Class: WRTG 120

Time: Towards the beginning of the Rhetorical Superhero unit

Introduction:

Presented here is a lesson plan that incorporates widely shared historical knowledge and common notions about evil into a lecture and discussion about the way rhetoric transforms sociopolitical landscapes. Students are shown excerpts from the Nazi propaganda film The Triumph of the Will, specifically speeches given by Adolf Hitler. With a historical understanding of the events of World War II, students are then tasked with analyzing surprisingly inspirational Nazi rhetoric and exploring through detailed discussion the ways in which uplifting, nationalistic rhetoric translates into atrocities.

Context:

As we talked about rhetorical concepts and examples, I became concerned that the students understood the terms, but had trouble tying them to reality. Any student I called upon could tell me what ethos, pathos, or logos was, and even relate it to exactly what we were discussing in class. When approaching this from the other direction however, they had difficulty relating to the concepts without explicit guidance, and coming up with their own examples. In order to illustrate the historical significance and gravity of rhetoric, I decided to incorporate one of the most significant events in history: World War II. This was a conflict they all had at least a passing familiarity and understanding of, and it was also a fantastic way to challenge their conceptions of the way rhetoric works.

Fast Write

Robert Oppenheimer: “Now I am become death” rhetorical/ historical analysis

· Why is this specific language used?

· Does Oppenheimer’s famous recitation accurately convey the gravity of his situation?

\*\*This fast write allows students to practice analyzing unfamiliar rhetoric, and helps to orient them in the time period and feel of the coming class.

The Triumph of the Will/ Discussion

Screening of key parts of the Nazi propaganda film, The Triumph of the Will. Specific focus and discussion on the nature of Adolf Hitler’s rhetoric

· Is fascist rhetoric inherently hateful?

· What do we do with the upbeat nationalistic speech from what is supposed to be one of the most “evil” men in history?

· How is this period talked about, and how does that differ from actual footage?

Writing activity:

How do your own opinions on Adolf Hitler’s speeches differ from your preconceived notions of what you expect Nazi fascist rhetoric to sound like? What rhetorical concepts are used, and are they effective? Can you identify these concepts in contemporary political rhetoric?

References:

Guth, Hans P. “The Politics of Rhetoric.” *College Composition and Communication*, 23.1

(1972): 30-43. Print.

Lunsford, Andrea A. Composing Ourselves: Politics, Commitment, and the Teaching of Writing.

*College Composition and Communication,* 41.1 (1990): 71-82. Print.

Vitanza, Victor J. Critical Sub/Versions of the History of Philosophical Rhetoric. Rh*etoric*

*Review*, 6.1 (1987): 41-66. Print.

Course Outcomes:

Rhetorical Knowledge: Students gain practice in identifying conventions of rhetoric through a historical lens, before venturing into contemporary examples. This example is already well-discussed, so they can compare their own analysis of historical fascist rhetoric to the way it’s talked about in the world at large.

\*\*Concepts are returned to during the visual rhetoric unit, allowing students to reexamine these concepts in a different form, with the experience of a project 2 under their belt.