

Ellen degeneres commencement speech analysis



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Graduation caps fly into the air, cheers erupt, and diplomas are received. This is a typical graduation day. Not only did these ceremonial events take place for Tulane University's class of 2009, but Ellen DeGeneres was there to congratulate them as well! This class was dubbed the " Katrina Class" for being survivors of the devastating Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Katrina was named one of the deadliest Hurricanes, causing more than 1, 836 deaths. Tulane University is located in New Orleans, Louisiana, where the most significant amount of deaths took place and 80 percent of the city was destroyed.

These graduates have survived a lot , and Ellen wants to congratulate them on their achievements. In Ellen's commencement speech to the Tulane University class of 2009, the use of rhetorical questions, allusions, metaphors, and hyperbole gives the graduates a time to reflect upon their years at the University, connecting with the speaker, and maintain a light the mood by the use of comedy. The road to success for Ellen had a very tragic beginning. Her girlfriend was killed in a car accident and Ellen was living a meager life. She had many questions, but had nobody to ask.

Ellen uses this anecdote to quickly explain a tragic event in her life. By letting the audience into a personal part of her life, she connects to them emotionally. This shows the audience that she is comfortable. Ellen this appeals to pathos; The sentences about her losing her significant other are very tragic, so her audience is sympathetic towards her. " And I was living in a basement apartment, I had no money, I had no heat, no air, I had a mattress on the floor and the apartment was infested with fleas. And I was

soul-searching,... ” is a climax towards her important realization about herself.

Ellen’s soul searching eventually leads to her comedic success. This is a first hand example for the graduates: that sometimes terrible things lead to great things, giving them hope for their futures. Ellen uses rhetorical questions as transitions into or out of serious topics, thus lightening the mood. Most graduates have a lot of stress and worry about their futures, the uncertainty of where they are going or what they will become. Ellen is relatable when she tells the graduates how she didn’t know who shes was, considering that, she was still dating men.

Another use of a rhetorical question “ But why am I here today? ” to introduce an anecdote about her growing up in New Orleans. This question takes the audience’s attention back to her, because, consequently, they know that Ellen will explain why she is there; giving them a reason to listen to her words. Once again, Ellen asks “ What else can happen to you? ” in order to commend the graduates of having success after the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. She uses the hyperbole and rhetorical question, “ So what I’m saying is, when you’re older, a lot of you will be gay.

Anyone writing this stuff down? Parents? ” this keeps everybody’s attention and loops the parents into relating the commencement speech to them as well. Rhetorical questions help Ellen by giving the crowd small moments to reflect and invites them into her speech, connecting to them and allowing them to smile during serious content. Furthermore, the use of hyperbole and metaphors are effective in this commencement speech. Ellen uses a

hyperbole when she rationalizes her anxiety about the success of her sitcom after the public realize that she is gay.

Ellen worried about this because in recent times, the public's attitude toward the LGBTQ community isn't always positive. "This was when we just had white presidents- this was back, many years ago" is a hyperbole that gives a veiled attempt at telling the time period of this event. The most memorable metaphor from Ellen's speech is "life is like one big Mardi Gras. But instead of showing your boobs, show people your brain, and if they like what they see, you'll have more beads than you know what to do with."

This resonates with the graduates, because coming from New Orleans, they are very familiar with Mardi Gras festivities. Ellen uses this metaphor because it is comical and relatable to the students. The speech with this metaphorical advice, in hopes that the graduates will remember it. That is the goal of any commencement speech after all. The uses of allusions to pop culture as well as current events is particularly apparent in Ellen's address as well. First, she alludes to the Pussycat Doll's song to explain how her personal definition of success has changed over the years.

She contrasts definitions of success ranging from holding down tequila shots to the better definition of living life as a well rounded and kind person. She reassures the audience that it is okay if plans and definitions change. The allusions to the Pussycat Dolls and tequila grabs the audience's attention so they are guaranteed to be listening when Ellen gives meaningful advice to them. She also alludes to the country's current socioeconomic situation

when making the hyperbole “ the economy is booming, the job market is wide open, the planet is just fine”.

Everybody in the audience was aware of the grim position that America was in, so alluding to that is relatable for everybody. Ellen lets the graduates know, through the use of this statement that even though times right are hard, she is confident that they will reach their full potential. This lets Ellen connect because everybody was facing hard times in 2009, including herself. The last sentence of her speech is an allusion to pop culture as well. Ellen tells the audience “ remember this: you’re gonna be ok, dum de dum dum dum, just dance. ” The allusion to the pop culture song is memorable and relatable.

Instead of a typical generic send off to the students into their future, Ellen uses a song. Now, each time somebody who was in that audience hears the Lady Gaga song, they will smile while thinking about their graduation day and the great memories they made at Tulane University. Clearly, at Tulane University’s 2009 graduation ceremony, Ellen successfully employed the use of rhetorical questions, allusions, hyperbole, metaphor, and more to give the graduates a time to reflect upon their years at the University, connect with her audience, and lighten the mood through comedic phrases.

She let the audience smile before of after stories of sorrow. She knew what they would understand. She was aware of the lasting impression she was trying to leave, she gave the graduates helpful and meaningful advice as well. Commencement speeches are important and should be unforgettable. Ellen knew how to deliver a successful commencement speech by using her

talent of comedy and awareness. It was helpful that Ellen posses these two highly valuable skills.