

Project 2: Rhetorical Situation Analysis

Background: In this project, you will draw on Lloyd Bitzer’s theory of the rhetorical situation to rhetorically analyze a text produced by a community or campus organization such as a local charity, professional organization, campus group, student club, advocacy center, or any number of other types of organizations. By successfully completing this assignment, you will learn how to analyze a source’s rhetorical situation, a practice that can help you respond effectively to other writing situations you encounter in school and beyond.

Assignment: Locate a piece of writing composed by members of your selected organization and analyze its rhetorical situation. Write a multimodal essay, addressed to the class, that

- Analyzes the text’s rhetorical situation, identifying its exigence, audience, and constraints
- Argues whether the article presents a fitting response to its rhetorical situation

Substantiate the claims you make about the text’s rhetorical situation, and its response to this situation, with evidence from the text itself and other relevant sources.

Include with the final version of the article a “Dear Reader” letter, addressed to the class, that answers the following questions:

- What is the purpose of your essay?
- What are the strengths of your essay? What are its problems?
- What were the challenges you encountered writing the essay and how did you address them?
- If you had two more days to revise the essay, what additional changes would you make and why?

Support your response to these questions with specific details from your essay and experience.

Tips for Research & Writing:

- The text you select should be representative of the discourse produced by the organization, so you will need to do some preliminary research to determine what genres the organization utilizes.
- In addition to locating a text to rhetorically analyze, you will need to conduct secondary research to understand the rhetorical situation that gave rise to the text, to provide context, and to ensure you respectfully and responsibly represent the organization that produced the text. This means you will consult a variety of

relevant sources and effectively incorporate them into your analysis. You will also need to incorporate at least one image that relates to your analysis.

Length & Format: 5 pages, double-spaced, sources cited in MLA

Due Dates:

Assignment Specifications: Below are the criteria I will use to assess each student's essay.

An effective essay

- Rhetorically analyzes a text produced by a specific community organization
- Identifies the text's exigence, audience, and constraints
- Presents a well-reasoned case for how the text does or doesn't offer a fitting response to its rhetorical situation
- Substantiates its claims about the text's rhetorical situation and fitting response with evidence from the text itself and other relevant sources
- Demonstrates an accurate understanding of Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation
- Documents sources using MLA in-text citations and a Works Cited
- Avoids excessive basic writing errors and stylistic problems that prevent readers from comprehending the essay
- Integrates visuals and other media effectively, following strategies discussed in class
- Includes a Dear Reader letter that answers the four questions listed above, using evidence from the author's writing and/or experience

Social Justice

Isaac Newton's third law of physics states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. However, these laws of physics do not just apply to the world of science; they can apply to the world of literacy as well. Perhaps every famous speech, book, and maxim that has been written is in response to a situation that causes discourse. Every situation calls for a different approach. For example, Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" meant to address the nation two years after the American Civil War and the horrifying Battle of Gettysburg. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his famous "I Have a Dream" speech to express his disgust at a nation that still discriminated on the basis of skin color nearly a hundred years after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. Both examples served a purpose- to call for change. Abraham Lincoln asked the country to join together after 2 years of fighting; Martin Luther King Jr. called for continued activism to put an end to segregation in America.

Today, slavery and segregation in America are a thing of the past. These gruesome ideologies and ways of life now exist only in a history class. However, racial issues continue to persist in America 150 years after the bloodiest war in American history and nearly 60 years after the civil rights movement. Charleston has been a site for controversial events in recent years. To bring light to this and call for activism that refuses to accept a community and country full of racial divides, the College of Charleston's Sustainable Literacy Institute has created the "Woke to Social Justice" exhibit. The exhibit seeks to inspire College of Charleston students to take matters into their own hands, to seek and create a future free from social injustices.

Before rhetorically analyzing its work however, it is important to recognize the rhetorical situation. The first component of the rhetorical situation is an exigence. "Any *exigence* is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done"

(Bitzer 6). Anything imperfect is an exigence; however, for an exigence to be rhetorical it must be something that can be modified. For example, an exigence of natural disasters cannot be modified by humans, so that cannot be classified as rhetorical. In addition, “An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse” (Bitzer 6). Therefore, for an exigence to be rhetorical, it must be something that can be modified through the use of peaceful, nonviolent actions. Exigence creates the need for a piece of rhetorical discourse that properly addresses it and conveys the need for change.

In addition to an exigence, the second component of a rhetorical situation is an audience to receive the piece of rhetorical discourse. Rhetorical discourse influences “the decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change” (Bitzer 7). Just as conditions need to be met for an exigence to be rhetorical, conditions must also be met for an audience to be rhetorical. Bitzer also claims that a rhetorical audience is distinguishable from mere hearers or readers by being capable of receiving inspiration from the discourse and mediating the change (7). It is important to recognize who the audience is to produce the appropriate piece of rhetorical discourse. An appropriate response, therefore, inspires an audience to properly change an exigence.

Lastly, the rhetorical situation is not complete without constraints. Constraints are naturally in every rhetorical situation, and are made of “persons, events, objects, and relations... They have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence” (Bitzer 8). Constraints are divided into two classes. First, the author’s own constraints such as their method of delivering their piece of rhetorical discourse. Second, operative constraints which are external

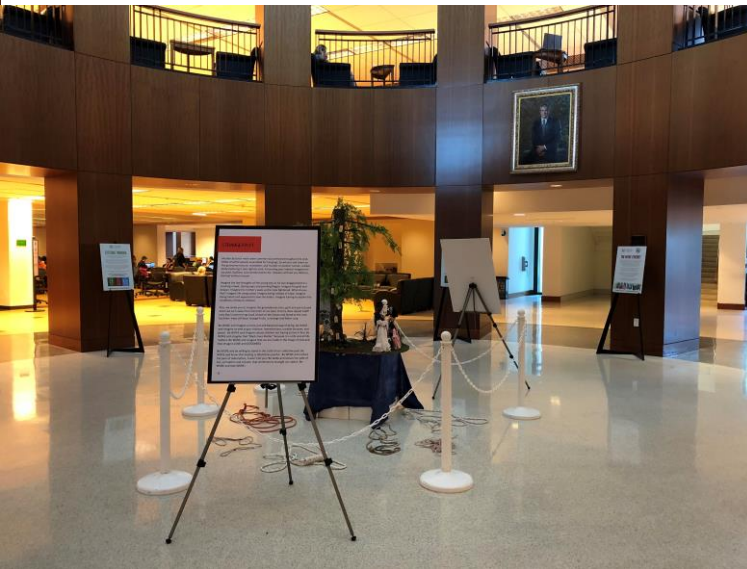
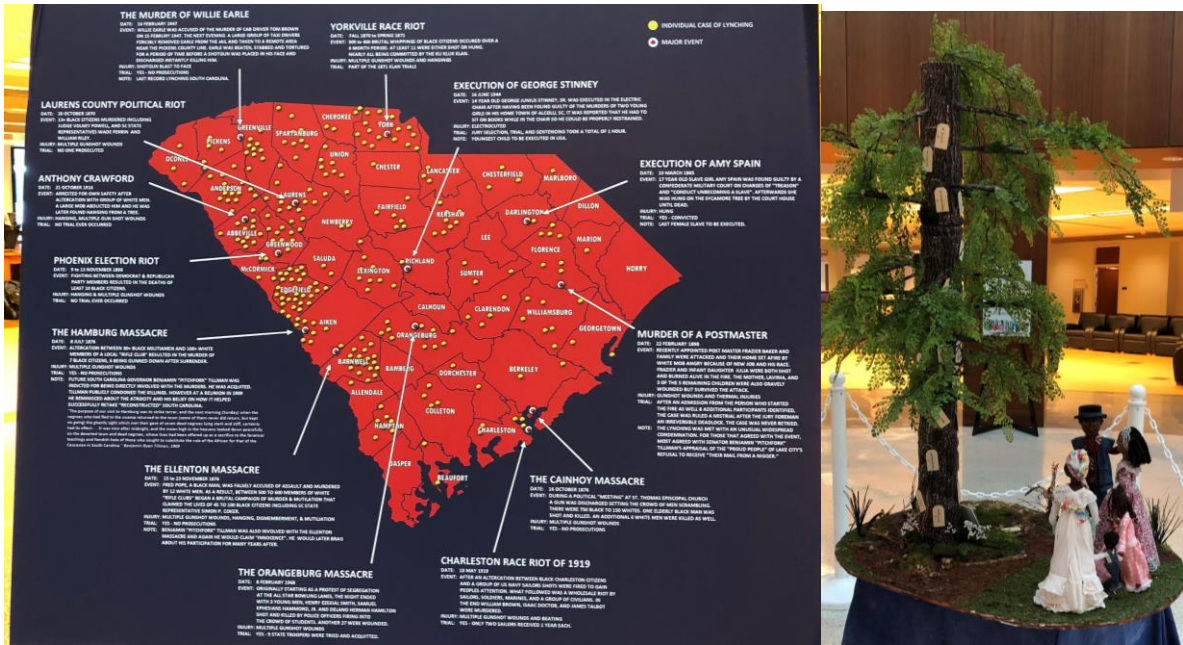
and serve to downplay the author's attempts and prevent the audience from modifying the exigence.

Although the United States has achieved much in terms of social progress, the exigence of racial issues continues to divide America. On June 15, 2015, a white man opened fire in Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church at downtown Charleston during its Wednesday night service, taking the lives of 9 black church members (Horowitz, Corosanti, & Southall 1). A white supremacist entering an African American church with the intent of killing those with a different skin color than him shows nothing but hate in the situation. The gunman, Dylann Roof, pleaded guilty and received a death sentence (Workneh & Murdock 1). This exigence should raise many questions, but the most prominent should be: "WHEN will something be done so that tragedies like this will not happen again?" "WHY is nothing being done?"

In addition, another shooting occurred in Charleston two months prior on April 4, 2015, in a traffic stop involving a white officer and an unarmed black motorist. The incident ended with another statistic to add to racial bias in American police officers: another shooting of a black man. Walter Scott ran from the traffic stop, until the policeman, Michael Slager, caught up with him and the two got into an altercation for Mr. Slager's taser. Unable to take the policeman's taser, Mr. Scott ran away from him again. The following actions by Mr. Slager were unjustifiable in every way imaginable. He claimed he was afraid to see a black man with a taser because he might use it against him (Blinder 1). While Mr. Scott was still running away from Officer Slager, the officer fired 8 shots and killed Walter Scott. Moments later, Mr. Slager placed his taser next to Scott's body, in an attempt to plant evidence and skew the investigation. Fortunately, a passerby on his way to work was able to video the situation (Blinder 1). The aftermath of the shooting was a rarity in shootings of unarmed black men by police officers:

Slager was sentenced to 20 years in prison. The outcome of an officer shooting a black man and being sentenced to prison is rare in America. In 15 cases of police shootings in America from 2014-2016, only 3 have been convicted (Lee & Park 1). How is this possible, with eyewitness accounts and video footage? ““Most police shootings are found to be legally justified... if an officer has reasonable apprehension of an imminent threat... then they’re justified in using heavy force”” states former police officer and associate professor of criminal justice Phillip M. Stinson (Lee & Park 1). With this in mind, it is fair to assume that this country’s laws are full of loopholes meant to protect those in power, instead of bringing them to justice for those who are affected. Eyewitness accounts and video footages do not suffice to bring justice in this country.

The Sustainable Literacy Institute’s “Woke to Social Justice” exhibit is trying to bring attention to these injustices that continue to plague our society, from the community level in Charleston to our country. The immediate target audience is College of Charleston students, who will pass by the exhibit when they go to the library. The exhibit is in the center of the Addlestone Library. The Sustainable Literacy Institute has put information boards in front of posts, ranging from its goals for the exhibit, the definitions of social justice and fair distribution, to a map of all the recorded lynchings in South Carolina. The map of recorded lynchings highlights some major events, such as Amy Spain, the last female slave to be executed; George Stinney, the last child to be executed in the United States; and Willie Earle, the last recorded case of lynching in South Carolina, which was not too long ago in 1947. There is a scene in the center showing black people looking upon a tree with tags of various towns and cities in South Carolina. On each tag is a number which represents the number of recorded black deaths in those towns and cities.



This scene coincides with the title, "Strange Fruit," of the rhetorical piece I will be analyzing labeled *Figure 1*. It is the board in front of the central scene of the exhibit. The title itself is a rhetorical appeal. "Strange Fruit" is a song by Billie Holiday, which functions as an extended metaphor, as the "strange fruit" of southern trees are those of the black people hanging from their branches. This casts a powerful effect on the readers, as it paints an elaborate image in

their minds of a tree prospering and bearing a strange fruit- lifeless black bodies. This image in turn appeals to pathos, evoking a horrified feeling on the reader as they imagine the scene of a southern tree.

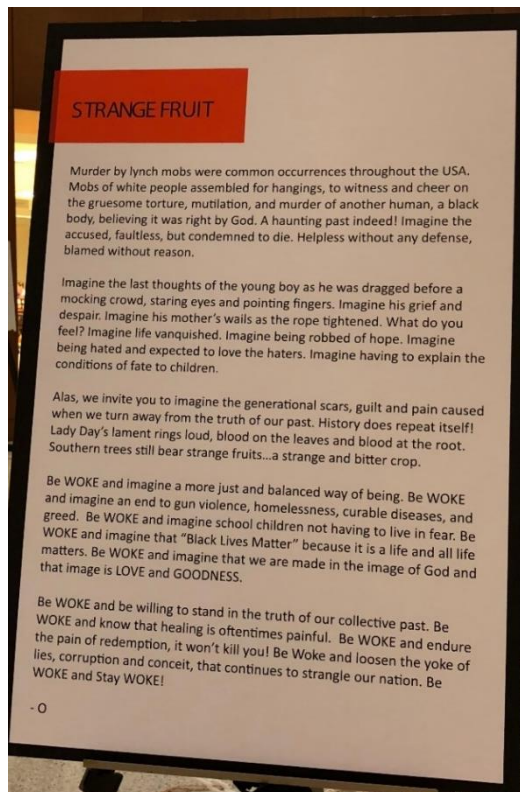


Figure 1

To begin, the text opens with a description of the past, “Murder by lynch mobs were common occurrences throughout the USA” (Figure 1). This is an appeal to logos, urging the reader to reflect on America’s past, a time when slavery was normal, black people were considered as only 3/5 of a human being, and killing black people for no reason was not a crime. The effect of reflecting on America’s past is so the reader will be able to compare it to today in the world they live in. Perhaps it will make the reader ask, “Though slavery and segregation no longer exist, are there still racial issues today?” A quick remembrance of recent events (the exigence) show that the answer is “yes.”

Moving along, the next paragraph is full of repetition: “Imagine... Imagine...” (Figure 1). This technique creates a rhythm to the writing. To emphasize the severity of the victims’ experiences, after “imagine” are gruesome events that only happened to black people. A young black boy being dragged before a raging crowd, his mother watching the rope tighten. Then, it asks “what do you feel,” appealing to pathos. This rhetorical question does not have a direct answer, as every viewer will have his/ her own interpretation. However, it does give the answer of the people being directly affected by the lynching: life is vanquished for the boy being hanged, and his mother’s life is robbed of hope. This makes the reader sympathize as they put themselves in the shoes of the victims of America’s racism. In addition to evoking thoughts from the reader, the exhibit plants in his/ her mind exactly what the victims are thinking.

Next, the third paragraph expands to a brighter scope, passed imagining individual thoughts, to imagining the impacts of this country’s history and past cultures: “We invite you to imagine the generational scars, guilt and pain caused when we turn away from the truth of our past. History does repeat itself” (Figure 1). This is an appeal to both pathos and logos. First, the reader feels the “generational scars, guilt and pain” of this country’s past that continues to linger today and hurt its victims as they remember the recent events in Charleston and around the country. The logic comes as the piece connecting the past to the present, as history has clearly repeated itself in the exigences mentioned earlier and countless more events around the country that have led to this rhetorical piece. How can America’s nightmarish past be kept from being repeated?

Finally, the fourth and fifth paragraphs end the piece with a call to action. “Be WOKE” is repeated in every sentence, giving the text a rhythm. The term “WOKE” directly appeals to my generation. The term is slang for being aware of what is happening. In this context, being

“woke” means to be aware of the social injustices running amok in our country. “WOKE” being capitalized also emphasizes how important it is to be “woke” in today’s world. However, it is telling us to do more than be aware. It is also telling us to imagine an end to “gun violence, homelessness, curable diseases, and greed... school children not having to live in fear.” This is an appeal to pathos. On top of social injustices, it reminds the reader of even more dilemmas that plague the country. This shocks and petrifies the audience by barraging them with more problems that have yet to be addressed or fixed. By putting being woke and imagining together, it is saying that awareness is crucial to seeing our hopes, our imaginations, our dreams of a better society, become a reality. How can they become a reality? In the fifth paragraph, it uses logos by saying to “Be woke and loosen the yoke of lies, corruption and conceit, that continues to strangle our nation.” The logic here is made by connecting awareness to having the power to loosen the lies, the corruption and conceit that strangles this nation. How can one be “woke?” This can come in many forms from voting for politicians who do not answer to lobbyists and want to change the unjust laws of this country, to participating in marches and protests that will get the message across to those in power: we are not accepting the social injustice in this country.

A constraint of the “Woke to Social Justice” exhibit is that the scope it can reach is very limited. Since the text is a physical copy, it would only be accessible by College of Charleston students who go to the library. By using “woke,” which is a slang known to millennials/ younger generations, the text may not hit home with older generations who do not know what the term means. Although the text also calls for activism in those that read it, it is a futile attempt if the corrupted politicians in power do not pay attention to the unjust laws that are being protested. There are also constraints found in the audience itself. If those who read it do not believe to

begin with that there is injustice in this country, they will not be inspired to act and change the exigence.

Overall, the “Woke to Social Justice” exhibit is a proper response to the exigence of social injustice in this country. It does not promote violence. Through pathos and logos, it invites the audience (which is predominantly white at the College of Charleston) to put themselves in the shoes of those who have experienced or have been victims of racism in America. Through repetition, the text gets a rhythm that does not make it so arduous to read. In addition, it directly appeals to its intended audience by using the slang “woke” because millennials know what the term means. In doing so, it prescribes a fitting response from the audience.

To add to that, the Sustainable Literacy Institution’s timing of the exhibit cannot be purely coincidental- congressional elections will take place in November. However, the message for college students who still have many years left to live in this country is clear: do not accept these injustices and do something about it so that history does not repeat itself. “Doing something about it” is something as simple as researching congressional candidates and finding those who want to progress our society and voting for them. The piece also does not name politicians or take sides on the political spectrum; doing so will weaken the argument for half of those who read it. Instead, it uses the pronoun “our” because truly, everyone is affected by those who “continue to strangle our nation.” Everyone plays a role in how the future of this nation turns out. Everyone is capable of and has the power to change the course of this country’s future, a future free from social injustices. Change begins with being woke.

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Dear Reader,

The purpose of my essay is to bring awareness to an issue that should not be present in America. The Sustainable Literacy Institute's exhibit in the library appealed to me because I have seen racism and ignorance first-hand growing up in South Carolina. I believe it is doing great work with showing College of Charleston students how to create a sustainable future.

I believe the strengths of my essay are the introduction and conclusion. I think I did a creative way of leading up to the technical parts of the rhetorical situation through talking about Abraham Lincoln's and Martin Luther King Jr.'s rhetorical works, in addition to relating those to lead up to the Sustainable Literacy Institute's rhetorical work. I also believe the conclusion is strong because I was able to integrate my artifact's "punch line" in the final sentence. By urging the readers to take action so as not to repeat history at the end of my essay, I have succeeded in tying the conclusion back to the introduction. However, I feel that I wrote more about the rhetorical situation and explaining the exigence too thoroughly, and that in turn makes the reader think "When is the rhetorical analysis coming?"

As I finished the essay, I noticed this problem. I addressed it by expanding more on the rhetorical analysis, and instead of merely summarizing what rhetorical appeals were used, I attempted to expand more and elaborate on the effects of these rhetorical appeals. If I had two more days to work on the essay, I would work on condensing the exigencies I talked about in the essay. However, I feel that some details should be kept in order for the stories to be complete, so the reader can participate and contemplate on these issues as well. Thus, the reader will be able to make his/ her own informed thoughts and opinions on these incidents without the issue of omitted information.