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10/20/14
MLK Rhetorical Analysis Outline
AP Lang Period A2
Mr. Coia
750 Words

Supporting Morality or Opposing Immorality

I. Introduction

a. Global/Broad Statement

- i. Fighting for what one believes in is often a perilous journey that involves the obstacles of judgment from the eyes of the judgmental.
- ii. But what truly defines a person is the way they handle the daggers of unacceptance.

b. MLK Tie-In

- i. Standing up for a cause that involves extinguishing immorality cannot be an act of extremism; it is an act of determined strong-will.
- ii. Yet, despite this simple concept, Martin Luther King Jr.'s movement for social equality was branded with the term "extreme".
- iii. Fueled by the desire to make change, King responds to these claims swiftly and skillfully in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail", using elements that convey his point crystal clear.

c. Thesis Statement

- i. Through his use of syntax and figurative language, King successfully presents a counter-argument that is both effective and clever.

II. Body Paragraphs

a. Syntax

i. Antithesis

1. A strong element in MLK's letter
2. "I have tried to stand between these two forces, saying that we need emulate neither the "do-nothingness" of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalist."(Par.28).
3. "Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained."(Par.30).
4. Effective because it presents both the negative side of the argument, as well as the positive side.
5. It highlights how much MLK's argument makes sense.

ii. Anaphora

1. "So let him march; let him make latent prayer pilgrimages to city hall; let him go on freedom rides- and try to understand why he must do so."(Par.30)

2. “Was not Jesus an extremist for love...so help me God.”(Par.31”
3. Puts on emphasis on the message he is presenting
4. By saying “let him, let him”, he puts the different things that the activists are doing tied together, showing the similarities between them.
5. He is also emphasizing the fact that they should be able to do what they need to because of their years of bitterness. It’s like a pounding of a fist of a preacher
6. MLK’s repetition of “Was not....” gives the letter an intensity as he goes on and on about people that fought a similar cause and were successful

b. *Figurative Language*

i. Allusion

1. A reoccurring element within all of MLK’s work
2. “Was not Jesus...?”, “Was not Paul...?”, “Was not Martin Luther...?”(Par. 31).
3. “In that dramatic scene on Calvary’s Hill, three men were crucified...thereby rose above his environment.”(Par.31).
4. The use of allusion strengthens his ethos, which consequently strengthens his argument.
5. It makes the audience give King a sense of respect because he is educated and educated well.
6. It also puts the current situation into relatable scenarios that help the audience take a step back and look at a bigger picture.
7. Because this is geared toward the clergymen, King shows them that he is on their level and that, in a sense, they are the same.

ii. Rhetorical Questions

1. “Was not Jesus...?”, “Was not Paul...?”, “Was not Martin Luther...?”(Par. 31).
2. “Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or the extension of justice?”(Par.31).
3. Emphasizes King’s point
4. Has an obvious answer, but at the same time forces the audience to dig deeper and find their own answer
5. The questions that King asks forces the reader to be on his side because, quite obviously, we wouldn’t want to choose hate over love and the audience, the clergymen specifically, *know* that Jesus Christ was an extremist for love.
6. It gives you no other choice but to be in agreement.

III. Conclusion

- a. Restatement of Thesis
 - i. Language is the way we communicate and, if used effectively, reach our desired goal.
 - ii. Martin Luther King does just this in his letter through his use of syntactical elements and figurative language that leaves you speechless by the end.
- b. Global Connection
 - i. Protecting your morals and standing your ground, despite constant disapproval, is an ability not many people possess.
 - ii. However, those who do have it and use it well are activists for justice and peace.
 - iii. No matter what the cause, there will always be resistance to anything that has the potential to make change.
 - iv. It is what you do about that resistance that makes you who you are and what changes the future.

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Sarah Birch

10/22/16

“Letter to Birmingham Jail” Rhetorical Analysis

AP Language Period A2

Mr.Coia

719 words

Zealous Peace

To call attention to a problem and make a difference, one must use the outlandish methods of an extremist. **The measures taken must be radical, profound, zealous, revolutionary.** [Asyndeton]. Martin Luther King Jr. attempted to change the way African Americans were treated through peaceful movements in Birmingham, Alabama. In turn, King was called “extreme” by the residing clergymen. King wrote the clergymen a letter in response from Birmingham jail to address the claims made. This piece is known as “The Letter from Birmingham Jail,” and is highly effective in its rhetorical strategies. Martin Luther King Jr. utilizes syntax and the appeals to respond to the accusation of being an “extremist.”

The syntactical elements used by King strengthen his argument by acting as an eye-opener to the clergymen. To convince the clergymen that he was not the type of extremist they had depicted him as, King asked a series of rhetorical questions that confronted the clergymen and forced them to reconsider their initial thoughts of him. “Was not Jesus an extremist in love? Was not Amos an extremist for Justice? Was not Paul an extremist for the gospel of Jesus Christ?” these questions reinvented the meaning of an extremist in the minds of the clergymen. An extremist now symbolized a remarkable person, notable of appreciation and respect. “Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice, or will we be extremists for the cause of justice,” this questions the clergymen’s morals as they must choose whether or not they will act out against the social norm for the right cause. If they are moral men, they will do so. The clergymen are now either extremists for justice or extremists for injustice. They are all extremists now, King has chosen a side, and now they must choose as well.

Extremism isn’t always a negative thing, in fact, it is a remarkable thing in King’s case. King establishes his ethos on multiple occasions to persuade the clergymen that he is not the violence-advocating extremist that they had categorized him as. King compares himself to some of the most admirable and well-known men through allusions such as Jesus Christ, Abraham Lincoln, and the Apostle Paul. This establishes that he is similar, in both qualities and goals, to those he alluded to. **If such men were extremists, then how could it be a negative thing?** [Rhetorical question]. King addresses the men as “fellow clergymen,” which shows that he is a man of the church as well, giving them their faith and morals as common ground. This argument becomes more believable and convincing because it is coming from a similar party. “I have tried to stand between these two forces, saying that we need not follow the do-nothingism of the hatred and despair of the Black Nationalist,” this makes King a mediator of the issue,

demonstrating that he is neither the “do-nothingism” extreme nor the “hatred and violence” extreme. He becomes the ideal example of an extremist. These ethical appeals boost King’s credibility and make his argument more convincing because other great men have been labeled as extremists and he is similar to them.

Logical appeals were used to demonstrate that King is not the malicious extremist they are portraying him to be. King specifically mentions the “Elijah Muhammad Muslim movement,” and how they demonstrate to show the clergymen that his demonstrations are by far more peaceful than other group’s movements. This logical sequence leaves the clergymen with the impression that there are worse things that could happen than King and his movement. The allusions and quotations show the following syllogistic sequence: **The following men are good men, they have good intentions, we are similar; therefore I am a good man with good intentions.** [Syllogism]. This appeal is used to make the clergymen see King as a moral man with golden intentions in a logical and reasonable way.

Martin Luther King Jr.’s argument was powerful. **His syntactical structure was exemplary. His appeals to ethos and logos were convincing and effective.** [Anaphora]. Each device contributed to the whole argument **like puzzle pieces forming together to make the greater picture.** [Simile]. King’s argument proved that the clergymen’s definition is one-sided and doesn’t take into account the possibility of the positive outcomes of extremism. **Extremism gets attention. Extremism sells. Extremism isn’t always a negative thing.** [Anaphora].

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Kim Grader
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MLK Essay
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Mr. Coia
581 words

Defending Extremism

Throughout history, people in power have maintained and nurtured the status quo, but there is always one person that sees flaws within the power structure and demands change. People of power will do anything to sway others from supporting the new ideas. A common tactic used by the powerful is to attack the revolutionary's ideas by calling them extremists' views. The same is true in the case of Martin Luther King. King received much criticism for his nonviolent protest. For example, in an article published by eight clergymen, the religious leaders condemned King's demonstrations as "extreme measures" and "unwise". King wrote "Letter from Birmingham Jail" as a response to the clergymen's criticism. In this letter, King uses figurative language and syntactical structure to defend himself against claims of being an extremist.

In King's defense of not being an extremist he uses two types of figurative language; metaphors and analogies. The first metaphor is used when he says "... I stand in the middle of two opposing forces" and points out the real extremists of the racial issues as the black nationalist who uses violence and the wealthy blacks who will do nothing because they benefit from the status quo. By showing the real extremes he presents himself as mediator. King further defends himself by discussing how his demonstrations are decreasing the amount of violence in the city. He says "If this philosophy had not emerged, I am convinced that ... streets of the South would be flowing with floods of blood." This metaphor continues to present King as the middle group and proves that his ideas work.

Another area of the "Letter" where King uses figurative language is when he says that he "gains satisfaction" from being called an extremist. In this paragraph he uses an analogy to compare himself to people who are praised for the way they change their respective societies. In paragraph he compares himself to people like **Jesus, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson [asyndeton]**. With this comparison he

is saying that these men were originally seen as extremist, but are now looked upon as heroes. By doing this he is calling his actions heroic.

Another key part to Martin Luther King's "Letter" is his use of syntax. Within the structure of King's letter he uses a lot of rhetorical questions. He asks "Was not Jesus an extremist in love... Was not Amos an extremist for justice... Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist?" This series of rhetorical questions adds to the power of his analogy. **As King lists person after person and how each one was considered an extremist, the reader is forced to think about what really makes someone an extremist [periodic sentence].**

King also used rhetorical questions to make the reader question their own values. He asks "what kind of extremist will we be? Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love?" With these questions he is completely disregarding whether or not he is an extremist, and asks what kind of extremist is he. **Will he be an extremist for oppression or will he be an extremist for freedom? Will he be an extremist for the status quo or will he be an extremist for change [antithesis].**

Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is an incredibly powerful letter. It gains power from the excellent use of rhetorical devices. **King's use of metaphors, his use of analogies, and his rhetorical questions all work together to defend himself against claims of being an extremist [anaphora].**