

Being a cripple



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A variety of words can be used in the act of describing someone who is physically impaired; society today chooses to use words such as disabled, handicapped, or differently able. Nancy Mairs, who is physically impaired with multiple sclerosis, chooses the word “cripple” to describe herself. In her piece “On Being a Cripple,” Mairs relays to her audience how she accepts being crippled, and she brings attention to her interpretation of the language used by society. Mairs portrays how she feels by setting different tones within her essay.

At the start of her writing, Mairs puts off a confident, bold, and defiant feel to her essay. Mairs represents herself as someone who is bold and confident by being very forthright about her opinion. “Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer...” The tone then shifts into being contemplative, and she reveals to us how she responds to words such as “handicapped” or “disabled.” In the conclusion of her piece, Mairs conveys a tone that is apathetic. “But call me 'disabled' or 'handicapped' if you like.

I have long since grown accustomed to them... here Mairs puts forth that she feels more accepting of the manner in which others may refer to her and her condition. In addition, throughout the whole piece Mairs inserts small amounts of caustic and ironic humor. For example, Mairs says, “As a cripple, I swagger” which portrays irony because of the sense that the “swagger” she may show in the way she walks is caused by her disability. She also inputs “my God is not a Handicapper General” which is another instance of a more sarcastic, dry humor. While writing, Mairs also conveys an image of herself and her condition by her choice of words.

Throughout the piece, she uses words that are both straightforward, and incisive. One major part of the diction of the essay is the syntactical repetition of the word cripple. Cripple is as Mairs says “ a clean word, straightforward, and precise. ” The emphasis Mairs places on the word cripple helps interpret the overall purpose of her writing. Mairs word choice also, at some points in her essay, is important to keep the piece flowing; for example, she uses an anaphora and antithesis to keep the momentum of the essay from braking: “... to describe anyone, to describe no one. Imagery is also used to keep the audience entertained and interested in the essay.

The words in which Mairs chose to place in her essay keep the audience aware, and altogether let the reader understand and relate to the feelings Mairs has for herself and her condition. Mairs uses different rhetorical structure to relate to her audience and convey her message. The syntactical repetition of the word cripple, again takes a role in relaying the purpose of the writing. Mairs uses the word, “ but” as a transition to help let the reader know the manner in which speaking is about to shift, and take on a different point of view.

Another rhetorical structure used in her essay is parallelism, “ These words seem to me to be moving away from my condition, to be widening... ” Mairs uses this parallel structure so the reader can create and image in their mind, understand, and relate to how she is feeling. The author Nancy Mairs writes to explain to her audience how she pictures herself, and the manner of which she would like others to view her and her condition. Throughout her essay, Mairs uses different forms of tone, diction, and rhetorical structure to make

her purpose able to be understood, and grasped by everyone who chooses to read her piece, " On Being a Cripple. "