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Rhetoric Unit
Anaphora, Antithesis, and Chiasmus

The Rhetorical Oracle: A Fun Introduction to Rhetoric

Abstract:

In this lesson students meet three key rhetorical schemes – anaphora, antithesis, and chiasmus – in a fun, engaging way. The students share some common concerns related to school (e.g., too much homework, not enough time with friends, bad grades on essays); after a student raises an issue, that student is given a slip of paper with a relevant (and rhetorical!) sentence or two to read aloud. With these rhetorical pronouncements, students hear the patterns of the three schemes in an engaging and personal way. The teacher can then follow up with a more detailed account of the rhetorical patterns.

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.5 Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6 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.

Procedure:

Begin by setting the oracular context in as unusual and inviting a way as you can. In my case, I turn off the lights, invite students to sit on the floor, and turn around wearing a blanket cloaked draped around my head and shoulders – all very intimate and strange. I also introduce myself as “Antiphorasmus the Wise” – a combination of **antithesis**, **anaphora**, and **chiasmus** that I only explain later.

Tell students that you are an oracle and you are here to give them advice. Ask students to take a moment to think of any school-related problems that they or their friends have been working through. In my case, students talked very candidly about many issues they faced – not enough time with friends, too much work, not enough sleep. However, if you feel that asking students to speak personally would invite deep-seated personal problems that would be trivialized by the oracle’s printed response, approach the issue differently: ask students about what most students don’t like about school, for example.

Invite a student to share a concern, and make sure to ask some brief follow-up questions to make sure that you’ve understood the issue. You may also mutter enigmatic phrases like “this is a very difficult one” or “a problem as old as time itself” in order to build anticipation. While you are listening and making obscure oracular comments, work through your storehouse of rhetorical responses (examples given below, in Materials) and find one that fits the issue pretty well. When you are ready, hand the student the slip of paper with the chosen response on it and ask the

student to read it aloud. You may have to ask the student to repeat the pronouncement if necessary.

Certainly, as you work through many student issues, your storehouse of responses will dwindle, and you may have to use question and answer to twist the student's problem a bit to fit the rhetorical response. Have fun with this, because the students will likely catch on to your process here.

When you have finished handing out and getting students to say the oracular responses, end the simulation. Ask students what they noticed about the advice they were given. Some will note certain patterns they heard (especially with anaphora). Call on students to repeat their phrases as you see fit. Note the patterns on the board, with an example or two for each, and introduce the class to each scheme's name. (Consider adding in "epistrophe" as an easy corollary to anaphora.) If there's time, ask the students to come up with an example of each form, with topical cues (e.g., "write about the value of Spring Break") as needed.

Related follow-up: A few days later, consider coming back to the rhetorical advice conceit with a new twist on the material: **Antiphorasmus the Younger**. Put them in groups, and tell them that each group is competing for that title. Then start the competition: with each round, give each group a problem that you are facing (e.g., I'm getting tired of shoveling snow; my car is getting old) and the rhetorical scheme that you would like them to offer advice through. Use as many as the students are comfortable with – consider anaphora, antithesis, chiasmus, and epistrophe, certainly, but also metaphor and parallel structure, too, for example. Students craft a response in groups and then write their answers on the board, one per group. You rate the answers after each round. Think about assigning points after each round to get the competitive juices flowing: I use a system of 3 points (response is both relevant to my problem and rhetorically correct), 2 points (response is either relevant or correct), and 1 point (response is neither relevant nor correct); I also give 1 extra point to the group that gets its response on the board fastest.

Materials:

Below are the oracular responses that I have used in this lesson. Obviously, feel free to substitute responses that fit your students better. You may also, of course, choose different rhetorical schemes to introduce in this lesson.

Anaphora (repetition of words at the beginning of multiple phrases)

You must proofread in the morning. You must proofread in the afternoon. You must proofread at night. You must proofread while awake. You must proofread in your dreams.

The way of the world is difficult. The way of the world is joyous. The way of the world is painful. The way of the world is beautiful. You must love these contradictions.

No one can stop you. No one can tell you what to do. No one can understand your life the way you do.

Antithesis (opposing ideas, parallel structure)

If you want to pass in life, you can't fail in school.

Teachers assign, students opine.

If your head is up in the stars, your feet will be down in the gutter.

Video games leave the heart cold; friend games make the heart warm.

Be like a Reese's peanut butter cup: rough around the edges, smooth at the center.

Plot your course well: One small step for you, one giant leap for your future.

Don't love your classes less, but love your inner life more.

Chiasmus (inverted repetition (A...B, B...A))

Ask not what your learning can do for you, but what you can do for your learning.

Good friends will be often in your company and in your thoughts always. [Here the chiasmus is of grammatical unit as opposed to one using same words: "often" (A) and "always" (A) are adverbs, and "in your company" (B) and "in your thoughts" (B) are prepositional phrases.]

Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.

The purpose of art is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.

In life, the true test is not the speeches one delivers, but whether one delivers on those speeches.