

This unit is about persuasive writing in the 11th grade. The students will learn how to recognize and utilize rhetorical terms and devices, analyze others' work for persuasiveness, write their own argument, and present their argument to an audience. The students will analyze some minor works from the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in order to learn about a powerful moment in American History in which non-violent persuasive methods were used to change the political landscape of our country. All of these goals support and surpass the Virginia Standards of Learning.

Since rhetoric is not only concerned with what is said, but how it is being said, I believe that we are faced with rhetorical situations almost constantly. Moreover, I believe that the average person uses rhetorical strategies and is an observer of these strategies on a daily basis. I would like to enhance that awareness in my students. Rhetoric is used in many situations such as advertising, politics, and debate. Through rhetoric, the students will learn how to recognize and analyze language at work. My method to accomplish that goal is to expose the students to some of the theories, terms, and applications of rhetoric. Using this knowledge, they will rhetorically analyze several pieces. Through careful observation and analysis of communication, the students will become accustomed to rhetorical strategies. By combining both theory and practice, the students will produce their own work that is both confident and mature. In addition, understanding rhetoric requires critical thinking skills and expands vocabulary.

The students will write in their reader response journals on a daily basis. This opportunity will encourage writing as learning in that it is a tool for formulating ideas and analyzing other's ideas. I believe that it gives them a creative way to be reflective and become more engaged with the text. I will perform journal checks throughout the unit; however, I will avoid grading them for correctness. I want the students to concentrate on thoughts and ideas rather than rules and conventions. I anticipate that students will enjoy this type of writing and use it to generate topic ideas for papers. I will grade the journals at the end of the unit, looking only for responsiveness and completion.

I have designed the writing assignments so that the recursive nature of the writing process is emphasized. Students will practice all aspects of the writing process in class—prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Students will benefit from this type of process writing because they will receive peer and teacher feedback throughout the process, and they will realize that writing involves many aspects such as talking, reading, and revising many times. I encourage students to choose their own topic so that the assignment will be meaningful and relevant. Hence, they will decide which method of delivery best suits their purpose and audience.

This unit also involves many perspectives through many different types of authors and works. It also addresses many types of literacy through the various texts—visual, cultural, intellectual, and critical. I believe that by incorporating various authors and texts the students will be able to realize the importance of literature as a mirror of human experience, reflecting human motives, conflicts, and values.

Unit Plan

I have designed this unit for an 11th grade classroom over a four-week period on a block schedule consisting of ten 90-minute classes. Before the weeks laid out here, I will have introduced persuasive writing and writing samples for the genre. The students will begin to think about writing forms (i.e., letter to the editor, op-ed, or letter to a person in a powerful position) and topics. I will provide a list of suggested topics for those who may struggle with this decision; however, I believe that students should choose a topic that has special meaning and relevance for them.

The unit is composed of three major assignments: Assignment One—Annotation of Dr. Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”; Assignment Two—Writing a Persuasive Letter; and Assignment Three—Presenting Persuasive Arguments (Same topic from persuasive letter).

I mark the allotted time for each activity, not as a rigid timetable, but to help guide me in planning and instruction time. If I see that the students need more time discussing or working through any aspect, I will make necessary adjustments. Furthermore, if I see the students do not need as much time as is allotted, I will proceed to the next item.

❖ Week One

- *Day One:* The unit will begin with an introduction to Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement through video and class discussion. The students will watch video footage with a focus on Birmingham in 1963 (20 minutes). We will discuss segregation, the Civil Rights Movement, and methods for overcoming injustices. This will act as a springboard to realize how persuasive writing and speech can lead to social and political change. We will focus on how writers, both youthful and mature, can bring about change. We will also discuss alternative methods of persuasion such as poetry, song, and personal narratives (20 mins). I will present a poem by Maya Angelou, “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”. The students will write in their reader response journals and share interpretations with the class (15 mins). Using a Power Point presentation, I will introduce rhetorical terms and applications including persuasive appeals—ethos, pathos, and logos; audience; style; arrangement; and delivery. The students will have a note-taking worksheet to accompany the lesson in order to facilitate in the rhetorical analysis of King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (25 mins). The worksheet will list the terms with a place for students to define them, offer examples, and have a short paragraph to rhetorically analyze. For homework, continue to brainstorm and research topics for Assignment Two. Review notes on rhetoric.
- *Day Two:* The students will analyze a short piece to turn in for a quiz grade on rhetorical terms and devices (10 mins). We will then discuss the notes and any questions the students had from the previous day’s lesson on rhetoric (5 mins). I will do an in class read of MLK’s “Letter...” in order

to convey the sense of urgency, logic, and injustice. The letter is lengthy so I will invite students to take turns reading aloud as we go. I believe this process will engage the students, creating a more invested reading. I will also encourage them to be active readers by reading along and highlighting or underlining phrases they stick out and jotting thoughts down as they occur (30 mins). Afterwards, the students will write in their journals using heuristics to get them thinking about different aspects of the letter (15 mins). Some of the heuristics are What are King's reasons for being in Birmingham?; How does King answer to the charge of being an outsider?; and What is direct action and why is King using it now? After writing in their journals, we will discuss the implications behind the letter and link the information on the Civil Rights Movement to the letter. I will then model how to rhetorically analyze and annotate a section of "Letter...". Students will be required to take notes for future reference (30 mins).

- **Day Three:** We will listen to Langston Hughes read his poem "A Negro Speaks of Rivers". The students will use this to construct their journal entries about how this poem could have helped to further the Civil Rights Movement (15 mins). I will present a grammar mini-lesson on varying sentence construction and length (10 mins). At the end of the lesson, the students will practice revising a paragraph, from their own writing, with attention to sentence variation that I will evaluate individually (10 mins). We will then review the lesson on rhetorical analysis and the annotation process in order to begin Assignment One—Annotation of Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter..." The students will be grouped to utilize pre-writing strategies such as discussion and freewriting or brainstorming in order to determine what argument is being made and how it is supported. I will be able to join each group in order to help the students out with their analysis (20 mins). Individually, students will evaluate and synthesize how these elements work together in order to produce an effect argument in the form of an annotation. The students will draft in class for the remainder of the period (30 mins). I will do a journal check during this time. For homework, continue working on annotation. The students will also bring in a poem, short story, or song that helped to further the Civil Rights Movement.

❖ **Week Two**

- **Day Four:** The students will use their homework piece for a journal entry. They will write about the rhetorical elements implemented and whether or not they are successful (15 mins). The students will bring their first drafts of the annotations to class in order to collaborate up for peer review (20 mins). They will be looking for identification of the argument, proper use of rhetorical terms and devices, examples from the text to support, and audience awareness (the teacher). After reviewing, they will be able to revise their drafts in class. I will be available for one-on-one feedback

during revision (40 mins). After revision, students will share some their analyzed examples. I feel like the students will benefit from this because they are likely to choose different elements to analyze and have various perspectives. I will have also noted particularly strong responses that I noticed during revision and ask those students to share. By sharing, they will have more exposure to rhetorical analysis and a greater understanding through having to explain their analysis (15 mins). For homework, the students will finalize their annotations due on Day 5 (assignment one) and continue to research their topic for the persuasive piece (assignment two).

- **Day Five:** The students will look at pictures from the Civil Rights Movement and compose a journal entry about visual rhetoric through heuristics such as—How are the images used to present an argument?; What information is being communicated through the images?; What elements make the argument persuasive? After writing, we will discuss some of the responses as a class (20 mins). Before beginning assignment two, we will review persuasive writing and discuss how knowledge of rhetorical application can help produce an effective argument. At this time, I think it is important to discuss ethical concerns surrounding rhetoric in that the appeals must be used responsibly (15 mins). The students will use prewriting skills to prepare for their persuasive piece. At this time, I will help students individually in order to help them finalize their topic and genre (15 mins). They will spend the remainder of the class time on drafting their persuasive pieces (40 mins). For homework, the students will continue to work on drafting.

❖ **Week Three**

- **Day Six:** Meet in the computer lab. The students will bring in their rough drafts to continue drafting and to meet with me individually for feedback. They will continue to draft for the first half of class (45 mins). They will stop drafting in order to review the elements of peer review that they have already practiced in class. For the second half of class, they will exchange places on the computers in order to peer review each other's papers. They will do File, Save As, "Review" so that their papers are not altered. The students will use notes from the previous lesson for guidance. They will use Microsoft Word's comment feature in order to insert suggestions. Using a peer review rubric, they will be looking for organization, cohesion, style, and evidence or support (45 mins). I will check journals at this time. For homework, they will work on revisions and find a picture or any visual item that supports the Civil Rights Movement.
- **Day Seven:** Using their pictures, the students will compose an entry about visual rhetoric (10 mins). The students will bring their first revised draft of assignment two to class in order to turn in for teacher feedback. I will then present a lesson on persuasive presentations. This lesson will focus on how to organize information in order to present evidence that is

clear and convincing. Having already gathered the evidence to support their positions, we will concentrate on how to present accurate, relevant, and effective speeches. We will listen to an example of a well-organized persuasive speech from the American Rhetoric database. I will present properties that will not produce an effective speech. By doing this, I hope to insert a little humor through common sense examples that sometimes get overlooked when preparing a presentation. The students will help to determine why elements are or are not successful (40 mins). Using their topics from the persuasive pieces, students will begin to draft their speeches (assignment three) (40 mins). For homework, continue to draft speeches.

- **Day Eight:** We will listen the song “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,” by James Weldon Johnson. The students will use this to write a journal entry about powerful persuasion through music. They will not only use the lyrics, but also the rhythm of those lyrics and the music (15 mins). At this time, I will give grammar mini-lessons addressing problem areas that were discovered while reviewing the drafts. I anticipate that we will review sentence variation through anonymous student writing samples. I will involve students with the analysis and revision of the sentences. In addition, we will review elements of punctuation and usage (20 mins). I will return the drafts of assignment two in order to allow class time to work on revising and editing. I will be able to offer feedback during this process (30 mins). For the remainder of the class (25 mins), students will work on their speeches (Assignment Three). For homework, work on revisions and completing their speeches. Also, read the short story “The Sad Girl,” by Eloise Greenfield.

❖ **Week Four**

- **Day Nine:** Final drafts of the persuasive pieces are due at the beginning of class. The students will write in their journals about the initial interpretation of “The Sad Girl” (15 mins). Having read that short story by Eloise Greenfield, we will discuss and analyze the relationship between this piece of literature and the history and culture that surrounds it. We will look at the themes and motifs employed. In addition, we will describe how the context and language structures convey the author’s purpose and perspective (40 mins). I will assign peer review groups for the oral presentations. Two other students will review each student in order to allow for more feedback. I will then present a lesson how to review an oral presentation. Students will be required to analyze the accuracy, relevance, and organization of evidence presented. In addition, they will analyze the clarity and effectiveness of delivery (20 mins). At the end of class, we will review notes on sentence variation and structure, the various readings, and the lessons on rhetoric and persuasion in order to prepare for a test the following class period (15 mins).

- **Day Ten:** The students will have a test consisting of revising a paragraph specifically for sentence variation and structure. In addition, they will rhetorically analyze it in hopes that they will make the connection between grammar and rhetoric. There will also be short answer questions about the various readings that we will have done over the last few weeks. Finally, multiple-choice will be included to assess knowledge about rhetoric and persuasive writing and speech (45 mins). I believe that offering a test with multiple question types enables students who may excel in one area, but not in another, ways to compensate. I also believe that testing is an indication of how much the student has attended class, participated in discussions, fulfilled assignments, and applied lessons. I will check journals for a process grade at this time. After the test, students will continue to work on their speeches (45 mins). For homework, students will finish their speeches and prepare to present the following week.

❖ **Week Five**

- We will conclude our persuasive unit this week. The students will present over two and half class periods. We will use the last half of the class period for peer review and follow up on any questions or concerns related to the unit as a whole. For the speeches to take place the following week, I will have divided the class into three sections for presentations. Students will review presentations on days opposite to their presentation in order to relieve any anxiety about being responsible for both aspects on the same day. In addition, I will invite parents, other teachers and staff, and administrators to the class on presentation days so that the environment will be one of a public forum instead of only their peers. I believe that this knowledge will act as an incentive for the students' excellent performances.