

Dr. Pegoda – Analyzing Primary Sources/(Some!) Questions for Rhetorical Analysis

Overall, consider the relationships between the author, the audience, and the message/primary source (i.e., the text); how all of this is done; and what all of this means. Analyze, and dig deep.

Who is the author of the text?

- Who is the author? Does it matter? What was their place in society? Are they credible?

What is the message in the text?

- Is this a work of fiction, nonfiction, or something in-between?
- What is the rhetorical situation?: What occasion gives rise to the need or opportunity for persuasion? When, where, and why was this text originally produced? How does it speak to hopes and fears in a given time and place? How does the text serve different purposes according to time and place? What perspectives does it include/exclude?
- What does the text want people to know, to think, or to do? Is the text attacking, defending, informing, praising, blaming, entertaining, teaching, etc.? How does it go about doing this?
- What is the agenda of this text? What are the related implications?
- What is the main argument of this text? Is it original? What are the supporting arguments?
- What assumptions are made?

Who is the audience for the text?

- Who is the intended or original audience? Who is the actual audience? What values do they hold? How do they react?
- How would other audiences react? How do you react? How might some take offense? How might it be inappropriate for some? (Consider women, men, non-binary folk; children, adults; people racialized as White, Asian; and so on.)
- Does the audience believe the text? Do they change their behavior?

How does the text communicate?

- What is the structure or staging of the text? How is information arranged?
- In what medium or genre does this text exist? What role does this medium play in analyzing the text? How would a change of setting or medium change the message?
- What is the writing style? What techniques of communication are used and how?
- What kind of evidence is used?
- Does the text emphasize fonts, images, and/or sounds? Is the layout and delivery effective?
- Does the text appeal to the logos, ethos, and/or pathos?
- How is the text framed? Where is the text presently located?

What is the even broader context of the text?

- Why is this text important? Is it still important?
- Is it even ethical to analyze this source? (For example, if it were a diary entry from the 15th Century.)
- What else was happening when this text was produced?
- What is the intertextuality?: How does this text relate to other texts? What other text surround this text?

What if we destabilize the text?

- What happens if we do a queered or feminist or crip or environmentalist or critical race theory reading, for example, *of this text*?