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Analyzing Rhetorical Concepts in Speeches

Introduction

Since most of my students were unfamiliar with rhetoric and the rhetorical concepts ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos, I wanted to make sure I designed in-class activities and assignments that helped them learn these concepts. One assignment that went over very well was when I showed two different speeches to illustrate how rhetorical concepts can be used effectively and ineffectively. Analyzing the presence and effectiveness of these concepts in speeches is a good starting point for students, and this activity allowed them to learn from each other, as they shared their analysis points with the class. After this activity, students will then be able to take what they learned about speech analysis and transfer these skills to rhetorical analysis of written texts.

Context/Timing

I implemented this assignment at the beginning of Unit 2: Rhetorical Superheroes. It was important that I engaged my students in practicing analysis techniques right away, so that they could see how the rhetorical concepts could be applied to texts and visuals in their everyday lives. In addition, the Rhetorical Superheroes assignment asked students to chose a TED Talk and analyze how the speaker demonstrated rhetorical superhero abilities by using rhetorical concepts well. Thus, this in-class activity directly related to what students were expected to identify and then write about for Paper 2.

To introduce my students to rhetoric and the rhetorical appeals, for homework I had them read Issue 1 in *Understanding Rhetoric* and fill out a reading response worksheet to get them thinking more in-depth about the information. After students talked about their worksheet answers with their peers, I had various other sources to help them understand these topics. For example, I had students watch a four-minute TED video titled "How to Use Rhetoric to Get What You Want." This gave them another medium from which they were learning about rhetoric. Next, I emphasized important aspects about ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos from *Understanding Rhetoric*. I also gave some questions they should ask themselves when trying to identify these rhetorical concepts.

Explanation

For this activity, I had students divide their paper into four sections: ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos. I then showed them a Frank Warren TED Talk, "Half a Million Secrets," and told them the rhetor used the rhetorical appeals effectively. I then asked them to write down notes in each section about how he used that rhetorical concept well. After this TED Talk, I asked students to share and explain examples they came up with. They did a good job with picking relevant examples; however; they did not seem as enthusiastic about the video as I was hoping they would be. Then, I showed them a short clip titled "How to Give a Wedding Speech" from the show *The Office*. I told them that Michael Scott did not use the rhetorical concepts well, and I asked them to identify specific examples. The conversation that followed this clip went a lot better, as they thought the clip was funny, and it made them more interested in discussing the rhetorical concepts. I think showing how the concepts were not used well helped students understand them better. Without me asking them to do this, students began giving examples of how Michael Scott could have made better rhetorical choices. It was also interesting to hear how students added to the discussion after they heard comments from their peers.

As a way to wrap up this activity, I had students write a quick write that asked them to reflect on the definition of rhetoric and why it is important to understand and examine rhetorical concepts. In the future, I think I would instead ask them to reflect on the specific activity and ask how it helped them further understand the concepts. In addition, I would want to know what they are still confused about.

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Scholarly Sources
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