Close Reading

Asking First-Impression Questions

Many of the tools of rhetorical analysis and close reading that we can apply to written texts are also useful for detecting how visual texts convey their messages. These tools work whether the visual texts are advertisements, photos, fine art, or political cartoons. Even conventional written texts have visual components: authors and publishers make decisions about fonts, spacing, and margins, and we make the same decisions when we write. Visual texts serve many different purposes and most have more than one. They can be informational — brochures, pamphlets, and PowerPoint presentations, for example — they can be persuasive — advertisements and political cartoons especially — and they can be inspirational, as with fine art such as photography, painting, or even graffiti. Like written texts, their purpose is very much connected to their audience. Let’s take a look at this advertisement for the Dodge Durango and try to answer some first-impression questions.

- What is being said?
- Who is saying it?
- To whom is it being said?
- Why is it being said?
- How is it being said?

This magazine print advertisement is for the Dodge Durango, a sport utility vehicle (SUV). The ad is saying, “This is a great SUV.” The ad was thought up and designed by both Dodge and the advertising company that created the ad. Dodge, like most car manufacturers, advertises widely in print and on television. It’s likely that it appeared in publications targeted at a particular audience, which we might identify as potential car buyers. The reason for the ad is to convince a certain type of customer to buy a Dodge Durango.
We will talk more about how the ad says what it has to say and how it might achieve its purpose of selling Durangos to a particular target buyer.

**Close Reading Visual Rhetoric**

The rhetorical triangle also applies to visual texts, so we can ask what are the relationships among the text’s subject (a powerful SUV), its audience (the potential SUV buyer), and the speaker (Dodge and the advertising agency it hired to create the ad)? In this case, the speaker — Dodge and the ad agency — are savvy about how to make the Durango appealing to its potential market and we see those elements in the ad: the beach, the cool Airstream, the humorous text, the Dodge logos, and more.

We can examine these relationships more closely by identifying the rhetorical strategies the text uses to appeal to its audience. In other words, how does this advertisement appeal to ethos, logos, and pathos? It banks on associations to Dodge cars and trucks — power, dependability, toughness — and, in this way, establishes its credibility or ethos. Its appeals to pathos play on preconceptions about food: a cheeseburger is real food, so tofu is somehow fake; cheeseburgers are what you want to eat, tofu is what you’re supposed to eat; a big powerful truck is what you really want, a small fuel-efficient car is what you are supposed to have. As for logos, the Durango is affordable; it makes sense to own one. Why not enjoy life, drive an affordable SUV, and eat big, juicy cheeseburgers?

Let’s look a little deeper. When we analyze a visual text, we still look at the words, both in terms of their meaning and in the way they are placed on the page. Look at the text on the top left part of the ad:

**DODGE DURANGO.** This is the most affordable SUV with a V-8. Dodge Durango. With nearly four tons of towing, this baby carries around chunks of those wimpy wanna-bes in its tail pipe.

Note the aggressive tone. How is that aggressiveness created? It may be the repetition of “Dodge Durango” with its hard consonant sounds; it may be the prepositional phrase announcing that the vehicle can tow four tons. It’s a “baby” that carries “chunks” of its competitors in its tailpipe. The use of the colloquialism “baby” contrasts nicely with the image of the car as a predator eating the competition. The owner of a Dodge Durango will be the kind of person whose car is his or her “baby” and who is the leader of the pack, not one “of those wimpy wanna-bes.” The Dodge logo — a ram’s head — and slogan “grab life by the horns” appear at the top right of the ad. Both the image and the words play with the connotations of horns: strength, masculinity, and noise. The imperative sentence is a call to action that can be paraphrased as “Don’t be a wimp! Enjoy life now!” Finally, the text at the bottom of the ad has yet another message. The large white letters on the dark road are boldly designed, but the message is gentle and even funny. “[B]ig fat juicy cheeseburger” acknowledges our natural desire for pleasures that are not always healthy. But who can resist when the alternative is tofu? The antecedent of it’s is, of course, the SUV, but the pronoun suggests an understanding, an insider’s wink.

**Analyzing Visual Rhetorical Strategies**

Visual texts can be examined using the same close reading tools we use to analyze written texts, but images also use distinctly visual style elements to craft rhetoric and appeal to an audience. We study the visual aspects of an image the same way we do words: individually and in terms of composition, or arrangement on the page.
For instance, notice that though the Dodge logo and the text at the top are quite aggressive, the photo is less so. In fact, the photo shows a man and a woman in the car, pulling a vintage Airstream motor home, thus suggesting not only a family atmosphere but also good taste, as Airstreams are collectibles. Perhaps it's a pitch to the rising number of female car buyers, or the use of an SUV as a less stodgy replacement for a minivan. Though the front of the Dodge Durango is outsized (a reminder of the power under the hood), the ocean and sky in the background soften the aggressiveness of the looming SUV; it looks like a beautiful day for a cool couple with great taste to be out for a ride.

Looking at the visual elements even more closely, you might note the horizon line. Set as it is, between the sea and sky, it has the calming effect common to horizontal lines. In contrast, note the diagonal lines: the diving lines in the highway, the slant of the rooftops of the car and the Airstream. These diagonals have the effect of suggesting movement. This contrast adds to the advertisement's mixed messages. The color used in the image also has something to say. The calm blue water and sky are reflected in the hood of the Durango, tempering a bit the sense that it's a powerful macho machine. The gold reflected in the other side of the SUV shimmers, lending a magical touch to the couple's outing. Much of the ad is in high focus; it's easy to see the different elements. The exception is the couple inside the Durango. They are difficult to make out, lacking in detail, and even open to interpretation. The suggestion might be that there's not just one type of couple—or buyer—that would love the Dodge Durango.

You'll also notice the ad's use of shape. Neither the Durango nor the Airstream have sharp edges. Powerful as the SUV is, it has a gentle, almost organic profile—again, a design element softens the aggressive qualities of the Dodge logo and the text to the right. Finally, take a look at the way the image's framing—what we see in the oblong box that frames the image and the vantage point of the viewer. The SUV is front and center, almost square in the middle of the shot. The water in the background wings away to the right; the Airstream to the left. The SUV is in the foreground—front and center. Plenty of room is given to the open highway ahead. Could it be telling us that adventures await?

So what is the advertisement's message? Or are there a few different messages? If you were to write an essay analyzing the "language" of the visual text, you might consider a thesis that argues for the ad's multiple messages. Here's one example:

The Dodge Durango ad balances aggressiveness with humor: it appeals to men and women with its reminder that life is too short not to enjoy its guilty pleasures.

**ACTIVITY**

Use the following ad for Coach handbags, or find one on your own that appeals to you or provokes you, and analyze it as we have done with the Dodge Durango ad. Remember to ask yourself the following questions:

- What is being said?
- Who is saying it?
- To whom is it being said?
- Why is it being said?
- How is it being said?
From Analysis to Essay: Writing a Rhetorical Analysis Essay

We're going to look now at steps you can take toward writing a rhetorical analysis essay. Good writing comes from careful reading, so the first steps will always be to read, reread, ask questions, and either annotate or create a graphic organizer for the text you will be working with. The more we examine the rhetorical elements in a text and consider their effects, the deeper our understanding of an essay, a speech, or a visual text becomes. We have to reach that deeper understanding when we write about rhetoric or we will end up merely summarizing rather than analyzing the strategies a writer uses to achieve a particular purpose.

Following is an excerpt from a floor speech by Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, the first she gave to the House of Representatives as a newly elected congresswoman in the spring of 1969. President Richard Nixon had also just been elected, in part because he had promised to end America's involvement in the Vietnam War, though that did not happen. Read Chisholm's words carefully, then read them again. Ask some questions, and either annotate the excerpt or make a graphic organizer. Pay close attention to the diction and syntax choices Chisholm makes and how they might help her achieve her purpose.
from People and Peace, Not Profits and War

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM

Mr. Speaker, on the same day President Nixon announced he had decided the United States will not be safe unless we start to build a defense system against missiles, the Head Start program in the District of Columbia was cut back for the lack of money.

As a teacher, and as a woman, I do not think I will ever understand what kind of values can be involved in spending $9 billion — and more, I am sure — on elaborate, unnecessary, and impractical weapons when several thousand disadvantaged children in the nation's capital get nothing.

When the new administration took office, I was one of the many Americans who hoped it would mean that our country would benefit from the fresh perspectives, the new ideas, the different priorities of a leader who had no part in the mistakes of the past. Mr. Nixon had said things like this: "If our cities are to be livable for the next generation, we can delay no longer in launching new approaches to the problems that beset them and to the tensions that tear them apart." And he said, "When you cut expenditures for education, what you are doing is shortchanging the American future."

But frankly, I have never cared too much what people say. What I am interested in is what they do. We have waited to see what the new administration is going to do. The pattern is now becoming clear. . . .

The new secretary of health, education, and welfare, Robert Finch, came to the Hill to tell the House Education and Labor Committee that he thinks we should spend more on education, particularly in city schools. But, he said, unfortunately we cannot "afford" to, until we have reached some kind of honorable solution to the Vietnam War. I was glad to read that the distinguished Member from Oregon [Mrs. Green] asked Mr. Finch this: "With the crisis we have in education, and the crisis in our cities, can we wait to settle the war? Shouldn't it be the other way around? Unless we can meet the crisis in education, we really can't afford the war."

Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird came to Capitol Hill, too. His mission was to sell the antiballistic missile insanity to the Senate. He was asked what the new administration is doing about the war. To hear him, one would have thought it was 1968, that the former secretary of state was defending the former policies, that nothing had ever happened, a president had never decided not to run because he knew the nation would reject him in despair over this tragic war we have blundered into. Mr. Laird talked to being prepared to spend at least two more years in Vietnam.

Two more years. Two more years of hunger for Americans, of death for our best young men, of children here at home suffering the lifelong handicap of not having a good education when they are young. Two more years of high taxes collected to feed the cancerous growth of a Defense Department budget that now consumes two-thirds of our federal income.

Two more years of too little being done to fight our greatest enemies — poverty, prejudice, and neglect — here in our own country. Two more years of fantastic waste in the Defense Department and of penny pinching on social programs. Our country cannot survive two more years, or four, of these kinds of policies. It must stop this year — now . . .

We Americans have come to feel that it is our mission to make the world free. We believe that we are the good guys everywhere — in Vietnam, in Latin America, wherever we go. We believe that we are the good guys at home, too. When the Kerner Commission told white America what black America had always known, that prejudice and hatred built the nation's slums, maintain them, and profit by them, white America would not believe it. But it is true. Unless we start to fight and defeat the enemies of poverty and
racism in our own country and make our talk of equality and opportunity ring true, we are exposed as hypocrites in the eyes of the world when we talk about making other people free. I am deeply disappointed at the clear evidence that the number-one priority of the new administration is to buy more and more weapons of war, to return to the era of the Cold War, to ignore the war we must fight here — the war that is not optional. There is only one way, I believe, to turn these policies around. The Congress can respond to the mandate that the American people have clearly expressed. They have said, "End this war. Stop the waste. Stop the killing. Do something for your own people first." We must find the money to "launch the new approaches," as Mr. Nixon said. We must force the administration to rethink its distorted, unreal scale of priorities. Our children, our jobless men, our deprived, rejected, and starving fellow citizens must come first.

For this reason, I intend to vote "No" on every money bill that comes to the floor of this House that provides any funds for the Department of Defense — any bill whatsoever — until the time comes when our values and priorities have been turned rightside up again, until the monstrous waste and the shocking profits in the defense budget have been eliminated and our country starts to use its strength, its tremendous resources, for peace and not for profits and war.

It was Calvin Coolidge, I believe, who made the comment that "the business of America is business." We are now spending $80 billion a year on defense. That is two-thirds of every tax dollar. At this time, gentlemen, the business of America is war, and it is time for a change.

Preparing to Write

Before beginning a deeper analysis of the message and rhetoric in Chisholm's speech, you may find it helpful to summarize it in a sentence, just to get the main idea on paper. We might sum up the excerpt from "People and Peace, Not Profits and War" as follows:

Shirley Chisholm's speech urges the U.S. Congress to use the money it is spending on war to fix American cities instead.

This quick paraphrase certainly doesn't cover all the details of the speech or explain why Chisholm's words pack such a rhetorical punch, but it clarifies her purpose and the context of the speech, which is a good starting point.

Let's pause to consider the context, occasion, and purpose of the speech. The speaker, Shirley Chisholm, was an African American woman who began her career as a teacher and who was (at the time) only a couple months into her first term as a Congresswoman representing New York. President Richard Nixon had just been sworn into office, having campaigned on the promise to end America's involvement in the Vietnam War. When Chisholm gave this speech — her first ever on the floor of the House of Representatives — in March of 1969, Nixon had not yet announced plans to withdraw troops from Vietnam, despite how unpopular the war had become with the American public. Chisholm's purpose, as our paraphrase indicates, is to convince her fellow members of Congress to focus on alleviating American poverty instead of continuing to fund the Vietnam War.

ACTIVITY

Carefully reread Shirley Chisholm's speech and create a graphic organizer of your observations. What rhetorical strategies does the Congresswoman employ to convey her message? What is the effect of each of those strategies?
Developing a Thesis Statement

When it comes time to write a rhetorical analysis essay, the first thing to do is craft a thesis statement. Your thesis statement must make an argument about the choices the speaker makes and how they help her achieve her purpose. You may end up changing your thesis statement as you go, but having an idea of your argument will help you stay focused.

Let’s say your teacher has assigned you the following prompt:

"People and Peace, Not Profits and War" was a speech delivered on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on March 26, 1969 by Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm (1924–2005). Read this excerpt from the speech carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies Chisholm uses to present her argument to her fellow members of Congress. Support your analysis with specific references to the text.

Remember, your thesis should reflect your analysis of the text and the ways in which its rhetoric achieves the speaker’s purpose. You should avoid creating a thesis statement that is so broad that it is just a summary of the speech, such as the following:

In her speech "People and Peace, Not Profits and War," Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm attempts to convince her audience of her argument.

Not only does this thesis fail to mention the rhetorical strategies the writer plans to discuss, but it also fails to state the specifics of the argument. A strong thesis identifies both the speaker’s purpose and the specific rhetorical strategies the speaker uses to achieve it. This helps create a good blueprint for the body of the essay, where you will analyze how those rhetorical choices contribute to the effectiveness of the speech.

You will also want to make sure that your thesis is not too narrow or just your personal opinion:

Shirley Chisholm’s passionate speech to Congress appeals to pathos.

Although this thesis identifies a rhetorical strategy — appeals to pathos — it does not address Chisholm’s purpose or the complexity of her argument speech. For example, it doesn’t leave room for the writer to examine the ways in which Chisholm establishes credibility or the evidence that she provides to support her argument in the body of the essay. You could not discuss a thesis like this for long before running out of things to say. And, while this thesis expresses an opinion about the tone of the speech, the writer does not connect that opinion to Chisholm’s purpose. A good thesis should be expressed clearly and should inform the reader of the scope of the argument you intend to make. It is the backbone of your essay, and everything in the essay will connect to it.

Working with the prompt above, let’s consider first how Chisholm establishes credibility by appeals to ethos — and how that supports the strength of her argument. First, Chisholm is committing her speech to the Congressional Record, where it will reside publicly and for posterity. “Mr. Speaker” is the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the head of the body she is addressing. Although she is a junior member of Congress, as a woman and a former teacher she has expertise when it comes to talking about priorities in education and family life. Chisholm mentions several politicians in her speech by name: Richard Nixon, Robert Finch, and Melvin Laird, for example. Her understanding of their
political platforms shows that she acknowledges the complexity of the issue, including the counterarguments. Chisholm, newly elected to her first term in office and an African American woman during an era in which feminists and civil rights activists were still struggling to achieve basic guarantees of equality in the eyes of the law, may have needed to establish more than the usual ethos, but her somewhat stiff and formal introduction pays off. Her audience will now be more willing to hear the logical arguments she presents and feel the full emotional impact of the details she weaves into her speech. Finally, of course, Chisholm publicly commits to her principles by announcing that she will vote “No” on every money bill that provides any funding for the Department of Defense “until the time comes when our values and priorities have been turned rightside up again” (para. 11). This forceful statement shows that she intends to stand by her values through concrete action, but also demonstrates her hope for a future in which her votes will not be statements of protest.

Chisholm’s argument is guided by the connection she makes between defense spending and education: the announcement of a need for “a defense system against the missiles” happens at the same time that “the Head Start program in the District of Columbia [is] cut back for the lack of money.” She restates this pattern of cause and effect — money is being spent on “impractical weapons when several thousand disadvantaged children in the nation’s capital get nothing” (para. 2) — several times during the speech. She even reminds her audience that President Nixon understood and publicly acknowledged this connection: “And he said, ‘When you cut expenditures for education, what you are doing is shortchanging the American future’” (para. 3). The facts and statistics she refers to — “a Defense Department budget that now consumes two-thirds of our federal income” and “$80 billion a year on defense (para. 12)” — provide the evidence Chisholm needs to argue that our priorities must change: there’s only so much money. She also includes Congresswoman Green’s question to Robert Finch, who was Nixon’s Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare: “With the crisis we have in education, and the crisis in our cities, can we wait to settle the war? Shouldn’t it be the other way around?” to further illustrate the poor logic that she argues is guiding policy on defense spending.

Some of Chisholm’s most powerful language is reserved for her descriptions of the negative effects of war, both overseas and at home. She assumes her audience knows that she is talking about Lyndon Johnson’s decision not to run for a second term because “he knew the nation would reject him in despair over this tragic war...,” suggesting that this is common knowledge to all Americans. And yet, Melvin Laird, secretary of defense, is telling the nation to expect at least “two more years in Vietnam” — the very issue that ended the previous president’s political career. Chisholm takes those “two years” and, in the next two paragraphs, extends them by outlining what two years means in terms of suffering at home and abroad: young men dead in battle, children uneducated, high taxes, and continuing “poverty, prejudice, and neglect.” She makes the issue sound like a disease that must be stopped in its tracks, using words like “handicap,” “cancerous,” and “consumes.” These remind the audience of the very human toll of the policy of putting war and profits ahead of people and peace.

Remembering that it is always important to address a work’s complexity, we might develop the following thesis statement in response to the original prompt:
In Shirley Chisholm’s 1969 speech to Congress, the young congresswoman establishes her credibility, makes a clear connection between cause and effect, and focuses on the human costs of government policy to argue for the necessity of making people and peace America’s first priority.

Organizing a Rhetorical Analysis Essay

Once you have an idea for a thesis statement — and, remember, this “working thesis” can change as you plan and write — you can begin to think about the way you will support it. Look back at the text and at your notes. Think about the ideas that inspired your thesis. Your essay might be organized around the elements of Chisholm’s rhetorical strategies, with a paragraph each on how she establishes credibility, the logic of her argument, and its emotional impact, for example. Or you could approach it a different way: you might group your ideas according to the ways Chisholm uses cause and effect to show the consequences of policies she is against, with one paragraph on the causes and one or two paragraphs on the effects.

You’ve probably noticed that the thesis statement we’ve suggested is likely to lead to a five-paragraph essay. Perhaps you’ve been warned to stay away from this organization because it is formulaic or prescriptive. We agree: stay away from the formulaic or prescriptive. However, the five-paragraph essay may or may not fall into that category. There’s no rule that says that every question or topic will fit neatly into an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Yet, if you happen to have three points to make, you’ll end up with five paragraphs that could form a cogent and insightful essay.

Integrating Quotations

Rhetorical analysis, as you know, requires references to the text, and you should think of the language and rhetoric of a text as evidence to support your thesis. The key is to choose quotations carefully and integrate them as seamlessly as possible into your own writing, avoiding big chunks of quoted text. Just remember that your voice should prevail in a rhetorical analysis essay — that is, you must offer thoughtful commentary on what you quote. One way you might check to make sure that you’re providing sufficient analysis of a work is to highlight all your quotations from the text. Here’s an example of a paragraph that quotes from Shirley Chisholm’s speech.

The idea of “American” values and beliefs is another theme that prevails throughout Chisholm’s speech. First, she asks “what kind of values can be involved in spending $9 billion” “weapons when several thousand disadvantaged children in the nation’s capital get nothing” (para. 2). The idea of “American” values returns when Chisholm states, “We Americans have come to feel that it is our mission to make the world free. We believe that we are the good guys everywhere." Chisholm talks of the “prejudice and hatred [that built] the nation’s slums,” pointing out that Americans are “exposed as hypocrites in the eyes of the world when we talk about making other people free.” Finally, Chisholm quotes Calvin Coolidge, saying “‘the business of America is business’. . . . At this time,
gentlemen, the business of America is war, and it is time for a change." With the Vietnam War, the United States is at risk of losing its very identity.

Apart from the topic sentence, the paragraph mostly consists of quotations from the speech. There is little original commentary on the text, and as a result the reader has little insight into the essay writer's thoughts on how Chisholm appeals to her audience, and to what effect. Instead, this paragraph reads more like a list that catalogs the congresswoman's views on American values as expressed in her speech.

Compare that paragraph to the one that follows. While the structure and some of the quotations remain essentially the same, original commentary brings the writer's voice into the paragraph and moves it toward rhetorical analysis by discussing the ways that Chisholm's language choices craft effective rhetoric.

The idea of "American" values and beliefs is another theme that prevails throughout Chisholm's speech. The first mention of higher morals comes when Chisholm questions the administration's policy on financing war machines, asking "what kind of values can be involved in spending $9 billion" on "weapons when several thousand disadvantaged children in the nation's capital get nothing" (para. 2). In Chisholm's eyes, the American government is not upholding the "values" that Chisholm and others hold dear, which is to say education over war and mindless brutality. The idea of "American" values returns when Chisholm states, "we Americans have come to feel that it is our mission to make the world free. We believe that we are the good guys everywhere." The United States is a country built on the fundamental belief of liberty and equality for every one of its constituents, yet Chisholm talks of the "prejudice and hatred [that built] the nation's slums," pointing out that until those problems are solved, the United States is "exposed as hypocrites in the eyes of the world when we talk about making other people free." Finally, the idea of an "American way" comes back in the final paragraph, when Chisholm quotes Calvin Coolidge, saying "the business of America is business"... At this time, gentlemen, the business of America is war, and it is time for a change." With the Vietnam War, the United States is at risk of losing its very identity, and Chisholm calls for a rapid and important change to keep that from happening.

Documenting Sources

In a rhetorical analysis essay, you are likely only writing about one text, so you won't need a formal Works Cited page. Your teacher may ask you to use paragraph numbers to identify where your quotations can be found, but with a short speech or essay it may be unnecessary. If you do add paragraph numbers, they should go in parentheses after the quotation mark and before your punctuation, like this:

The idea of American values returns when Chisholm states, "We Americans have come to feel that it is our mission to make the world free. We believe that we are the good guys everywhere" (para. 9).
A Sample Rhetorical Analysis Essay

Below is a sample rhetorical analysis essay written by a high school student in response to the prompt we introduced on page 63. After reading the prompt and the essay carefully, respond to the questions that follow.

"People and Peace, Not Profits and War" was a speech delivered on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on March 26, 1969 by Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm (1924–2005). Read this excerpt from the speech carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies Chisholm uses to present her argument to her fellow members of Congress. Support your analysis with specific references to the text.

"People and Peace, Not Profits and War"

by Milutin Gjaja

When Shirley Chisholm took the floor in March 1969, the Vietnam War had been going on for close to 14 years, and the toll it took on the United States and the American people kept growing heavier. In this speech given in Washington D.C., Chisholm explored the consequences of a deadly war at home, emphasized the American values that the United States government should keep to, and entwined past, present, and future to show that, should nothing change, the lives of the American people and the country in general will only get worse.

One of the main rhetorical strategies that Chisholm uses is emphasis on the mindless war the United States is engaged in, and its consequences on U.S. soil. War is an ever-present theme in the speech from the very beginning of the speech, the title: "People and Peace, Not Profits and War." Right away, the Vietnam War is given a negative twist opposing it to the greater "people" and "peace." The first thing Chisholm criticizes about the war is its monetary cost, a gigantic nine billion plus dollars, a sum that feels heavy "when several thousand disadvantaged children in the nation's capital get nothing" (para. 2) because of the lack of funding of the Head Start program. But very quickly, Chisholm turns to the more important expense of the Vietnam War, the cost it has on the American people. This cost is first hinted at in paragraph five, when Chisholm quotes Mrs. Green, a fellow congresswoman, speaking about "the crisis we have in education" because of the war. But it is later, when Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird suggests that the war could continue for two more years, that Chisholm fully explores the consequences of further conflict: "Two more years of hunger for Americans, of death for our best young men, of children at home suffering the lifelong handicap of not having a good education"; "two more years of high taxes"; and "two more years of too little being done to fight ... poverty, prejudice, and neglect" (para. 7). The impact of the war is not simply a financial one, or limited to one sector of everyday life; on the contrary, it touches all aspects of the American peoples' lives, from taxes to education to prejudice.
to death. As Chisholm explains, this is something that is deeply hurting the country, and until the change that the American people call for: "[The American people] have said, 'End this war. Stop the waste. Stop the killing. Do something for your own people first'" (para. 10) is realized, the country and its constituents will continue to suffer.

The idea of "American" values and beliefs is another theme that prevails throughout Chisholm's speech. The first mention of higher morals comes in the second paragraph, when Chisholm questions the administration's policy on financing war machines, asking "what kind of values can be involved in spending $9 billion on 'weapons when several thousand disadvantaged children in the nation's capital get nothing'" (para. 2). In Chisholm's eyes, the American government is not upholding the "values" that Chisholm and others hold dear, which is to say education over war and mindless brutality. The idea of "American" values returns in paragraph nine, when Chisholm states, "We Americans have come to feel that it is our mission to make the world free. We believe that we are the good guys everywhere." The United States is a country built on the fundamental belief of liberty and equality for every one of its constituents, yet Chisholm talks of the "prejudice and hatred [that built] the nation's slums," pointing out that until those problems are solved, the United States is "exposed as hypocrites in the eyes of the world when we talk about making other people free." Finally, the idea of an "American way" comes back in the final paragraph, when Chisholm quotes Calvin Coolidge, saying "the business of America is business' . . . At this time, gentlemen, the business of America is war, and it is time for a change." With the Vietnam War, the United States is at risk of losing its very identity, and Chisholm calls for a rapid and important change to keep that from happening.

But perhaps the most powerful part of Chisholm's speech is how she entwines the past, present, and future of the country she serves. This theme is first taken up in the third paragraph, when Chisholm identifies herself as "one of the many Americans who hoped . . . that our country would benefit from the fresh perspectives, the new ideas . . . of a leader who had no part in the mistakes of the past." Right from the start, Chisholm paints a sharp contrast between a bleak past full of "mistakes" and a much more optimistic outlook, something the speaker quotes Mr. Nixon as calling "the American future" later in the paragraph. This theme of contrasting the past and present comes up again in paragraph six, when Chisholm criticizes Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird's views of the war, saying "[t]o hear him, one would have thought it was 1968." Once again, the past of the nation is given a negative connotation, but this time, this depressing past seems to be infecting the present and even the future, something demonstrated by the "two more years" repetition of the next paragraph: "two more years of hunger"; "two more years "of death for our best young men"; and "[t]wo more years of high taxes." Chisholm continues with the problems of the present, denouncing the "prejudice and hatred [that built] the nation's slums" and affirming that the government must "fight and defeat the enemies of poverty and racism in our own country."

What Chisholm is trying to demonstrate with all these observations is that the past, present, and future of the country are fundamentally intertwined; the mistakes of the
past affect the present, and without fixing those mistakes, the future looks glum for the nation. To prevent this, a transformation must occur, something the author announces in her final line: “it is time for a change.”

In this speech, Chisholm makes her point about the cost of the Vietnam War and its future consequences with passionate language and powerful rhetorical strategies. The procedures that Chisholm employs to prove her point are widely used by other writers and politicians, should it be the theme of time in Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, or the emphasis on American values in Martin Luther King Jr’s ”I Have a Dream” speech. But the wide use of these strategies only serves to prove their effectiveness, an effectiveness that Chisholm demonstrates in her “People and Peace, Not Profits and War.”

QUESTIONS

1. Examine the relationship between the thesis and the topic sentences. Do you think the basic structure of the essay is effective or ineffective? Why?

2. How does the essay support its argument with evidence from the text? Cite evidence that you find especially effective and explain why.

3. The writer argues that Chisholm emphasizes the Vietnam War, shared American values, and the connection of past, present, and future. To what extent do you think the rhetorical strategies Chisholm employs in her speech support this interpretation?

4. What is another argument you might make based on a rhetorical reading of the Chisholm speech? It does not have to contradict this writer’s interpretation entirely, but rather offer another way to read the speech or a different conclusion than the one drawn in this sample essay.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

Read this speech given by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she conceded the 2016 presidential election to Donald Trump. First, try one of the pre-writing techniques you’ve learned for close reading to get your observations on paper. Then generate a thesis statement that makes an argument about the choices Clinton made and how they help her achieve her purpose. Finally, write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies Clinton uses to thank her supporters and encourage them to look to the future.

2016 Concession Speech

HILLARY CLINTON

Thank you. Thank you all very much. Thank you so much. Very rowdy group. Thank you, my friends. Thank you. Thank you so very much for being here. I love you all, too.

Last night I congratulated Donald Trump and offered to work with him on behalf of our country.

I hope that he will be a successful president for all Americans. This is not the outcome we wanted or we worked so hard for, and I’m sorry that we did not win this election for the values we share and the vision we hold for our country.

But I feel pride and gratitude for this wonderful campaign that we built together.
This vast, diverse, creative, unruly, energized campaign. You represent the best of America, and being your candidate has been one of the greatest honors of my life.

I know how disappointed you feel, because I feel it too. And so do tens of millions of Americans who invested their hopes and dreams in this effort. This is painful, and it will be for a long time. But I want you to remember this.

Our campaign was never about one person, or even one election. It was about the country we love and building an America that is hopeful, inclusive, and big-hearted. We have seen that our nation is more deeply divided than we thought. But I still believe in America, and I always will. And if you do, then we must accept this result and then look to the future. Donald Trump is going to be our president. We owe him an open mind and the chance to lead. Our constitutional democracy enshrines the peaceful transfer of power.

We don’t just respect that. We cherish it. It also enshrines the rule of law; the principle we are all equal in rights and dignity; freedom of worship and expression. We respect and cherish these values, too, and we must defend them.

Let me add: Our constitutional democracy demands our participation, not just every four years, but all the time. So let’s do all we can to keep advancing the causes and values we all hold dear. Making our economy work for everyone, not just those at the top, protecting our country and protecting our planet. And breaking down all the barriers that hold any American back from achieving their dreams.

We’ve spent a year and a half bringing together millions of people from every corner of our country to say with one voice that we believe that the American dream is big enough for everyone — for people of all races, and religions, for men and women, for immigrants, for LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities. For everyone.

So now, our responsibility as citizens is to keep doing our part to build that better, stronger, fairer America we seek. And I know you will.

I am so grateful to stand with all of you. I want to thank Tim Kaine and Anne Holton for being our partners on this journey.

It has been a joy getting to know them better, and it gives me great hope and comfort to know that Tim will remain on the front lines of our democracy representing Virginia in the Senate.

To Barack and Michelle Obama, our country owes you an enormous debt of gratitude.

We thank you for your graceful, determined leadership that has meant so much to so many Americans and people across the world. And to Bill and Chelsea, Mark, Charlotte, Aidan, our brothers and our entire family, my love for you means more than I can ever express.

You crisscrossed this country on our behalf and lifted me up when I needed it most — even four-month-old Aidan, who traveled with his mom. I will always be grateful to the talented, dedicated men and women at our headquarters in Brooklyn and across our country.

You poured your hearts into this campaign. To some of you who are veterans, it was a campaign after you had done other campaigns. Some of you, it was your first campaign. I want each of you to know that you were the best campaign anybody could have ever expected or wanted.

And to the millions of volunteers, community leaders, activists and union
organizers who knocked on doors, talked to their neighbors, posted on Facebook — even in secret private Facebook sites.

I want everybody coming out from behind that and make sure your voices are heard going forward.

To everyone who sent in contributions, even as small as five dollars, and kept us going, thank you from all of us. And to the young people in particular, I hope you will hear this — I have, as Tim said, spent my entire life fighting for what I believe in.

I've had successes and I've had setbacks. Sometimes, really painful ones. Many of you are at the beginning of your professional, public, and political careers — you will have successes and setbacks too.

This loss hurts, but please never stop believing that fighting for what's right is worth it.

It is, it is worth it.

And so we need — we need you to keep up these fights now and for the rest of your lives. And to all the women, and especially the young women, who put their faith in this campaign and in me: I want you to know that nothing has made me prouder than to be your champion.

Now, I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but some day someone will — and hopefully sooner than we might think right now.

And to all of the little girls who are watching this, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams.

Finally, I am so grateful for our country and for all it has given to me.

I count my blessings every single day that I am an American. And I still believe, as deeply as I ever have, that if we stand together and work together with respect for our differences, strengthen our convictions, and love for this nation, our best days are still ahead of us.

Because, you know, I believe we are stronger together and we will go forward together. And you should never, ever regret fighting for that. You know, scripture tells us, "Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season, we shall reap if we do not lose heart."

My friends, let us have faith in each other, let us not grow weary and lose heart, for there are more seasons to come and there is more work to do.

I am incredibly honored and grateful to have had this chance to represent all of you in this consequential election.

May God bless you and may God bless the United States of America.