

# Rhetorical analysis



To write a splendid literary piece, any writer needs an inspiration. It does not matter whether this inspiration is intangible or tangible. This inspiration is usually brought out in most literary pieces through the two vital literary elements: rhetorical strategy and rhetorical context. Rhetoric strategy is the manner in which a writer uses words and language to reach the hearts of his or her readers. On the other hand, rhetoric context is the situation that surrounds a writer's intention when writing such as why he or she is writing, for what audience and for what purpose. Common rhetorical strategies include logos and pathos, while common rhetorical contexts are ethos and kairos. Through their elegant prose, references to history, and analysis of their plight, Martin Luther King in his " Letter from Birmingham Jail" and Thomas Jefferson in his " Declaration of Independence" show their learnedness by using these literary elements to respond to opposing arguments as well as supporting different claims.

Jefferson employs several rhetorical strategies throughout the " Declaration of Independence". To express the importance and need for independence, Jefferson demonstrates logos, pathos, ethos and kairos in the " Declaration of Independence". He uses logos in the entire first paragraph to tell the reader why the declaration needed to be made in the first place. Note that ' logos' is an appeal to the reader's reasoning or logic. Jefferson argues that it reaches a time when a society must break from its past leader, and depend on the earth the power of the almighty God to create a new society. He uses logic to help the reader comprehend the meaning and significance of this document. Jefferson also uses logos to showcase the significance of independence by asserting that independence will secure people's rights of

life, pursuit of happiness, and liberty (Jefferson par. 1). He goes further and lists all the ills that the British monarchy had done to Americans. Not only does he list these ills methodically, but also presents his evidence in a logical manner so that the reader can understand it. Through logos, Jefferson gives evidence towards his arguments, thus implanting a sense of credibility in the reader, as well as making his claims more believable.

Just like Jefferson, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his “ Letter from Birmingham Jail” in an exceptionally effective manner. Inspired by the clergymen’s unjust accusations and counteraccusations, King integrated virtue, honesty, and intelligence in writing to present his rebuttal. King crafted his arguments effectively by directly addressing the clergymen and his audience by using pathos, logos, ethos and kairos to present his own ideas and refuting his opponent’s counterarguments. King appeals to the reader’s logic throughout his letter. Kings, appeal to logos in this text is evident from the onset as King lays a platform for his counterarguments by highlighting the faults in his opponent’s claims. After asserting that “ it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative,” King (para. 5) delves into his logical argument about the important steps of any no-violent campaigns.

The author’s investigation of the causes and underlying conflicts that are sparkig the conflicts between whites and blacks in Birmingham utilizes logos. His appeal to logos is very implicit, especially when he asks the readers to see into the present fact rather than the past. Such an appeal is brought up clearly when he quotes an elderly woman who says “ my feets is tired but my soul is at rest” (King para. 47) He confirms that this statement is

grammatically wrong, emphasizing the woman's lack of education and his awareness of that. One may be compelled to ask, why draw too much attention to this? King wanted to point out that even those who have limited their education understand and sense the scale of injustice of segregation. In other words, the logic behind King's reasoning is that a person doesn't have to be a rocket scientist to see the inequity of the situation at hand.

Another appeal to logos in the text is evident when King gives an explanation for his assertion that he had "reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Klu Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice" (King para. 23). The logic behind this statement is that neither do white moderates understand that law and order exist for the purpose of sustaining justice, nor do they understand that the tension and conflict in the south results from segregation. By using such logical arguments that are not only sequential but also structured, King's appeal to any avid reader's thoughts and logic.

Jefferson's appeal to pathos within this text is very clear. In the second paragraph, Jefferson uses pathos to explicitly convey the agony that the 13 colonies had endured, and why they needed a break from the British. He writes "Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government" (Jefferson par. 2). Any reader would find this statement very powerful because it elicits suffering from within. Another instance where this author employs pathos is when he rallies his fellow Americans to declare their support and allegiance to the declaration. He writes "And for the

support of this Declaration....., we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor (Jefferson par. 2)” In this statement, the reader is able to see how people were willing to sacrifice their honor, fortunes, and even their lives for independence. It also illustrates the amount of passion and heart that was put into this document. Since the author didn’t merely use his appeals to the heart and opinions to persuade the reader, he comes out more authoritative in his argument.

Kings appeal to emotions culminates from his use of pathos throughout his letter. In quoting the old woman with tired feet, King makes the reader feel for her because she must fight for something she truthfully should already have. Through various quotes, King is able to invite the reader to have a feel of the daily life of a segregated African American living in Birmingham. When he writes, “ When you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim,” (King para. 14) King creates a vicious picture in the mind of the reader, which elicits the feeling of emotions caused by segregation.

Reading through Jefferson’s document, one may not fail to notice that it has been written in the right rhetorical context. For instance, Jefferson’s appeal to ethos is evident when he exhibits his authority in the final paragraph. By stating that he and those who signed the document are the representatives of the people of America, Jefferson not only reveals, but also shows the credibility and position of those who enforced the declaration. He also highlights ethos in this text by listing the errors and shortcomings of the British Monarchy. Jefferson’s appeal to kairos is evident in his arguments. By stating that “ we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are

created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights....," Jefferson's appeal to kairos comes out. This was not a good time for Jefferson to champion for the rights of Americans because other Americans, particularly Black Americans had been deprived off the same rights that Jefferson was appealing for during slavery.

Dr. King's letter would not be appealing as it is had the author not have put it in the right rhetorical context. This letter is such a masterpiece because of King's appeal to ethos and kairos. By quoting clergymen such as St. Augustine who argued that an unjust law is not a law, King brings out the ethos of spiritual leaders. He extends this ethos when he demonstrates his knowledge of the lives and deeds past religious leaders such as Paul. By stating certain facts, Dr. King brings out his ethos as a caring person. For instance, King exhibits the characteristics of a caring human being when he writes " it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily" (King para. 12). King's use of specific rhetoric strategies such as pathos, logo, ethos, and kairos enables him to refute all arguments brought forth by his opponents. Likewise, King's letter also demonstrates the sheer significance of kairos to the noble rhetorician who thought that he was ill mannered. While serving term for leading a rights protest in Alabama in 1963, King comes across a newspaper article with a letter written by seven religious leaders who deemed King's protest a bad decision. In retaliation, king seized on the kairos of that situation and jotted a reply to the clergymen. This letter was in fact, a demonstration of his own reaction to the kairos of that situation because he didn't wait for his release to compose a well thought-out and neatly prepared letter.

In conclusion, it is clear that King's and Jefferson's success culminated from their distinctive strategy of directly addressing their opponents and audience. This effective strategy enabled them to present their rebuttals with conviction and more authority, and thus achieve their goals. Moreover, their unique approach to different rhetorical strategies makes their literary works very informative. It goes without saying that the two literary pieces are prime examples of how rhetorical strategy and rhetoric context can be used in a single document. It is obvious that the " Declaration of Independence" and the " Letter from Birmingham Jail" have and will continue being very influential; because of their emotions and appeals that culminate from the various literary elements discussed therein.