

A ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE: AN INTRODUCTION TO RHETORIC

TABITHA GINTHER, NORTHSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Unit Overview

This unit uses the enticing scenario of a zombie apocalypse to teach students rhetoric and rhetorical appeal. Students practice identifying persuasive techniques in multiple forms of writing and speech – famous film speeches, advertisements, TEDTalks, and a letter written by LeBron James – and collaborate in small groups to discuss effective rhetorical strategies. Students conclude the unit by writing their own rhetorical letters with the goal of convincing a selection committee to choose a selected character to survive a zombie apocalypse.

Standards Addressed

1. **ELA.9-10.RI.1:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. **ELA.9-10.RI.2:** Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
3. **ELA.9-10.RI.6:** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.
4. **ELA.9-10.W.1:** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
5. **ELA.9-10.W.4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
6. **ELA.9-10.W.5:** Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
7. **ELA.9-10.SL.1:** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
8. **ELA.9-10.SL.3:** Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

9. **ELA.9-10.L.2:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
10. **ELA.9-10.L.3:** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Essential Question

How does an author use rhetoric to accomplish his or her purpose?

Day One – Introduction and Gallery Walk

Standards Addressed: 3, 7, 8, 10

1. Begin class by watching *one* or *two* speeches from popular films. As a class, discuss the audience and purpose of each speech.
2. Then, introduce the SOAPSTone technique for analyzing reading and writing using the **SOAPSTone PowerPoint**. Have each student SOAPSTone one of the speeches using the **SOAPSTone Graphic Organizer**.
3. In small groups, students discuss how effectively each speech achieved its purpose. Emphasize the importance of the speakers' decisions in their attempt to achieve their purpose for their particular audience.
4. Next, provide students with multiple hypothetical situations. For each situation, students discuss the best approach to achieve the speaker's purpose. For example, ask students how they would convince their parents that grounding is not an effective punishment for teens. Continue to use the **SOAPSTone PowerPoint** as a guide. Once students discuss multiple scenarios, compare the different approaches for each scenario as a class.
5. Explain that all of these scenarios are rhetorical and each approach is an example of rhetoric. Ask students to discuss the possible definition of rhetoric. Guide students to understand that rhetoric is the art and science of persuasion.
6. Have students brainstorm a list of rhetorical techniques they recognized in the speeches and scenarios. These techniques include personal stories, allusions, facts and statistics, and more.
7. Then, divide students into eight groups. At each table, place one of the prompts from the **Gallery Walk Activity Guide**. Each group analyzes the prompt using the **Rhetorical**

A TIP FROM THE TEACHER

When using PowerPoint, create intentional mistakes in your presentation for students to identify. Choose mistakes that are common in your students' own writing to reinforce writing and grammatical concepts.

Appeals and Techniques Graphic Organizer. Signal groups to rotate to the next table every seven minutes. The list of Techniques is not exhaustive; teachers are encouraged to edit according to their students' needs.

8. Once students rotate through all seven tables, discuss each prompt as a class. Check for understanding of rhetoric and different rhetorical techniques.

Day Two – TEDTalks and Lebron James

Standards Addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10

1. Using the components of SOAPStone, students watch multiple TEDTalks to practice analyzing and identifying rhetorical techniques and choices. Possible TEDTalks include *[“The Hidden Power of Smiling”](#)* by Ron Gutman, *[“Everyday Leadership”](#)* by Drew Dudley, and *[“How School Kills Creativity”](#)* by Sir Ken Robinson. Students complete the **TEDTalk Rhetorical Analysis Activity Sheet** for each video.
2. Next, students act as “partner professors” and teach their findings to a partner. Have each pair discuss their findings with the class.
3. Then, introduce the next activity using the **Lebron James PowerPoint**. Students read and annotate **Lebron James’ Letter**, identifying his rhetorical techniques in each paragraph of the letter.
4. After reading and analyzing the **Lebron James’ Letter**, students write three paragraphs in which they discuss James’ most effective rhetorical choices. Each paragraph should focus on one major rhetorical choice that students defend with ample textual evidence.
5. Conclude with a class discussion of the letter and the rhetorical techniques identified.

Days Three to Four – Zombie Apocalypse

Standards Addressed: 4, 5, 6, 9, 10

1. Begin class reading the **Zombie Apocalypse Opening** aloud. Tell students there is a zombie apocalypse and they must write a letter to a selection committee to convince them to choose their character to survive.
2. Use the **Zombie Apocalypse PowerPoint** to review the rules of the activity. Each student is given one of the **Character Slips** with specific traits of a new, and secret, character from whose perspective they must write. Students must use at least two rhetorical appeals and four persuasive techniques in their letter.

3. Give each student a copy of the **Zombie Apocalypse Instructions** and allow them to brainstorm rhetorical techniques for their letter. Use this time to review rhetoric and specifically discuss the rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos.
4. Allow students time to work on their letters. Once students complete their final draft, students type their letter in Microsoft Word and use the comment function to identify and label their rhetorical appeals and persuasive techniques.

Day Five – Selection Day!

Standards Addressed: 3, 7, 8, 10

1. Each student then submits their letter with only their character's name. Divide the class into small groups and give each group three or four letters – make sure students do not receive their own letters. Each group reads all of their letters and selects one or two semi-finalists, noting why these letters were the strongest. Tell students to choose the best letters based on the strength of the rhetorical appeals and persuasive techniques in the letter, not the character's traits.
2. Collect the semi-finalists from each group and read these letters aloud as a class. While each letter is read, students take notes about the strengths or weaknesses of each letter. Then, using the **Zombie Apocalypse Ballot**, students vote for the winners.
3. Choose the top three or four letters as the final winners. Announce the final winners during the next class, revealing the true identity of the students who wrote the winning letters.
4. Conclude with a discussion of the strengths of each letter and why their rhetorical techniques were most effective.