

"Letter From Birmingham Jail" Analysis Exercise

Name(s): _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Today we are going to be looking at how Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. persuades his audience--at just how he convinces and argues, at his incredible grasp of rhetorical strategies, at his capability to not only reveal his audience's power, but also to reveal their moral shortcomings. Today, dear class, we embark on understanding just how a master of rhetoric makes his case.

But what is rhetoric you may ask?

Well, rhetoric is _____.

According to Aristotle, a speaker or writer uses three main strategies:

Logos (An Appeal to Logic)	Ethos (Relying on the Credibility of Speaker)	Pathos (An Appeal to Emotion)
		

However, you must NEVER state that "the author uses logos" (or ethos or pathos) in an essay. *Why*, you ask?

Well, imagine analysis like this: "The author's use of emotion causes his audience to feel deeply." That is what your analysis will sound like if you say that the "author uses pathos/ethos/logos."

Now you will analyze Dr. King's use of rhetorical strategies throughout his "Letter from Birmingham Jail". You will be answering the following question:

How does Dr. King appeal to his audience's sense of logic, play on his audience's emotions, and/or establish his own credibility as a speaker in order to convince his audience that non-violent direct action is not only a justified means of change, but a morally imperative one?

Directions: Each table will be give one of the following thesis statements to "prove" using evidence from the text. Please circle the thesis statement for which you are responsible...

- 1) In "Letter from Birmingham Jail" Dr. King appeals to his audience's intellect and rationality in order to convince them that non-violent direct action is not only a justified means of change, but a morally imperative one.
- 2) In "Letter from Birmingham Jail" Dr. King toys with his audience's emotions in order to convince them that non-violent direct action is not only a justified means of change, but a morally imperative one.
- 3) In "Letter from Birmingham Jail" Dr. King consistently reasserts his own credibility as a speaker in order to convince his audience that non-violent direct action is not only a justified means of change, but a morally imperative one.

Directions: Now, before you begin, you must break apart your thesis statement into "What" and "How".

"What" is Dr. King arguing?

"How" is Dr. King making this argument?

Now that you have identified "what" and "how", you need to determine what **evidence** you will use to prove your thesis. As you do this, you might consider looking at examples of Dr. King's use of the following rhetorical/literary devices. Feel free to use the definitions in your literary terms packet! And remember, your evidence could come in the form of quote, paraphrase, or summary; regardless, once you find a good piece of "proof", you need to write it down in the "evidence" column.

*Repetition	*Rhetorical Question	*Allusion	*Conflict	*Irony (Situational or Verbal)	*Anaphora
*Paradox	*Hypocrisy	*Anecdote	*Diction (type?)		*Juxtaposition
*Simile		*Aphorism	*Syntax (type?)		*Maxim

Furthermore, you need to analyze why your evidence is persuasive. This means you need to explain why this piece of evidence is 1) an example of this strategy, and 2) is convincing to the audience. Your explanation may be in complete sentences, or bullet points--it just needs to be written down.

Evidence:	Explanation (AKA Commentary):

As you work, your table must all be at the same place at the same time! Do not move ahead without your table; do not fill in the chart without consulting your peers! You are building your proof together--a frustrating, but inevitably stronger process!