already know that.” But if you wrote a paper claiming that William Shakespeare was a famous late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century English playwright whose plays demonstrate remarkable insights into European history and politics, even though Shakespeare himself never traveled or studied in Europe, then members of your audience would probably perk up and say to themselves, “Hmmm, that’s an interesting angle. Let’s see what this writer can do to flesh out that claim.”

Your audience's response to the fuller, more debatable topic illustrates the second concept about subject matter treatment that a budding rhetor needs to understand: A successful speaker or writer generates effective material by capitalizing on what his or her audience already knows, making them curious to know more about the topic, and then satisfying their curiosity by providing facts, ideas, and interpretations that build on what they already know. To continue our example from above: the audience for your paper about Shakespeare already know that he was a famous late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century English playwright, and they may even know (as you do, once you've learned it in class) that there is some dispute about whether Shakespeare himself actually wrote the 34 plays that bear his name. Such an audience would find your topic compelling because it would speak to their curiosity about how a young man with only a grammar school education in a rural town in England could write such historically, politically, and socially rich plays. In your Shakespeare paper—indeed, in all effective compositions that you produce—your audience will look for believable material that supports a point that you are making about a topic that they either are curious about already or become curious about because your title and the opening of your composition have made them so.

And this desire for believable material in support of a general point illustrates the third and fourth concepts that a person developing skill with rhetoric needs to understand about subject matter treatment: the basic move of all effective rhetorical texts is claim-plus-support, and the central responsibility of a rhetor developing a subject is to generate ample, substantial material to support the points he or she wants to make. A budding rhetor can use the phrase *claim-plus-support* as shorthand to remind himself or herself of this fact: All successful texts, written or spoken, are made up of a series of points the rhetor wants to make. One of these points may be the main point of the text, sometimes called the **thesis statement**. To develop this main point, the rhetor generates a series of subsidiary, supporting points, and to flesh out these points, the rhetor comes up with facts, details, examples, illustrations, and reasons—all those things that cause a reader or listener to think, “Ah, I see *why* and *how* the point is being made.” And this ability to create appropriate, effective points and supporting material must be active and robust. As we will explain in Chapter 2, the first of the ancient canons of rhetoric was **invention**, the craft of generating material to flesh out the topic of a text. A good rhetor will often produce *more* material—more general points and supporting material—than he or she actually needs in a text, just so he or she can *choose* the points and material that will be most effective with the audience.

### Activity

Read the following editorial that was published February 1, 2001, by the nationally syndicated columnists Jack Anderson and Douglas Cohn. Then, in your group, discuss the following questions:

### TEACHING RHETORIC

The “claim-plus-support” model mentioned here is the groundwork for many other discussions of writing arguments. Toulmin’s model of argumentation uses the structure of claim, data, and warrant.

Alert students to the authors’ contention that “the basic move of all effective rhetorical texts is claim-plus-support.” Make sure students notice that the word *move* connotes the strategy and gamesmanship involved in rhetoric. Acknowledging healthy competition will make the students take seriously their in-class roles as both speakers/writers and listeners/audiences. Further, students should realize that their arguments contain “moves” that lead to overall effects. Just as a boxer or a ballet dancer uses many “moves” to achieve an overall effect or goal, so will the students need to produce subtle and complex rhetorical strategies. Students who practice playing the rhetorical game become increasingly adept at manipulating complex rhetorical strategies.

- Who might be the audience for this column?
- How do Anderson and Cohn appeal to this audience (or these audiences)?
- Select one audience that you think might pay attention to this column, and describe how the column addresses or alludes to what the members of this audience probably feel, think, believe, and know about the subject matter.
- What is the principal claim that Anderson and Cohn make? How do they support that claim? Can you detect one or more claims besides the principal one? If so, how is that claim (or are those claims) supported?
- If you were working as an assistant to Anderson and Cohn and had to generate *more* material for additional columns on this subject, what kinds of questions would you raise or issues would you address?

#### HOW ABOUT ONE STUDY AT A TIME?

#### READING CONNECTION

Other American essays in which students should be able to easily highlight appeals include

- Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”
- Langston Hughes, “Salvation”
- Alice Walker, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens”
- Jane Addams, “The Bayonet Charge Speech”
- Zora Neale Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”
- Benjamin Franklin, “The Speech of Dolly Baker”

#### TEST PREP: CLOSE-READING QUESTIONS

See page 263 for multiple-choice questions based on the editorial by Anderson and Cohn.

Prompted by first lady Laura Bush, education is the front-burner issue for the Bush administration, but the arguments are centering around the wrong issues: vouchers and accountability.

The real issue is the structure of education. Vouchers are generally being discounted because they would divert badly needed funds from the public school system. Accountability is a problem only in the remedy; schools whose students do not meet the standards are to be penalized when they should be counseled and assisted.

The solution is to change the system. Socrates educated his students in very small numbers, one subject at a time. It was a good method—a method we could use today.

True, we cannot provide one instructor for every five to 10 students, but we can teach one subject at a time. It is well known that students do better in summer school than during the regular school year, and the reason is that they are immersed in one subject for a short period of time. They can focus, they can concentrate, they can explore, they can question—and they cannot be ignored.

The idea of trying to have students simultaneously learn six or seven subjects forces unwanted choices upon them, because they must choose how they will allocate their time. And there are educators who defend this system, claiming that time management is an important element of education. Baloney. Is it more important than learning the subjects?

The primary goal of education is to graduate students who have actually learned the subject matter. Why impose extraneous forces and decisions upon them? Why complicate their lives? Why increase rather than decrease the pressures?

Instead, imagine an educational system that mirrors summer school. The school year would be divided into six or seven units. Each unit, lasting five or six weeks, would be devoted to the study of a single subject. Students who hate mathematics, language, history or science would be able to devote all of their scholastic energies to those subjects, one at a time. And teachers, keenly aware that not all of their students love the particular subject as much as they do, would have enough time to provide individual attention to each of them.

Next comes the curriculum. There was a time in our history when Latin was mandatory. Today, the study of a foreign language is mandatory for most college-bound students. However, since virtually none of them can expect to graduate from

high school or college fluent or even conversant in the language, the study of foreign languages should be elective.

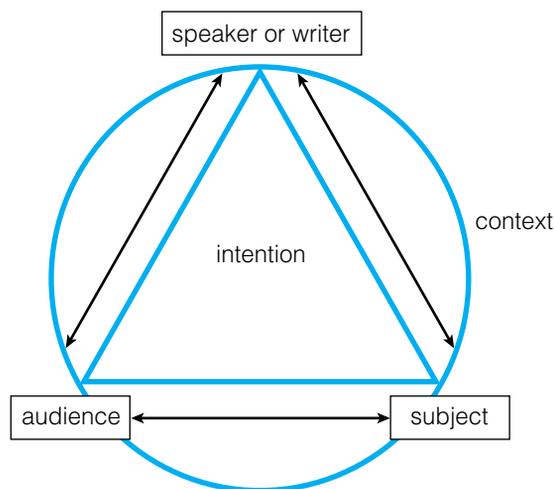
Mathematics has a similar problem. A study of algebra, geometry and trigonometry is fine, but what possible purpose is served by forcing students in their last years of high school or first years of college to study calculus if they are not planning to major in math or science?

While some of these suggestions may be controversial, the objective of graduating students who have learned the subjects is not.

—United Feature Syndicate, *Jack Anderson and Douglas Cohn*

## Modifying the Basic Rhetorical Triangle: Rhetoric Occurs in a Context

While the basic rhetorical triangle sets out the three initial keys to developing skill with rhetoric, the triangle needs to be modified so that it reflects three vital facts. First, rhetorical transactions always take place in a **context**—a convergence of time, place, people, events, and motivating forces—that influences how the rhetor understands, analyzes, and generates the persona, the appeals, and the subject matter material. Second, every rhetorical transaction is designed to achieve an **aim**, a **purpose**, or an **intention**. Third, when rhetors consider what aim they hope to accomplish in a particular context, they select an appropriate type of text, or **genre**, to achieve that purpose. These three facts thus lead to three additional keys to developing skill with rhetoric.



Revised Rhetorical Triangle

### Key #4: Understanding Context

Just as the seventeenth-century poet John Donne argued in his famous Meditation 17, “No man is an island, entire of itself,” so budding rhetors need to understand that no text they create or analyze is an island, separate unto itself. Every speech or written composition arises from a context: the convergence of the immediate situation calling forth the text, any pertinent historical background information about the topic, the persona and identity of the rhetor, and the knowledge and beliefs of the audience. The context of a speech or written composition strongly shapes how rhetors argue their positions or explore their ideas. An effective speaker or writer knows how to allude to the context in his or her work; a careful reader understands how context affects a text he or she is analyzing.

Consider an example involving writing. Let’s say that a writer is writing about gun control in the wake of the Columbine High School shooting tragedy, the terrible event of April 20, 1999. The writer would probably be remiss not to acknowledge Columbine, since it would have been so much in the news and in the public consciousness. The climate of fear and sadness about the Columbine events is part of the context the writer needs to address whatever his or her position on gun control issues. Rhetors can refer to topical events—that is, time-bound moments like the Columbine shooting, the O. J. Simpson trial, the voting problem in Florida in the 2000 presidential election, the Teapot Dome scandal, the McCarthy hearings, the Watergate break-in, or the Chicago Seven—as they consider how to approach subjects, how to provide evidence, and how to connect with audiences. One problem with using current events, of course, is that their currency fades quickly. Some of the events mentioned above, for example, may seem far in the past to readers. (The Teapot Dome scandal was a corporate double-dealing scandal during the administration of Warren Harding in the 1920s, the McCarthy hearings were a congressional inquiry prompted by fears of communism in the 1950s, the Watergate break-in happened in 1974 and led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, and the Chicago Seven was a group of antiwar activists tried in court for their protests during the Democratic National Convention in 1968.) Still, even though they lose force quickly, topical events serve an important purpose of locating time and space for an audience and in explaining and exploring the contexts that lead rhetors to conclusions.

Rhetors also use wider cultural contexts as they make decisions about their texts. A writer on gun control issues might allude to the American West and the frontier in order to connect the American present to the American past, a past that many readers have seen mythologized over and over again in movies and books. That cultural context is part of what writers consider when they write about issues, such as gun control, that reflect on something about the way the culture views itself. Do Americans see themselves as cowboys? And if they do, what associations do they bring to that word? Free, independent, powerful, dangerous? If a rhetor considers the cultural images that the word *cowboy* evokes, he or she might see how the words alone begin to help him or her

understand how and why Americans have difficulty reconciling the problem of guns in this country. Knowing the cultural context thus will help a rhetor generate evidence and create an effective persona.

Context, then, can be immediate or distant, bound by current events or ongoing events. You might stop to think about how you would work with context if you were writing about gun control. Is there an event that has happened in your school or your community that would provide strong evidence and help connect with your readers if you used it? Is there some local history that might contribute to your argument? In Greensboro, North Carolina, many residents remember a school shooting in 1993, when a 16-year-old boy who had been suspended from school for smoking went home, got his father's gun from a locked cabinet, and returned to wound the assistant principal and then turn the gun on himself. His death provoked a lot of discussion about both school safety and gun control. Many places in the country have a long tradition of hunting and a history of parents teaching children responsible gun ownership and safety that a writer could use to draw other conclusions about safety and gun control.

In summary, an effective rhetor knows how to refer to context to help the audience understand the position he or she takes and to connect positively with the text's argument.

### **Key #5: Understanding Intention**

A fifth element that a rhetor must understand is intention, also called aim or purpose. A rhetor's intention is what he or she wants to *happen* as a result of the text, what he or she wants the audience to *believe* or *do* after hearing or reading the text. In some rhetorical situations, the rhetor knows his or her intention right from the start; in other situations, the intention becomes clear as the text evolves.

Consider the first option. You may begin with an intention, saying to yourself: "I want to write an essay to persuade people to use public transportation." Often when you begin with an aim, you already have strong feelings and opinions about the issue, maybe because you've read a lot about it already or because you have personal experiences that have convinced you of the rightness of your position. Your task in this case is to find enough evidence and to present it fairly enough to justify the aim you begin with.

In other situations, you begin with a topic you're interested in but don't yet carry strong opinions about: "I want to write about using public transportation." Or you're assigned that topic by a teacher: "Write about the advantages and disadvantages of public transportation." When you begin with a topic, you discover your aim as you write. Part of the mark of a successful writing process and a successful writing product is the ability to take a topic and discover an aim through the exploration of ideas and evidence.

As a reader, you discover intention in the process of reading much as a writer discovers intention in the process of writing. In one text, the writer may

announce a purpose—in this case, a persuasive one—at the beginning of an essay: “We need to take the bus to work. And here’s why.” In that case, you the reader understand immediately what the writer has in mind, and you make a decision quickly about what your disposition is with regard to that aim. You the reader might think about what you know and believe about pollution, buses, and city problems. (Notice how you are drawing on context as you interpret?) And you will think about how the writer sounds, and whether you like the voice that states its aim so quickly and assertively.

In another text, the writer might begin with a story and wait to announce the aim, or use the story to imply the aim. The writer might marshal facts and figures to prove the case and end the essay with a sentence that generalizes about the purpose. You the reader comprehend the reason for the story or the use of figures as you begin to understand the aim. And you decide whether or not the evidence or the stories have been effective to convey the aim. You analyze the rhetoric of the piece, in other words, to decide on its success.

### *Activity*

Choose an issue or subject that relates to some event at your school. Draw your own illustration of it. Keep in mind the triangle. Share your drawings with your group, and see if your “readers” understand the context, your aim, and your persona.

### **Key #6: Understanding Genre**

A sixth key to developing skill with rhetoric also emerges from the modified rhetorical triangle. Because every act of writing and reading is embedded in a context, and because every writer writes to accomplish an aim and every reader reads to discover that intention, every rhetor chooses to produce a certain *type* of text—a genre that is appropriate to accomplish his or her intention in the particular context. A rhetor needs to understand that there are many types of texts, many genres, to produce and analyze as a student and a citizen.

Let’s look at a scenario that might make this context-intention-genre connection clearer. Suppose that your advisor tells you that a local service organization, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), is inviting students to apply for a partial scholarship in psychology or social work, two fields you’re considering as majors. Immediately, you understand part of the context—you have a motivation to write a letter of application, and you have an incentive to produce a text. You do a bit of research on the program, and you discover that RSVP places a strong emphasis on what it calls “intergenerational volunteer” work—projects that involve both senior citizens and younger citizens in community improvement. This is right down your alley; just last year, in fact, you and your grandmother volunteered to work together at a drop-in food pantry sponsored by a church in your neighborhood. Voilà, you understand a little

more about the context—you know something about one of the areas stressed by RSVP. Since you know that RSVP has money to support college students and because you think you might need some financial assistance for college, you also have an intention: You need to persuade the scholarship committee at the local RSVP chapter that you are an extremely deserving candidate for their scholarship. So, in this context with this intention, what type of composition do you write? Do you write a poem that shows your creativity with words and images? No. Do you write a scientific laboratory report about some aspect of aging and psychology? No. You write a courteous, convincing letter, detailing your credentials as a student, your interest in the fields the organization wants to support, and your experiences with your grandmother that show how much you have already learned from intergenerational research and how much you think you can continue to learn. Context plus intention lead to genre.

Students who are just beginning to develop their rhetorical skills sometimes have difficulty thinking “outside the box” about genre. Many students have been taught that every paper they write for their courses needs to be the same type: It needs to have an opening paragraph that “hooks” the reader and ends with a **thesis** statement; then it needs to have three “body” paragraphs, each of which begins with a topic sentence and develops some aspect of the thesis statement; and then it needs to conclude with a paragraph that restates the thesis. This type of writing, commonly called the five-paragraph essay, is taught in many American high schools. (Curiously, almost no other system of secondary education in the world puts so much emphasis on this particular genre.) There is absolutely nothing wrong with knowing how to write a five-paragraph essay. It is a genre that students ought to master early in their school years because it is especially useful when students have to write a timed, impromptu essay for a test. But it is not the only genre students should learn to produce. A rhetor needs to look at the particular context that’s calling forth the writing, consider his or her intention in this context, and then ask, “Is the five-paragraph essay *appropriate* for this context and this intention?” It may be the case that some assignments would be better served with a paper that ranged beyond five paragraphs; that offered a more provisional, tentative thesis that the writer would want to qualify or rethink part of the way through the paper; and so on. In summary, students should understand that as valuable as the five-paragraph essay is, it remains a relatively “closed” genre, one that suggests that a writer has drawn all of his or her conclusions and put them “in the can,” rather than thinking deeply about the topic at hand and reflecting that complex thinking in a more complicated genre.

Think of all the genres you could write by tapping into this connection between context and intention. For example, let’s say that you, a part-time worker yourself, have just read two or three really interesting magazine articles about the effects on students of holding a part-time job. Given that so many students you know work while they are in school, you know that the context is a rich one, and you would like to write something that would combine the insights you gained from the articles with your own thoughts about the benefits and drawbacks of part-time employment. Given this context and this intention,

## READING CONNECTION

After reading about Key #6, genre, students may be interested in literary genres that are somehow mixed or crossed. Here are some possible categories with reading suggestions:

- “Creative nonfiction” is a label some critics use to categorize Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, Langston Hughes’s “Salvation,” Jamaica Kincaid’s *Girl*, and Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*.
- “Metafiction,” which is fiction that refers to itself as a work of art, applies to Paul Auster’s *New York Trilogy*, Thomas Pynchon’s *V*, and Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*.
- “Global literature,” which depicts crossing/clashing cultures and their effects on characters in our new, global society, is an appropriate label for Li-Young Lee’s *The Winged Seed*, Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, and even Amy Tan’s *Joy Luck Club*.
- “Academic, Bohemian literature” takes place in a school, usually college, setting. One example is Weldon Kees’s *Fall Quarter*.
- “Post–WWII angst literature” identifies J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, and Kurt Vonnegut Jr.’s *Slaughterhouse V* and *Cat’s Cradle*.
- “Memoir” writing, a genre that is growing in popularity among poets as well as fiction writers,

describes Mark Doty's *Heaven's Coast*, Kien Nyugen's *The Unwanted*, and Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*.

Help students to understand that the different genres of prose, just like the different aspects of rhetoric, overlap. As students become more aware of the different ways to categorize prose today, they can invent their own genres or predict emerging genres.

you decide to write a feature article that might be published in your school newspaper. Or, to consider another example, let's say that you, along with other people who live in your neighborhood, are concerned about the potential traffic congestion (and danger) that might come about if a large hardware store opens near a very busy intersection, as has been proposed. The city development commission has announced a public hearing on the proposed construction. So you and your neighbors might go to the intersection, conduct a study of the current rate of traffic, speculate based on your best estimates about how traffic will increase if the hardware store opens, and then write a documented, scientific study, complete with an introduction, methods of investigation, findings, and implications, and present it with a cover letter opposing the construction of the store to the development commission. Both of these examples illustrate the kind of thinking a skillful rhetor does about genre. He or she asks, "What is the context calling forth a piece of writing? Who needs to know what I intend to write about? Therefore, what is the *best*, most *appropriate* genre to produce?"

## Rhetoric in Everyday Life: Your Life, Your Community

Just because you are using this book in a course, don't think that the study of rhetoric is something that applies only to school projects. While it is important to apply the six keys to developing skill with rhetoric to school projects that require you to read, write, speak, and think clearly and effectively, it's equally important to consider how these rhetorical abilities help you prosper in your life beyond the school walls.

The following text and three activities are designed to see how being a skillful rhetor can help you become an active, contributing citizen and a conscientious consumer of the many texts that you must analyze.

### Rhetoric and Citizenship

What does it mean to be a good citizen? One way to answer this complicated question is to use a metaphor: Citizenship is a two-way street, and being skilled at rhetoric gives you the ability to travel in both directions successfully. Here's what we mean.

When you are a citizen, you belong to a series of governing units that you expect certain things from. In turn, they expect certain things of you. Let's say, for example, that you are a citizen of the United States, the state of Illinois, and the city of Downers Grove. (As you might have guessed, this describes the citizenship of one of the authors of this book!) Among other things, you expect the United States to provide a strong and stable set of armed forces—the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard—that can protect the country from attacks by individuals or groups who oppose our nation. In turn, the U.S. government expects 18-year-old men (but, for now, not women—more on this issue below) to register with the Selective Service System and in times of

national crisis to be willing, within the limits of their conscience, to be drafted into the armed forces. Among other things, you expect the state of Illinois to establish and enforce regulations by which the public schools operate. In turn, the state of Illinois expects elementary and high school students to study a prescribed set of subjects in secondary school in order to receive a high school diploma. (Do you recall the activity, earlier in this chapter, that asked you to examine Jack Anderson and Douglas Cohn's argument for "one-subject-at-a-time" schooling?) You also expect Downers Grove to maintain large, open, wooded areas as parks where residents can relax and enjoy nature. In turn, Downers Grove expects you to respect the cleanliness and safety of the parks by not littering, not chopping down trees, not allowing pets to run wild in them, and so on.

Good citizens generally know a lot about these expectations—how they expect their country, state, and city or town to behave toward them, and how they are expected to behave in return. And, whether they know it or not, these good citizens use their skill at rhetoric to understand what their citizenship provides for them and expects of them. Many of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are not set in stone. They are conveyed to us—sometimes directly from the governing bodies, sometimes indirectly through schools and the media—as propositions or proposals, and we, as good citizens, have to examine them critically and decide whether and how we want to assent to them. This process requires that we read documents and listen to speeches and conversations about citizenship issues very carefully, working hard to understand the argument being put forward and the language used to embody the argument—in other words, to comprehend the rhetoric of good citizenship.

Let's consider an example of how being skilled at rhetoric can help you be a well-informed citizen. While women serve in all the armed forces of the United States, they have neither been required to register for the Selective Service System nor been drafted. The federal government came close to drafting women in World War II because there was a shortage of military nurses, but a surge of volunteerism made the draft of women unnecessary. Three decades later, the draft of men was deemed unnecessary as well. As the Vietnam War ended, so did the drafting of young men in 1973, and from 1975 to 1980 18-year-old males were not required to register with the Selective Service. But when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1980, there was concern about America's ability to deploy its armed forces quickly, and President Jimmy Carter asked Congress to reinstate the law requiring young men to register for the draft. Congress complied but only after debating the question of whether young women should also be required to register and, in times of crisis, be drafted. Since it was the policy of the Department of Defense not to involve women soldiers in combat, Congress decided not to require 18-year-old women to register. This decision, however, was challenged. A district court in Pennsylvania, responding to a lawsuit brought by several young men, ruled that the exclusion of women from the draft violated a clause in the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which states that no citizen may "be deprived of his life, liberty,

or property without due process of law.” The case, *Rostker v. Goldberg*, was later appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that the exclusion of women was not unconstitutional. The question of whether 18-year-old women should be required to register for the draft has resurfaced regularly since then. Bodies ranging from the U.S. Senate to a Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces to the General Accounting Office have debated the question, with decisions being reached in 1992, 1994, and 1998 not to require women to register and not to subject them to the draft.

## RESPONSES TO ACTIVITY

*How does the author create a persona?*

- The author repeats himself or herself in the second paragraph by saying that “only men” are required to register for the draft. He or she puts these two words at the end of this paragraph; they are alone, as if they are a sentence.
- The author begins with catchy phrases that are common.
- The author presents both sides of the argument; in doing so, the author is persuasive that it would be best for the country if women had to register for the draft.
- The author says, “America is one nation, with one society.” This gives the impression that the author cares about the subject as well as the well-being of society. He or she is a caring person.
- The author says, “Fighting wars without soldiers is impossible.” He or she also says, “Running out of manpower at a crucial point in a war would be disastrous.” Both of these comments denote

## Activity

The issue came to the fore again in early 2003, just as the United States and its coalition partners were planning to take military action against Iraq. Read the following editorial, which appeared in the *Daily Illini*, the student newspaper at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, on June 20, 2003. Then do two things: First, in your group, analyze how the anonymous author of this editorial creates a persona, appeals to the audience, and addresses the subject matter. Second, write your own response to the editorial. Pay attention to how you incorporate the context, determine an aim, and decide on the appropriate genre that will embody your response.

### INCLUDING WOMEN IN THE DRAFT

Uncle Sam wants you. Be an army of one. Commercials, posters and pamphlets bearing these slogans—and others like them—encourage many to enlist in the military. But even more people are available to the armed forces.

In addition to all the men and women who enlist on their own, men must register for the draft. Men ages 18 to 25 are eligible to be drafted into the military during times of war. Only men.

The idea of conscription is distasteful to many, but the draft is an unfortunate necessity. While many people do become more patriotic in times of war, not all feel obligated to enlist. Running out of manpower at a crucial point in a war would be disastrous.

Critics of mandatory enlistment say it’s wrong to force anyone to register for the draft. But when it comes down to the wire, the draft pool is a needed resource. Fighting wars without soldiers is impossible.

Historically, only men have had to register for the draft. But society is different now, and equality is a closer goal.

Women are able to enlist in the military voluntarily, and female soldiers are considered an asset. If women are able to enlist by choice, it should also be made mandatory for them to register to be drafted. It’s unfair that only men are forced into combat. America is one nation, with one society. It’s unfair that one sex can be forced to fight the battles of both.

Women in other countries are drafted into the military. Every Israeli citizen must serve in the Israeli army. Other countries have considered or implemented conscription for women already, and the United States should follow suit.

Opponents of women being in the military might argue that women may have to leave a family behind or become pregnant while on active duty. But health concerns that would distract from duty would need to be addressed and details would need to be hammered out for maternity leave.

Others argue that women shouldn't have to register because they won't be able to physically handle a combat situation.

This is a moot point because the military provides training and decides where each person will be placed, including less physical jobs. It's unlikely that a woman who lacked the physical skills for combat would be placed in that situation. Nor would a man.

The military wants to win wars, and it would be detrimental to place people in positions they are not qualified for or lack an affinity for. But with a bigger pool of help to choose from, the military could only better itself.

## Rhetoric and Community

When you are skilled at rhetoric, you are not only in a position to make good decisions about national political questions, such as whether all 18-year-olds should be required to register for the draft. When you are skilled at rhetoric, you are also in a better position to understand and respond to important issues and concerns in your local community.

Consider the following scenario, for example. In Downers Grove, a wooded suburb about 20 miles west of Chicago, drivers used to see interesting signs over and over as they traveled south on Belmont Avenue, a busy road. Planted in several front yards were large white placards, with a simple message in bold, black, all-capital letters: NO MEANS NO. The average motorist driving past these signs might not have known exactly what they meant, but passersby certainly perked up and paid attention to them. Why?

Here's the story behind the signs: Along the western edge of Belmont Avenue was a substantial parcel of undeveloped park land, owned by the city. A proposal was made that the Downers Grove Park District build a large, state-of-the-art water theme park on this site. Proponents of this plan said the theme park would draw both visitors and new residents to Downers Grove, provide an excellent venue for family recreation, and generate considerable income for the city. The opponents—including the homeowners who put the signs in their yards—conceded this last point: The theme park would indeed generate revenue. But the opponents believed that the theme park would also attract to Belmont Avenue hordes of people who didn't care about keeping the area clean and safe. The opponents envisioned regular traffic jams on the street in front of their homes. They worried that the theme park would become a site for loitering and potential vandalism.

Sensing that they would need community support, city officials who hoped to see the water theme park succeed put the question to a vote. In a referendum, voters were asked whether they supported the construction of the park on Belmont. They overwhelmingly voted no. But much to the voters' surprise,

the logic and seriousness of the argument.

*How does the author appeal to the audience?*

- The author uses *logos* by stating how unfair it is that women can enlist by choice but it is not mandatory for them to register to be drafted, especially since women are considered an asset to the military.
- The author uses *pathos* to appeal to the audience by stating, "Society is different now, and equality is a closer goal." This makes the audience feel attentive to the idea of becoming a more equal people. He or she uses the words *detrimental*, *unfortunate*, and *unfair* to make readers feel the importance of the subject.
- The author uses *ethos* by mentioning what the military in Israel is like. This gives the reader the sense that the author has done his or her research. He or she has other countries to compare ours with. The author also addresses the other side of the argument: women may not be physically capable, and they may have more "health concerns that would distract from duty." This makes him/her seem credible and intelligent.

*How does the author address the subject matter?*

The author presents the material in a sensible way. He or she draws on people's

emotions, explaining why women are important to the military and why women can be fit for the military. The author writes about the subject matter in a realistic way. He or she says we need people to fight for our country, so why not use everyone available? Why stick to our old ways of segregating men and women when we are a country striving for equality? This is a persuasive and informative piece that makes the audience really think about the effectiveness of requiring only men to register for the draft.

city officials appeared at the next council meeting after the election and, claiming the election was not a *binding* referendum, announced their intention to go ahead with the water theme park development. That's when the signs went up in people's yards: NO MEANS NO.

Why are these signs so effective? There are no fancy words—just three monosyllables making up one simple sentence. The graphics are not all that impressive: plain black capital letters on a white background. Yet the signs caught people's attention and motivated them to find out the story behind them. Why? At the level of literal meaning, the sentence was a **tautology**, a direct (and perhaps needless) repetition of an idea. But on a deeper level, the message was very strong. NO MEANS NO sounded like a strong, forceful parent disciplining an unruly child who was trying to get away with something forbidden. NO MEANS NO had a air of finality to it, suggesting that this was really the final word on the issue. And the appearance of so many signs in people's yards, all of which said NO MEANS NO, suggested that people in this neighborhood were unified, bonded, together.

Of course, not all the signs and public displays one might see in a community are as negative as NO MEANS NO. Throughout Downers Grove, for example, there are signs on posts that say *Downtown Downers Grove: Catch the Spirit*, a message that suggests the residents can find plenty to do in the small downtown area. Outside many of the schools, one sees signs that proclaim *Excellence in Education*. And not all of the rhetoric that defines and binds together a community can be found inscribed on signs in yards and on lamp-posts. Communities—like Downers Grove and, perhaps, the city, town, or village where you live—call upon their residents to identify with the municipality, to support and take part in events it sponsors through signs, brochures, newsletters, and town meetings. All of these materials together constitute the rhetoric of the community, the statements that the community makes about itself and that it wants its residents to believe and support.

## RESPONSES TO ACTIVITY

Here are the answers of one student who analyzed a newsletter from her community.

Do the artifacts you find create a persona? If so, how would you describe and characterize it?

The newsletter creates the persona of an interested, responsible, up-to-date group. It includes reprimands to residents, follow-ups on past cases, a bank statement, plans for

## Activity

With one or two classmates take a walk or drive through the community where you live. First of all, notice any signs and banners that are posted. How do these signs and banners suggest the community wants to portray itself? What points are they trying to convey? How effectively do the language and the graphics on the signs and banners contribute to conveying the message? Second, find a brochure or newsletter that is published by the town, city, or county where you live. Ask the same questions about it.

When you've finished examining signs, banners, and a brochure or newsletter (or perhaps two or three of them), discuss the community's rhetoric. Here are some questions you can ask:

- Do the artifacts you find—the signs, banners, brochures, or newsletters—create a persona? If so, how would you describe and characterize it?

- How do the artifacts appeal to you as an audience?
- What aspects of the “subject matter” of the city, town, village, or community do the artifacts emphasize? How do they do so?
- Are you able to see an overall aim or intention in the artifacts? If so, what is it?

## Rhetoric and Conscientious Consumption

One message should be clear by now: Being skilled at rhetoric is one of the most important abilities you can develop in your quest to lead an active, successful life. If you can read materials with a discerning eye; if you can scope out a situation and understand what is at issue in spoken and written documents and discussions; and if you can speak and write clearly, fluently, and correctly, then you are going to be in a much stronger position to succeed in whatever intellectual task you tackle. Think about this: you are surrounded by, and often immersed in, language—from the books, magazines, and newspapers you read to the conversations you have, the television you watch, the radio and CDs you listen to, and the Internet you surf. A great deal of this language is trying, either openly or subliminally, to get you to do something: Vote for this candidate, buy that product, support this cause, oppose that movement. How do you know what to do, which advice to heed, which path to follow? To a certain extent, of course, you can follow a “gut instinct” in these matters. But certainly you don’t want to rely solely on what your emotions tell you to do when an important decision faces you. You want to be able to survey the situation at hand—read, listen, consult, and think. You want to be able to consider the benefits and drawbacks of all the possible courses of action. You want to decide wisely. You want, in other words, to use your rhetorical skills.

As an example of how using your rhetorical skills helps you lead an active life, consider a project familiar to a great many students—selecting colleges and universities to apply to, and getting accepted by an appropriate school. This process may start very early in life for some students, especially if parents, teachers, or friends offer advice about choosing a good college. The process begins in earnest, however, in the sophomore or junior year, when students begin receiving solicitation letters. Colleges and universities throughout the United States want to attract the very best students, so many institutions acquire lists of students’ names and addresses from educational testing organizations, marketing firms, student organizations, and alumni groups, and mail letters to high school students urging them to consider applying. Each of these letters aims to portray the college or university in a favorable light—the people at each institution, after all, want you to apply. You need a discerning, rhetorically skillful mind to read these letters carefully and decide whether you actually should apply. You need to notice what kinds of information and appeals to you are played up in such letters. You need to notice what is *not* said in such letters, as well as what is said, and you need to ask yourself *why* you think the

future renovations, and upcoming dates for meetings. The newsletter encourages people to participate.

*How do the artifacts appeal to you as an audience?*

The artifact appeals to me because I wonder if I am mentioned in it. I also have a curiosity to learn if any of my neighbors have been reprimanded for breaking the rules. I want to know if changes are going to be made to my driveway, roof, or garbage procedure. The newsletter is organized and detailed. The authors use specific dates of violations or changes to policies and accurate information.

*What aspects of the “subject matter” of the city, town, or community do the artifacts emphasize? How do they do so?*

The newsletter emphasizes responsible, clean, and respectable living habits and group involvement. It deters people from violating codes. It asks people to participate in the meetings for the community.

*Are you able to see an overall aim, or intention, in the artifacts? If so, what is it?*

The overall aim is to inform residents of improvements and problems and to encourage neighborly behavior.

**RESPONSES TO ACTIVITY**

*How would you characterize the persona created by each of the letters?*

Franklin College tries to present itself as a reputable college (it names people who have gone there and are famous or have done something famous). It also tries to present itself as an affordable college. It is seen as offering a small-town, warm, and friendly atmosphere.

Arizona State University's letter creates the persona of a growingly popular university (increasing numbers of academically talented students), with a wide range of majors (95 undergrad majors), a school that is both beautiful and affordable.

*How would you describe the way each letter appeals to its audience?*

Franklin draws on the popular and familiar names and focuses on the school's outstanding reputation. It appeals to emotions in that it is a warm, small-town campus. The letter is logically appealing because of the university's affordability.

Arizona makes its appeal as a popular place to study. It appeals to ethos in the beginning as it highlights the question, "What do you want from your college experience?" It is up to you to decide what you do in school. It makes it seem as though it is interested in your desires. It draws on logical reasons: it is a beautiful and affordable college.

writers of these letters chose to foreground, include, and omit certain material. Certainly, every college and university in the United States has attributes that will appeal to some students, but a rhetorically skillful reader will apply to those institutions that really speak to his or her interests and needs.

## Activity

The following are passages from two college solicitation letters. Let's examine both of them as rhetorically skillful readers.

What do the inventor of the Doritos snack chip, the director of the classic movie *The Sound of Music*, and the founder of the Save the Children Foundation have in common? They're all graduates of a small college that's been providing extraordinary educational and career opportunities for more than 160 years—Franklin College.

Arch West, Robert Wise, Dr. John Voris and thousands of other Franklin grads will tell you that the choice of a college has a lifelong impact. That's why they continue to be active in events and activities at their college long after graduation. And that's why you should strongly consider Franklin as you look at your college choice.

You already know that colleges like Franklin provide a unique educational atmosphere that includes small classes, a faculty that loves teaching, a warm and friendly campus, and outstanding opportunities to participate in athletics and extra-curricular activities. But you'll find so much more at Franklin:

- A small-town atmosphere with convenient access to metropolitan Indianapolis and excellent shopping, cultural, and entertainment options.
- Nationally recognized internship, leadership, and professional development programs that provide graduates with outstanding career options.
- A top-quality education at an affordable price—Franklin has been consistently recognized as a "best buy."

—Franklin College, Franklin, Indiana

Think about what *you* want from your college experience. Then explore the remarkable opportunities available to you at Arizona State University. Discover why increasing numbers of academically talented students from around the world are choosing ASU.

- 95 undergraduate majors, many of which are recognized as the finest in the nation.
- Outstanding career and graduate study opportunities for ASU graduates.
- A beautiful campus combining desert and tropical landscape in the Valley of the Sun.
- Outstanding students. ASU's fall 1999 freshman class boasted a high school grade point average of 3.36 and included 132 National Merit Scholars, 12<sup>th</sup> best among all universities in the USA.
- *The Student Guide to America's Best College Buys* has recognized ASU's combination of academic quality and affordable price as one of the 100 best buys in the USA.

—Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona

Analyze, and then compare and contrast, the rhetoric of these two letters. Ask yourself (or discuss with members of your group) the following questions:

- How would you characterize the persona created by each of the letters?
- How would you describe the way each letter appeals to its audience?

As you address each of these questions, be sure to point to specific passages in the two letters that support your answers.

---

Both letters use imperative statements telling the audience to “explore” opportunities, and “discover” why students are choosing the school.

