

J.m. barry fascination
with the river essay
sample



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In *Rising Tide: The great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and how it Changed America*, John M. Barry writes to communicate his fascination with the Mississippi river to his readers. He does this through the use of rhetorical and literary devices.

Ethos and logos work together in the first and second paragraphs to make the reader know that Barry does not have a surface level fascination with rivers but one so deep that it has driven him to research everything about rivers to try and gain a scientific understanding of them. Barry begins the passage by talking about all rivers in general. In the first paragraph he builds ethos with his readers by quoting Gleicks quote of Heisenberg “ on his death bed he would like to ask god two questions: why relativity? and, why turbulence?” He is says that rivers are so complex and mindboggling that not even God can make sense of them. In the second paragraph Barry uses logos. His use of scientific terms like “ internal dynamics...velocities...and friction” demonstrate all the factors that make rivers awe inspiring and utterly complex.

In the middle section of the passage Barry shifts his focus from rivers in general to the river system which he believes to be most multifaceted and most impressive, the Mississippi. This narrows Barry’s focus and allows him to expand more deeply on the single river system of the Mississippi. He personifies the river by saying “ it acts... it roils”. Barry is saying that the Mississippi is alive; it dictated its own path and cannot be controlled. In the third paragraph Barry uses four similes to say that the Mississippi river is so complex and dynamic that no single image can capture it’s essence in whole. In that one paragraph Barry described the river “ Like an uncoiling

rope...snapping like a whip...trying to devourer its self” and “ whirling and foaming like a whirlpool”. These four similes somewhat overload the readers mind when trying to envision what the river looks like. This is Barry’s desired effect; he wants the reader to feel overwhelmed because the Mississippi river is an overwhelming force.

In the final paragraph Barry uses complex diction which ties in to the complexity of the Mississippi. Barry illustrates the movement of the river by using the repetition of the ‘ S’ sound. “ Snakes seaward” puts the image of the river running back and forth and curving like an s repeatedly in the readers mind. He also uses powerful diction such as “ collision... tremendous turbulence... and scouring” to demonstrate the immense power of the river. Through out the entire passage Barry’s writing style is not uniform just like the river. In some places he has long complex syntax and in others extremely short two word sentences.

All of these literary and rhetorical devices come together to successfully communicate John M. Barry’s utter fascination with the Mississippi river. Barry informs his readers about the immense power of the Mississippi. The passage makes his readers think of the Mississippi in a new light and he instills some of his fascination into his readers.