

Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Modes of Persuasion

Overview

Key components of any political speech, advertisement, debate performance or other type of persuasive communication are logic (logos), emotion (pathos) and authority/connection to the audience (ethos). These are the Three Modes of Persuasion first codified by the Aristotle and are as relevant today as they were more than two-thousand years ago.

An understanding of all three Modes of Persuasion (including how logos, pathos and ethos work together to make persuasive communication more effective) can help us become more successful communicators as well as help us understand how political rhetoric and other types of arguments try to persuade (and sometimes manipulate) us.

Terminology

Important vocabulary terms used in this lesson include:

- Modes of Persuasion
- Logos (argument by logic)
- Pathos (argument by emotion)
- Ethos (argument by authority)

Goals

The goal if this lesson is to give students an understanding how an argument (or any type of persuasive speech or presentation) can include:

- An appeal to logic (logos)
- An appeal to emotion (pathos)
- An appeal to authority/shared values (ethos)

Students will be introduced to each of these three elements individually. In addition, they will understand how the correct balancing of logos, pathos and ethos can lead to successful persuasive communication.

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Primary Resources

The following resources are available at the www.criticalvoter.com web site to support this lesson:

- **Critical Voter:** Chapter 3 (Modes of Persuasion)
- **Check for Understanding** – A short quiz designed to determine if someone has understood material in the reading.
- **Blog Entries** – To find additional examples and information on the Critical Voter blog (if available), select “Logos, Pathos and Ethos” in the blog’s **Category** list.

Additional Resources

[Aristotle in 90 Minutes](#) – An easy access ramp to many of Aristotle’s works.

[The Dream of Reason: The History of Philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance](#) – The first part of an ambitious two-volume project that will eventually cover all of Western philosophy, with volume one covering ancient thinkers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

[The History of Philosophy \(Without Any Gaps\)](#) – Peter Adamson’s multi-year podcasting project will eventually cover all philosophy (as of now, he’s already gotten through the Greeks – including several great podcasts on Aristotle).

Suggested Activities

Activity	Notes on this activity
Have students read the assigned book chapter and answer the Check for Understanding questions to ensure they have understood the concepts covered in this lesson.	The Check for Understanding quiz is made up of questions which were designed to be easily answerable by anyone who has read the book chapter in its entirety.
Discuss (and look for examples of) arguments based purely on logic (logos). Work together to “boil down” the logical argument to a simple set of logical statements (such as premises leading to a conclusion, or an IF...THEN statement).	Examples could include: • Short political statements (such as answers to questions during a press conference) • Empirical arguments (such as a scientific or mathematical proof) • Logical appeals from teachers or parents that students behave in a certain way (taken either from real life or fiction/television, such as “Wear a jacket or you’ll catch a cold.”)

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Activity	Notes on this activity
Discuss (and look for examples of) arguments based purely on pathos (emotion). Discuss which emotions are being targeted by the examples and whether the appeal is being made to “good” vs. “bad” emotion.	Examples could include: • Newspaper/magazine advertisements or television commercials • Emotionally manipulative political speeches or newspaper editorials • Emotional appeals from teachers or parents to try to convince students behave in a certain way (taken either from real life or fiction/television, such as “There are kids starving in the world who would love to eat the vegetables you’re not touching.”)
Review different types of presentations (classroom lectures, business presentations, political speeches, etc.) and identify the different ways the speaker is trying to create an ethos-based connection with the audience.	Examples could include: • Starting a speech with a story or joke related to an understanding of the specifics of the audience (such as a reference to the performance of a local sports team) • Statements of appreciation to specific named individuals in the audience • The use of industry or other community-specific language that the audience will understand • Declarations of shared values
Provide students with three different colored markers and copies of one or more political speeches (current or historic). Ask them to color code text in the speech based on whether the speaker is making an appeal to logic (logos), emotion (pathos) or is trying to make a connection to the audience (ethos).	After color coding the speech, ask the students to comment on whether the primary persuasive focus of the speech was logical, emotional or ethos-based. Discuss whether or not the presentation had the right balance of the three Modes of Persuasion.