***Ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*: Finding Argumentative Structure and**

**Persuasive Appeals within King’s “Letter From Birmingham Jail”**

**A Case Study**

OBJECTIVES:

-The student will read, comprehend, and analyze the argumentative and persuasive strategies used in “Letter from Birmingham Jail”, by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

-The student will use context clues to analyze language included in “Letter”, analyzing vocabulary, figurative language, and literary devices.

PART I: COLOR CODED ANALYSIS OF RHETORICAL APPEALS – As you read “Letter from Birmingham Jail”, color code various statements within the text using the following key. You may use either colored pencils, highlighters, or pens to mark/underline statements. Read and complete as follows:

* YELLOW: identifies the opposition’s argument (What the white clergymen have said about King, according to his letter.
* BLUE: identifies King’s use of ETHOS, or any statement that would possibly qualify him as trustworthy/ethical
* RED/PINK: identifies King’s use of PATHOS, or any statement that would encourage an emotional reaction from his audience.
* GREEN: identifies Kings use of LOGOS, or any statement that would allow someone to view his argument as logically correct

As you work through this assignment, remember that you are viewing it as an *audience member* – his audience is in the 1960’s Southern US - not the present day, in your situation.

PART II: BREAKING DOWN RHETORICAL APPEALS – Using your color coded story, fill in the following chart. First, record a quote from “Letter” according to the rhetorical category (ethos, pathos, logos) in which it fits. Then, briefly discuss what King wants his audience to do/think/feel/act when he makes that claim. Last, explain why the quote qualifies as ethos, pathos, or logos.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TYPE OF RHETORIC | Direct Quote from “Letter From A Birmingham Jail” | What does King want his audience to do/think/feel/act? | Why does this quote qualify as ethos/pathos/logos? |
| ETHOS |  |  |  |
| ETHOS |  |  |  |
| PATHOS |  |  |  |
| PATHOS |  |  |  |
| LOGOS |  |  |  |
| LOGOS |  |  |  |

PART III: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – Answer the following questions to the best of your ability

1. We know that King’s direct audience was the nine white Birmingham clergymen that printed the ad, attacking him. However, the article was published in nationwide magazines and newspapers.
   1. Considering the Civil Rights era, what audience do you believe responded positively to King’s letter? Explain your answer.
   2. Which audience do you believe responded in a negative way? Explain your answer.
2. List three criticisms the Birmingham clergymen make about King and his character, and how King responds to those criticisms.
3. Take out your phone (yeah, I said it!) and do a little research about *civil disobedience*.
   1. What is civil disobedience?
   2. Why did King wish to engage his community in this way? Wouldn’t it be simpler to just follow the law/rules?
4. King uses several examples, past and present, to demonstrate the suffering of the African-American community.
   1. Name three examples that King cites regarding this.
   2. Why do you believe King brings these examples forth for his audience?
5. The clergymen claimed that King was an “extremist”, something King clearly finds offensive and not true. Why do you think King opposes this?
6. Explain the meaning of this statement: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Part IV: MULTIPLE CHOICE – Answer the following questions by selecting the correct answer choice.

Before you begin…number the paragraphs within the letter.

1. Several times throughout the essay, Dr. King makes references to biblical verse. This type of reference is known as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
   1. Illusion b. Alliteration c. Allusion d. Oxymoron
2. Read the following sentence: ‘*You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham.’* Based on its use in the sentence, the word *deplore* most likely means \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
   1. Respect b. Hate c. Envy d. Desire
3. What is the author’s purpose of including Paragraphs 1 and 2?
   1. To describe the struggle of the African – American throughout history.
   2. To explain Dr. King’s recent actions in Birmingham
   3. To persuade the policemen to let him out of jail
   4. To entertain with a biblical story
4. Read paragraph 5 that begins with “In any non-violent campaign…” Which of the following describes the overall organizational pattern of this paragraph?
   1. Compare and contrast
   2. Problem and solution
   3. Description and List
   4. Chronological Order
5. “Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation…” (746) is an example of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
   1. Simile b. Metaphor

c. Personification d. Oxymoron

1. What is the main idea of the paragraph beginning with: “Now, what is the difference between the two?
   1. What segregation does to the soul
   2. The characteristics of a just law
   3. A law can be just in theory and unjust in application
   4. A comparison and contrast of a just law with an unjust law
2. Which of the following is the best example of loaded language?
   1. Men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair.
   2. Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience.
   3. An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in natural law.
   4. This is certainly a legitimate concern.
3. How, according to Dr. King, has he expressed the “highest respect” for law?
   1. He has broken an unjust law and will not receive punishment.
   2. He has broken no law whatsoever.
   3. He has broken an unjust law and will accept the penalty for doing so.
   4. He will only respect those laws he feels are just.
4. How does the organizational pattern of the paragraph beginning with “We should never forget…” illustrate the author’s purpose for including this paragraph?
   1. It uses comparison and contrast to show the differences between Dr. King’s religion and that of the Jewish people.
   2. It uses problem and solution to show that Dr. King wants to find a way for all to live peacefully.
   3. It uses description and list to illustrate the evils of Hitler’s Germany.
   4. It uses comparison and contrast to show that even though an action may be legal, it does not make it right.
5. Re-read the very last paragraph. Why has King included so many references to historical and religious figures?
   1. He is utilizing the persuasive technique of appeal to authority by showing how much he has in common with figures the audience for this letter would have respected.
   2. He is giving a list of respected figures who would most likely have agreed with King’s actions.
   3. He is showing that “extremist” does not have the negative connotation the audience would have hoped for, and in fact, can be a compliment.
   4. All of the above.