

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

ACTIVITY: WRITE A RESPONSE

Instructions: Take two minutes and name your favorite film. Then, answer the questions: Who is the audience for this film? Are there specific types of people drawn to this film (by age, by gender, by culture, by interests, etc.)? Why? Explain.

READ: WHAT IS THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the art of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.” So, not only do we use rhetoric to write and to persuade, but we also use rhetoric to observe and even to analyze.

Nothing is without its rhetorical properties. In fact, even the most everyday things are rhetorical (e.g., artifacts, documents, actions, reactions, etc.). One way to observe and analyze the rhetoric of different things is to evaluate their rhetorical situation.

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION (PRIMARY)

Now, everything has a rhetorical situation. Each situation is comprised of the following elements:

- * Author
- * Purpose/Intent
- * Audience
- * Medium
- * Context (Time & Space/Location)
- * Stance

To determine these elements, you simply ask a series of specific questions.

AUTHOR

Typically, one cannot have an action or object without an author, creator, designer, speaker, actor, or agent. Even in the case of something created anonymously, an author or creator still exists.

Questions: Who created the object? Or, who acts?

AUDIENCE

Everything has an audience. The audience can be analyzed in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, etc. (any demographic information).

Questions: Who is seeing/reading/hearing the object or who is witnessing the action?

PURPOSE

Everything has a purpose, whether that purpose is conscious or unconscious, overt or concealed.

Question: What is the reason/intent for the object or the action?

CONTEXT

Every object and every action is created or accomplished at a specific time and in a specific space. Note: Space has two meanings: Geographical and Cultural.

Questions:

Where was the object created? Where does the action take place?

When was the object created? When did the action take place?

MEDIUM

Medium refers to the substance or material the object consists of, or the channel/mode of communication being used.

Questions:

What is the channel or means of communication (print, online, film, paper, etc.)?

What is involved in the action (gesture, body, eye contact, etc.)?

STANCE

Stance refers to the author's attitude or behavior towards the topic (and in some cases towards the audience).

Now, think of the different ways you can choose to express an idea:

*Straightforward

*Sarcastic

*Friendly

*Unfriendly

*Argumentative

*Formal

- *Informal
- *Serious
- *Careless

What is the stance? What is its position? Does it have a position?

SECONDARY RHETORICAL SITUATIONS

Evaluating the rhetorical situation can be difficult, because sometimes a document or artifact has multiple authors, multiple purposes, and multiple audiences.

Oftentimes, we refer to this idea by considering a “primary” and a “secondary” within the different elements of the rhetorical situation. Thus, things may have a primary and secondary author, a primary and secondary purpose, a primary and secondary audience, etc.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Sometimes, other concerns are present in everyday objects and actions, and although they might not be part of the rhetorical situation, they undoubtedly may affect it (or affect others around it). These consequences may be deliberate (purposeful) or unintended (not planned or meant to happen). Oftentimes, these consequences become apparent during the evaluation of the rhetorical situation.

DISCUSS: EVALUATE AN ARTIFACT FROM POPULAR CULTURE

Directions: Work together to answer the questions below.



PRIMARY RHETORICAL SITUATION

Who is the author (or creator) of Barbie?

Who is the audience for Barbie? Who plays with Barbie?

What is the purpose/intent of a Barbie?

What is the medium of Barbie?

What is the context of Barbie?
Time?

Space (Geographic and Cultural)?

If applicable, what is the stance of a Barbie?

SECONDARY RHETORICAL SITUATION

Is there another audience for Barbie?

Is there another purpose for Barbie? Hint: *Look up "Vintage Barbie" on the internet.*

Are there any unintended consequences of Barbie? Hint: *Look up "Human Barbie" on the internet.*

ACTIVITY: RHETORICAL SITUATION EXERCISE

Instructions: Read the following short passages, and answer the questions for each:

ARTIFACT #1

Expect showers across the northern part of the state. Tomorrow, we should clear this low-pressure system and move towards some sunny weather. The Eastern part of the state will notice a slight rise in humidity as well, while the Southern part of the state will remain comfortably dry throughout the week.

1. Who is the Author/Speaker? How do you know?
2. What is the Purpose/Intent? How do you know?
3. Who is the Audience? How do you know?

ARTIFACT #2

Harry the Lion was feeling quite down. While the other lions enjoyed their time playing in the grass, he spent the day resting. His mother noticed and gently asked, "Harry, is everything alright?" "Not really, mama," he responded. Without hesitation, she took his paw and kindly shared, "Not every day is bright. Sometimes it rains, but that rain can be beneficial too, helping the grass to flourish. Do you see what I'm saying?" "Yes, mama. I understand," Harry replied with a nod. He then embraced his mom and began to gather the courage to join the others in play once more.

4. Who is the Author/Speaker? How do you know?
5. What is the Purpose/Intent? How do you know?
6. Who is the Audience? How do you know?