



**I Need a Visual:
Analyzing the Argument in Song Lyrics with Graphic Organizers**

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This curriculum unit is recommended for AP English III Language and Composition, 11th Grade

Keywords: rhetorical situation, exigence, intended message, audience, structure, verse, lyric, argument

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: This curriculum unit focused on using graphic organizers in order to follow the lyrical argument of singers, rappers or songwriters. The “Time Travel Through Music” seminar examined the social and political implications of multiple musical genres. In this examination, Fellows were able to listen, audibly digest, select, organize and interpret our understanding of the lyrical messages being played through informal group discussion, free form artistic renderings, targeted video clips and still imagery. This method of internalizing the musical arrangement of an artist, along with commentary about a song’s design from Professor Corbett, led to the progression of my unit “I Need a Visual.” My unit focused on using graphic organizers as a way to capture, funnel and visually form the message made in the lyrics of a song using various text types. Students consider how to use graphic organizers to interpret a song in order to arrive at the central argument of the artist. By using graphic organizers, students are crystallizing their thoughts visually, isolating key words in associative categories, and making analytical inferences that will yield a focused blueprint of the argument an artist made with music as an accompaniment. Regardless of the time period, it is evident that music is used as a way to impact the mood of the listener while ethos, or credibility is used to build an invisible cord of trust between the musician and the audience. Without ethos, without credibility, the artist’s message would not be able to impact the audience.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 28 students in English III AP Language and Composition to 11th graders.

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I Need a Visual: Analyzing the Argument in Song Lyrics with Graphic Organizers

by Deborah E. Brown

Introduction

Airpods, headphones, earphones, Powerbeats... portable wireless technology allows teens to custom make and listen to their playlists for pleasure on the bus, in the hallway, in the CLASSROOM. Music has commanded the ears and attention of today's teenager. As a classroom teacher, I battle daily with the verbal messages of songwriters, the "bars" of mumble rappers, the vibrato of classically trained singers and the melisma or the "run" of pop phenoms. During class instruction, random students, in their words are "multitasking." They listen LOUDLY to a song in the classroom while they claim they are listening to me. In this language and composition course, I want all students to realize that the music they are listening to is one large argument that follows a structure, is organized and seeks to change their mood, mind or willingness to act. I want to use these songbirds, these musical mellifluous messengers as my material for teaching students how to use graphic organizers and visual or written text to aid in strengthening the context of song's structure in order to help them understand how to graphically organize, analyze and write an argument.

Rationale

Because of technology and the Internet, comments, likes and instantaneous feedback has driven society to honor, revere or dispute the first draft. This respect for unrevised commentary does not bode well for dependent learners. As a result of real time and at times "in your face" feedback, dependent learners are not acclimated to valuing or even knowing about the recursive process of writing, so as a result, they feel that one and done is more than sufficient-- to ask them to re-write is to ask them to abandon their submission, to erase all of their hard work, to ignore their writing efforts in search of something "better" than what they have already done.

In our world today, nothing is ever really done...it's just waiting to be revisited by someone who can promote and propel it into a sequel. To that point, the world we live in is a never-ending argument. The injection of social media and the opinion of random people constantly pushes society into an ongoing and at times volatile conversation of claims, counterclaims, reasons and evidence. For today's student, it is expected that he/she be able to take a position and defend, concede and refute within reading passages, articles, quotes online in textbooks, in pictures, in still and moving images in order to effectively communicate, themes, central ideas, concepts and compelling issues.

Learning how to effectively structure, organize and write an argument in core classes prepares dependent learners to meet the critical thinking demands of our feedback rich, technologically driven society today. In order for students to understand the structure of an author's argument, that student needs a structure to view, gather data and graphically plot their

claims and reasoning. This is why I am interested in using graphic organizers to unpack this standard for my unit. Over many years of working with children, I have underestimated the power of using graphic organizers with deliberate intention. I have used it to map out vocabulary or to plot the events in an essay, but I have not been intentional in using graphic organizers to teach advanced placement students the logical flow of an argument by incorporating music with lyrics.

School/Student Demographics

Zebulon B. Vance High School, a Title 1 Beacon Initiative School is a comprehensive high school located in the University Research Park in Charlotte, North Carolina. Vance High School offers a variety of courses, at different interests and learning levels, in order to meet the needs of all students to help them achieve academic and personal success.

The school's Advanced Placement course offerings include: English Literature and Composition, English Language and Composition, Calculus AB, Spanish Language, U.S. History, Psychology, and Human Geography. This unit will be designed for my AP English III Language and Composition class. This course primarily focuses on non-fiction writing and the techniques behind reading, writing, speaking and listening to all forms of persuasion.

Our school and the English department is comprised of four levels of English. The AP English Language and Composition course is a one section, yearlong course that meets on an A/B day schedule. The AP course seeks to promote equity in learning by granting *all students* access to challenging course work. For this reason, the methods of instruction have to be differentiated to meet diverse learning modes.

Unit Goals

1A Reading Identify and describe the components of the rhetorical situation: exigence, audience, writer, purpose, context, and message.

In order for students to understand the structure of an author's argument, that student needs a structure to view, gather data and graphically plot the rhetorical situation. This is why I am interested in using graphic organizers to unpack this standard for my unit. Over the years of working with children, I have underestimated the power of using graphic organizers with deliberate intention. I have used it to map out vocabulary or to plot the events in a story, but I have not been intentional in using graphic organizers to teach advanced placement students the logical flow of an argument by incorporating music and song lyrics.

Using graphic organizers will help students determine whether the points the songwriter makes has a exigence and whether its intended message for the audience follows a sequence supporting the rhetorical situation for the listener to evaluate its structure. The source I will use to support my instruction for this standard is *Mining Complex Text*.¹ This resource claims that high school teachers can use graphic organizers to help "make complex text comprehensible" (Lapp, DeVere Wolsey, Wood, Johnson 2015, 1). For instance, one rhetorical device that can

¹ Diane Lapp et al., *Mining Complex Text. Using and Creating Graphic Organizers to Grasp Content and Share New Understandings* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2015)

confuse listeners would be artists inclusion of allusions in song lyrics. Allusions can create complexity within a song if the listener is unable to spot them or understand how the historical or societal reference clearly engages the reader in the songwriter's argument through melody and song.

Objectives for Unit

4A Writing Develop a paragraph that includes a claim and evidence supporting the claim.

The intention of this standard is to drill down into what makes a piece of writing argumentative? My intention in using the source *Differentiating with Graphic Organizers: Tools to Foster Critical and Creative Thinking* is to crystallize for students what is organically taking place in their minds as they listen to music that resonates with them. For example, we can practice with different organizers, how to critically think through an argument.

5B Reading Explain how the organization of a text creates unity and coherence and reflects a line of reasoning.

6B Writing Use transitional elements to guide the reader through the line of reasoning in an argument.

The source *How to Use Graphic Organizers to Promote Student Thinking³* would be helpful in evaluating a song. My hope is that this text will give me ideas for students to design their own rubric to not only evaluate a song of their choice for its line of reasoning, but also design their own rubric to evaluate a song of their choice for unity, coherence and a clear line of reasoning.

Content Research

Using graphic organizers will help students determine whether the points the songwriter makes is clear, convincing and engaging in order for the listener to evaluate its structure. The source I will use to support my instruction for this standard is *Mining Complex Text⁴*. This text has proven to be quite helpful in stressing the value of graphic organizers ability to deepen students' analytic, evaluative and creative thinking (Lapp, DeVere Wolsey, Wood, Johnson 2015, 17). One central emphasis in this source is for students to create their own graphic organizers if one is not available for them to use. Too often, students receive photocopied examples of templates to fill in with prescribed information.

While these templates that students fill in are quick tools to capture information, they are not used to inform any clear path to linking ideas logically to a larger project, like an essay or a multi page paper. As a result, the graphic organizer activity can become a rote method for many students and a blanketed way to check whether the words of an assignment was copied onto paper by the teacher. In the case of exploring the rhetoric with graphic organizers, it takes on another layer and shape of difficulty. Using a graphic organizer to follow the pattern of a song writer's oral argument is more than filling in squares and boxes, it is more than copying down

lines that seem like they belong in that box. It's intentionally using the graphic organizer to dig, to uncover, to mine for meaning and to interact with that meaning by intentionally connecting with other organizers by other students.

Using graphic organizers for exploring song lyrics can yield a new appreciation for the words an artist brings forth in melody. It can change the way a student views the "bars" of his/her favorite artist. It can transform the way the music is played as well as sung. It can force a student to see the hidden meaning and message in the lyrics, it can drive a discussion of rhetoric through the author's clever use of repetition in the refrain, it can implore a student to consider the effects of song lyrics and the context that brought about its exigency. It seems strange to want to trace the words of a singer or rapper, it is much more fun to listen them croon away. After all, that is why they wrote the song, cut the CD or made the video.

The writers of *Mining Complex Text*⁵ provide a rationale for the importance of students using graphic organizers to unpack complex text (Lapp, DeVere Wolsey, Wood, Johnson 2015,7). It has to do with the world they are living in currently. Everything is complex, multi-step, analytical and demanding that they view it for more than what a superficial, general level understanding could support. In viewing difficult concepts like song lyrics with the support of a graphic organizer, students are able to take seemingly tough concepts and with nonlinguistic supports and aids create meaningful steps to bridge their general understanding of what a song is saying to the rhetorical message songs subliminally intend to bring to its listening audience.

These messages are embedded in the rhetorical situation. The rhetorical situation looks at more than the lyrics of the song, it considers the backstory--this is important because this is what drives or repels the writer from creating the song, the producer from cutting the track, or the singer from committing to sing the song. For all intents and purposes, the backstory reveals the tension that encapsulates the exigency of the song's rhetorical situation. For matters of personal interest to students, this is the place where students may find it more interesting than exploring the rhetoric found in song lyrics. In class, there were several instances where we were introduced to the story behind the story of many popular songs. Having this knowledge revealed brings a level of incredulousness to backstory of the song. As a result, the song becomes more meaningful, it is listened to differently and it increases the level of appreciation for the song making it to the radio, the CD rack, and/or the streaming device.

As for the author's of *Mining Complex Text*⁶, they share examples of ways to scaffold graphic organizers in ways that will support differentiation of instruction and make meaningful links between varied approaches using organizers in tandem (Lapp, DeVere Wolsey, Wood, Johnson 2015,25-26). This way capitalizes on the idea of a group's efforts to divide and conquer a large reading task as well as regroup to regain missed ideas, much like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. By dividing students into rhetorical term groups, they can explore, with the help of a graphic organizer, their rhetorical term in depth. They can discuss how that term functions in the common text that was read prior through any of the rhetorical modes (classification, definition, narration, process analysis...). For example, "Where does audience function through classification in this song by the Rich the Kid? Examining this through a rhetorical mode is equally as important because it shows the students that not only is the song an argument, but the purpose of the song is also identified through its rhetorical method or mode. For example, the

song is classifying young ladies as “freaks” and “lil’ bitches” because the writer’s purpose was to magnifying misogyny in his lyrics. This answer can clearly be answered in a sentence, but in using a graphic organizer, the student can parcel out denigrating terms like “freak” “lil bitch” into a segment of the organizer, then have a section of the organizer that illustrates purpose of the song by capturing a lyric as support.

As a way to bridge various organizers together from different groups, student groups can convene not to discuss the completeness of the graphic organizer, but the “benefits and challenges of using each type” (Lapp, DeVere Wolsey, Wood, Johnson 2015, 26). Having this collective discussion pushes the thinking of the larger group forward to viewing how they have captured their notes as tools to “deepen pathways of thinking and creating”(Lapp, DeVere Wolsey, Wood, Johnson 2015, 7).” What a great way to support meaningful tools for organizing complex thinking!

The book, *Differentiating with Graphic Organizers: Tools to Foster Critical and Creative Thinking*⁷, is a resource that allows various nonlinguistic representations show them how to form and shape their argument--complete with a claim and specific, appropriate evidence. Ultimately, AP students are expected to enter into rhetorical readings with a central focus on locating the claim of the writer in order to write an argumentative paragraph. This paragraph initially starts off with a general assumption made by the student. What this source invites students to do is to address the verbs of critical thinking through graphic organizers (Drapeau 2009, 38).

This benefits students in general, but in particular AP students because they have multiple opportunities to trace a line of thinking graphically in order to arrive at a solid argumentative claim that is supported with specific, appropriate evidence while engaged in rhetorical writing. This source can help teachers provide students with at least two different ways to get at critical thought graphically. The feature that is most helpful for teachers and AP students would be the graphics that ask students to make assumptions and judge (Drapeau 2009, 45-46,100-101).

In rhetoric, a central expectation of reading is to determine the arguable claim. This claim is created by the student. The graphic organizers that have been created to invite students to take their thinking through a series of visual steps that ultimately lead them to a fair and accurate claim. For determining the argument in song lyrics with graphic organizers, students can have each graphic organizer out while listening to the song and following along with the lyrics. The organizer for judge distinctly requires students to make an opinion and support each reason with a documented source. Following that, students shall consider the reasons and sources as a whole in order to summarize and ultimately make a judgment (Drapeau 2009, 101). From this graphic layout, it will be apparent for students to draft a solid paragraph that includes appropriate, specific evidence justifying the claim they made about the song they chose to listen to.

In a final source *Graphic Organizers: Visual Strategies for Active Learning*⁸, it supports the claim that showing students how to create original rubrics to use for evaluating their own writing not only increases their level of accountability in using nonlinguistic representations, but

it also validates and supports their ability to analyze what makes a graphic organizer a tool worth using for exploring rhetoric critically (Bromley, Irwin-DeVitis, and Modlo 1995, 47-48).

As with any type of unit of instruction, there are measures in place for checking student understanding as well as evaluating what students have learned. Using a rubric that is designed by the student for this curriculum unit legitimizes this activity in several ways. Initially, having students design a rubric for this unit increases their analytic ability. Their interest in establishing writing norms for themselves allows them to clarify and build an increased awareness of what they want to target as a result of what they have learned.

Inviting this form of final assessment, makes the unit more inquiry based than activity based (Bromley, Irwin-DeVitis, and Modlo 1995, 48). Inquiry based instruction changes the focus of interest for students to exploration. By developing their own rubric, they can establish what they value as essential understanding for a song analysis. If their goal is to determine how an oral argument is unveiled through song and music, they could use a four scale rubric. The four scales could focus on degrees of analysis, from weak to exemplary analysis. It would be helpful for students to receive a list of words they could use to sort out how to think through shaping their scoring guide.

Students would need a word bank of various terms in order to create this rubric. They would need a list of words that describe an actual song structure pattern: intro, verse, refrain, chorus, hook, bridge, outro. Within this list, students would create short descriptions of to what degree does each part support or fail to support the songwriter's written argument--the lyrics. Providing students with a word bank for each part of developing their own rubric is a logical step to supporting their exploration of self-assessment. Creating a rubric works much in the same manner as students designing their own graphic organizer, they are connected, on a much higher level, to establishing the concepts, supporting information and how those terms are related (Bromley, Irwin-DeVitis, and Modlo 1995, 52). Analyzing a song, then assessing their understanding of argument through self-designing a rubric are encouraging students to value organizing ideas and to find the patterns in what makes a piece of writing rhetorical.

Instructional Implementation

The newly revised AP curriculum, set forth by the College Board, introduces the "big ideas" or the argumentative "threads" that run throughout the language and composition course. These threads are categorized into four headings that cover key components: rhetorical situation, claims and evidence, reasoning and organization, and style. These categories chunk the essential components to enhance any robust argument. This curriculum also emphasizes the importance of making logical connections and strategic writing choices. A visual way to make connections while incorporating complex ideas in recursive writing instruction is by using graphic organizers. Graphic organizers is the visual display of thinking on paper. Visual organizers support a writer's reasoning, organization and development of an argument.

K-W-L Sunburst with Color

As a result, in order to best support the comprehension of a song's lyrical argument, students begin with what they already know about the topic, then add to that understanding (or misunderstanding) with additional context through multiple text sources. In this build up of schema, students use a sunburst graphic organizer to capture associative words for each piece of text to help them shape and expand their thinking about the topic.

The words that are placed in their organizer are used in support of the claim (policy, value, fact) students are expected to arrive at the conclusion of jotting down ideas to create or link more rays to the sunburst. The sunburst represents the topic being viewed, read or heard. Each time a form of text (visual, auditory, written) is used, the student takes a colored pencil, highlighter or marker and writes associative words that come to mind. So, each color represents a form of text. At the conclusion of the text association sunburst, students read through their color coded notes, determining how best to create their own claim of value thesis statement using words from the color coded notes to help them with building their claim.

I used this activity to begin my "Metacognition and Mercy: Weaving Synthesis in Writing" unit. Students began this unit with the word "felon." I chose to begin this exercise with this word because I wanted to see what type of prior knowledge students had about this word. Many associated this word with "crime, relatives, arson, troublemaker, thief, prisoner..." thoughts that would fall under a general consensus of people in society. These words at the onset of building student background is critical. It is critical because this is where the baseline of learning will be deleted, modified or enhanced. Once students completed their sunburst web with their initial ideas, I had them listen to instrumental music geared toward felons.⁹ While this music played, students were told to close their eyes. Just close their eyes and listen to the music play for a few moments. After about one minute of listening, the music stopped and students were told to take up a color that was different from the one they used previously, and write words in the graphic organizer they associated with the music they were listening to. If students found words they listed on the initial sunburst web were similar, they would place a check mark by it, if they could make an associative connection to what they heard, for example "criminal" with "renegade" then they were to draw a line connecting the words to each other. Students again used their sunburst organizer and, with another color, jotted down words that they would associate with how instrumental music impacted their mood. At the conclusion of this activity, it was evident that students perspective of a felon was negative.

To support the words that each student captured on their paper, students teamed up with an elbow partner to share the words they wrote on their sunburst. For a final word capture as a whole class, I created a sunburst on the class board and, using multiple colors, collected words from students for their initial thoughts about the word "felon" and additional thoughts about the instrumental music for felons. We took a moment to find words that had a similar connection and link them together. At the conclusion of that activity, students read an article in the New York Times on felony disenfranchisement¹⁰ in Florida. At the conclusion of that reading, students again are asked to jot down words they would associate with the information they gathered from the article. This is where their words shifted. In my whole class word capture, to the students, the felons were no longer viewed as "criminals" "renegades" and "black" people, they viewed them as unfairly judged, wrongly victimized, and restricted. To add an additional

layer to this color coded sunburst, students watched a video that contextualized the personal impact of felon disenfranchisement on an ex-felon who is denied the right to vote by state lines. The responses from the students began to soften again, students were realizing that felons were not “renegades” and “arsonists” but “people” who “struggle,” “grow,” “change” and “mature.” This activity has students see logical links between their initial thoughts about felons to their changed perception based on new information learned about felons and voting rights.

In the last context building activity of this felon disenfranchisement unit, I used a song from Steve Earle and The Dukes titled “Billy Austin.”¹¹ This song was given to the students along with the song lyrics. Students were directed to listen to more than the lyrics, but also listen to the melody. The melody is compelling and it sets the stage for the narrative tale that is revealed by Steve Earle and The Dukes. At the conclusion of this song, students were directed to use words from the graphic organizer to write a central claim for the word “felon.” So, in this activity, the song was not being used to provide further context, but to set the mood for students to view the words that have been generated from various text references to write a central claim of value, fact or policy for the word “felon.” This song is used later when students write their argumentative paragraph.

Color K-W-L w/ 3 in 1 Claim Paragraph

This activity incorporates intentional use of the sunburst with writing. From the context building exercises on the word “felon” students are now ready to write an argument that inserts words from their color coded sunburst to write a paragraph that includes their claim about felons with words to support their specific and appropriate evidence. With the color coding, students take ideas from colored words written while watching or reading various articles on the topic. In hindsight, creating a legend prior to using each color in their graphic organizer would help students reference the source that gave them the word or phrase jotted down. Students will review their notes, and circle words that associate with the evidence they plan to use to write appropriate and specific support to their claim. The 3-in-1 sentence writing for specific and appropriate evidence is used at this point. It directs students to intentionally string words together in support of their evidence. The use of the graphic organizer in this assignment helps students understand the multi-purpose use of their notes.

Herringbone Map with Jigsaw + Writing

A song is a lyrical argument embedded in a rhetorical situation. An organizer that can assist students in unpacking that structure is a herringbone map ((Lapp, DeVere Wolsey, Wood, Johnson 2015, 96). This map uses a cause and effect visual text structure to address multiple layers of the rhetorical situation.

Students would draw the initial herringbone map as a single cause with effects that are the equivalent of the amount of rhetorical components found in the rhetorical situation. As students listened to the song with a copy of the lyrics to follow along, they are provided with a statement: Make an argumentative claim that defends purpose of the song title. Students are given this prompt prior to analyzing the lyrics for its argument. Previewing the prompt with the students focuses them to think about the song as a whole, not merely isolating segments to fill out the graphic organizer. Once the students have established their own baseline for the song, they are divided into rhetorical term groups. In each group, they listen to the song for its specific device and mark or highlight where it is expressed. On the graphic organizer, students extend the herringbone two more spaces to include the function, the lyric analysis of each rhetorical situation and its impact.

Next, students re-read and review their herringbone map for the section they completed, ensuring that all parts of their map is filled out. Then incorporating the protocol for students shared with their jigsaw home team the answer unpacked in their expert group.

Finally, each member of the group reviews his/her notes to write an analysis paragraph that incorporates the argumentative claim defending the song title and analyzing each aspect of the rhetorical situation.

Ultimately, the function of the graphic organizer was to make visual notes reveal their own unique ability to organize ideas to help students write argumentative paragraphs that analyze the rhetorical situation with unity clarity and coherence.

Targeting the Herringbone

The herringbone graphic organizer can be a multi-functioning tool that supports the recursive writing process. As students can visually create an analysis of a song's rhetorical situation, students can also use its notes to expand on a single idea in the map. The herringbone map supports multiple elements of the rhetorical situation that can be analyzed with targeted questions. For example, to analyze the structure of the rhetorical situation, create targeted questions that address the device and its mode. For example, "How does structure function through narration in the song "Billy Austin"?¹² This question can be adapted to fit the rhetorical device and mode under evaluation. Understanding the mode or method the songwriter used to craft his/her argument is equally as important since the mode or method is how the message is carried, given to the listener for audible consumption. This is important to understand. Equally as important as the terms of rhetoric to understand the author's argument is the message or the way the author delivers it to the reader through the rhetorical mode or method.

That's Debatable: Assuming a Song's Meaning

Not all songs are easy to understand. Some song lyrics can be puzzling or completely confusing. In any event, unpacking absurdity can be challenging. This challenge, for an adolescent, may be ignored entirely or incorrectly interpreted. Providing students with a graphic organizer to address oddities in musical refrains or stanzas acknowledges their confusion and offers them an alternative way to think about befuddling lyrical messages.

At best, the most anyone can do when faced with song lyrics that come across as confusing is not to ignore it, but to explore the assumptions that have been made about it by the listener.

Drapeau¹³ uses an organizer that invites students to explore assumptions. This graphic organizer operates like a flow map where one idea vertically and logically creates the next idea and so on. Drapeau's organizer invites the reader to begin by making a general assumption about the song in question. The assumption can be drawn by the title or the melody and refrain. It would be best to not use a music video, as that is the visual interpretation of the song's interpretation by the music producer. Part of establishing a claim in an argument is to make an assumption. The assumption is what drives the inquiry in determining its validity. The assumption carries great weight because it is the assumption that drives our ability to think clearly in order to draw a meaningful conclusion.

For the graphic organizer to help students make their assumptions visible, in the first space "Make an assumption" have students generate that assumption from what they believe the title is telling them. In the next space, "Justify the assumption with evidence," have students explain how they drew that conclusion about the title. Once this is completed, students will "break" or be allowed to listen to the song under analysis with lyrics to follow along. Including lyrics at this step is essential to aid the students in comprehending the words of the song as well as making the logical links between the words of the artist to their initial impression of the song from its title and inferred evidence. Once the song has ended, have students fill in the final graphic "Draw a conclusion: Is the assumption reasonable?" with their answer. Students have to align their answer with evidence from their previously written notes. If they are going to refute their previous assumption, it has to be referenced in the final graphic.

In the Mix: Understanding the Rhetorical Situation in Music and Personal Narrative

In this exercise, students combined elements of the rhetorical situation from two texts in order to analyze the argument: exigence, audience, intended message and structure. For this exercise, students used a song “All Falls Down” by Kanye West¹⁴ and an autobiographical excerpt “Shame” by Dick Gregory¹⁵. Both texts addressed a central idea of insecurities. For the activity, students listened to the song and read the excerpt. I initially assessed whether students understood how to examine a verse of a song by using an unrelated song that dealt with the same central idea of insecurities. In the song “Fireworks” by Katy Perry¹⁶, I assessed with students whether they could identify, from the first verse of the song, signal words that hinted at text structure and Perry’s central argument. For the signal words, I included a hyperlinked visual from Pinterest¹⁷ of signal words and graphic organizers for text structures to allow students a chance to match words in the pinterest poster with words in the excerpted verse. This activity helped students familiarize themselves more with the poster and make associative links to words in the verse. Ultimately, students were able to see the connection between the central message and signal words.

Because students understood that there is a direct correlation between the signal words, the central message and the song’s verse, they could follow the Perry’s line of reasoning. They understood immediately that verse under examination was comparing and contrasting feelings of inadequacies, neglect and disconnection to inanimate objects or random elements in nature. This analysis confirmed to me that they understood what Perry was implying and how signal words aided in guiding the reader through the line of reasoning in her argument. I supported this line of reasoning with West’s song “All Falls Down”¹⁸ to add an additional layer of context to the central idea of insecurities as well as exploring how the transitional elements, the signal words, helped develop West’s line of reasoning. Locating signal words in West’s song lyrics illustrates his line of reasoning so that students can understand his text structure and ultimately, West’s argument.

Students were given a graphic organizer that included four columns to examine West’s lyrical argument by exploring West’s line of reasoning through his use of transitional elements [signal words]. Students were given the lyrics and asked to work in groups at unpacking West’s line of reasoning. The verses were selected by students out of personal interest, not for its format. For the students, it created an easier “buy in” to the activity. The students had control over which verses they could “unpack” and were not led by my choices. The verses they chose did vary, and it was evident that the progression of West’s line of reasoning became clearer as they filled in each of the rows with details from the verse. One groups selection revealed the central idea of the insecurities, and their line of reasoning showed that they could connect to how the signal words included in the verse supported the student’s comprehension of it. For example, one group chose as a signal word “cover up.” In the signal word poster, there is no text structure or signal word for “cover up” but the group understood from West’s line of reasoning that “cover up” was an associative signal word for problem and solution as stated in the column of their graphic for Kanye’s argument “The songwriter is saying how we buy material things to fill the emptiness of love we have.” The students who wrote this response are all ELL students, so even

though their final analysis is not “perfect” by their engagement with the graphic organizer, it became easier for the group to see how each box was supported by the previous box.

Following this graphic organizer, students defended both song titles by analyzing each aspect of the rhetorical situation in a paragraph. Initially, students analyzed both song titles separately, in separate paragraphs. What I realized from this is that students need to spend time copying down the prompt, then identifying what is expected of them to answer. It was evident that the entire class did not fully understand how to incorporate the copious notes they took with their graphic organizer and apply those notes to their analysis paragraph. They believed that the graphic organizer notes was one exercise, and the analysis paragraph was a prompt they had to answer for the next exercise. This showed me that my instruction in helping students see how the graphic and paragraph that would follow Kanye West “All Falls Down”¹⁹ and Dick Gregory’s “Shame”²⁰ needed to be clearer.

Based on that discovery, I modeled with the class from a group’s graphic organizer, how to write an analysis paragraph that compared and contrasted both texts. In this modeling, I noticed a few things: in addition to the multi-column graphic organizer, I needed to create a double t chart. Initially, in executing this assignment, I did not see the need to incorporate another double t chart, but in doing so, it was very easy for the students to see how to discuss both texts and what made them similar and different. I also noticed that students needed a list of compare and contrast signal words in order to make their writing flow in a way that readers appreciate. As a result of this, the student written responses were targeted to defend the title of each text while addressing the similarities and differences of the rhetorical situation using the terms of exigence, audience, intended message and structure. Doing this allowed me to meet more than my expectations for this writing assignment. Because of deliberate use of compare and contrast signal words to help shape their answer, I also tapped into using rhetorical modes as student’s analyzed their arguments.

What Makes a Song a Good One? Pick a Song, Create a Rubric and Write a Paragraph

For this activity, students were asked if they were familiar with the way songwriters craft lyrics for their songs. Many students mentioned they knew a song needed a chorus, a refrain or verses but not much else. Following that, I shared with the class that songwriters, for the most part, follow a structure when creating lyrics for their songs. As they mentioned some of the terms found in a songwriter’s toolbox, as a class, we explored definitions for the basic structure of a song: intro, verse, refrain, chorus, hook, bridge, break, outro. I provided one sentence terms for each word, and students shortened those one sentence terms into 3-5 words. Initially, for the first word “intro” the class had the same definition. Then a student spoke out, “Can we come up with our own?” That was a great idea! I realized that the student, and more than likely the entire class wanted to avoid having a cookie cutter set of shortened terms for these words, so the class created their own shortened song structure definitions.

Initially, I thought it would be a good idea to provide students with the terms, so we would all have the same meanings, then the midst of introducing the activity, I realized that it would probably be too difficult to absorb multiple lengthy definitions as they are trying to apply the meaning of the words to the song they are analyzing for its structure. That was my reason for

using the 3-5 word definitions. Then when a student made a suggestion for the whole class to create their own 3-5 definitions, well, that settled it for me! Now the students have a list of terms that they can manage as they start thinking more deliberately and critically about their favorite song.

To start us off, I reintroduced to Katy Perry's song "Fireworks"²¹ as it gives fidelity to the song lyric structure. Initially, I had students listen to the song with lyrics and call out places where they saw or heard the intro, verse, chorus, bridge, or outro. With this song, Perry does not incorporate all of the song lyric terms, and that is good for students to notice. A song does not require the use of every single term in order to make it a good song. As a way to guide their responses, I created a slide that included the song structure sequence, so it would be easier for students to listen to the song being played as they called out the structure in the order listed on the slide. What I did notice, even with that structure at the top of the slide, was that students were hesitant to call out the song structure terms even as they heard it played.

To me, that indicated a discomfort with being incorrect. As a way to support their timidity, I used a simple guided question. I would ask, in the sequence of the song playing, "What part of the song is this?" That gave students the willingness to respond, because they knew the "answers" were above the slide in the correct sequence, and with my prompting, all they had to do was read the words above the video with the song lyrics. Once that activity concluded, students understood how I wanted them to use the song structure terms to read the lyrics of their favorite song.

In order to simulate the class creating a rubric for a purpose, I designed a prompt that had them explore their song by developing criteria and categories. Students determined the criteria and categories by looking at an example of a song rubric, but they were not allowed to use the same language. They had to create their own terms. This forced the students to consider what the example identified as a category or divisions within the song, and how they would identify and describe those same categories for the song they chose. The song criteria was far more creative. This portion of the rubric revealed how they personally judged the music they identified as their favorite. In developing criteria, it showed that they could hear it not only from their point of enjoyment, but also from a critical stance.

They could evaluate it for its quality. And what the students consider quality ran the spectrum. For example, one student included the words "Surpassed Expectations" to "Not Applicable" in judging whether her song "Reckless" would be a good song choice for the American Senior High Teen Idol show. Another student chose the song "Intro" by Dababy a local rap celebrity. The criteria he developed for this song ranged from "Perfection" to "Take it Back," while another student's criteria for her song "1-800-273-8255" went from "Talked Yo' S+*" to "Chatting," while another student, who used "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" developed criteria that ranged from "Masterpiece" to "Music." Their criteria revealed to me that students want something from the songs they listen to--they want more than a melody, they crave the message. It is clear from the song titles that they are in search of answers to real questions as 1-800 song deals with suicide prevention. I chose not to restrict their song choices, as I wanted them to use this activity as a way to examine the music they value with a critical eye. For that reason, their criteria revealed that they had an expectation for the song. They expected the categories to do

something for them, which is why they branded the top performing criteria in their own superlative terms. Each song evaluation revealed to me that I need to give students space to express and be creative in their song analysis while not failing to miss the opportunity to insert rhetorical terms into the rubric descriptors. I provided the terms, I gave them the writing prompt, but then I let them, in the end, make their own choices on how they would design their rubric. In hindsight, I would have restricted the amount of latitude I gave the students in designing their own rubric. I would have held myself to my initial plan of expecting students to use a word bank of various terms to create their rubric instead of allowing them to decide whether they felt the word list would restrict them from expressing their descriptions fully.

As a way to capitalize on their creative characterizations of song criteria and categories, in a future lesson, I plan to have the students use their highest criteria as a guide to writing their paragraph. In the paragraph, they will include the rhetorical elements that I noticed many students did not incorporate into the description portion of their rubric. Initially, I felt that was a shortcoming in my instruction, but as I examined the descriptions the students gave to justify the criteria's category, I realized that the descriptions provide the student with direction to address the rhetorical situation. For example, in one student's rubric, for her relatability category, she wrote "understand the slang in the song, English makes sense." What I found interesting is that she created a category in her rubric for "engineering," so she realizes that a song is comprised of more than a beat. She understands that a song is engineered or mixed. And she realizes that in its engineering, the song should be comprehensible. This tells me that she pays attention to the delivery and message of the song by the artist.

There are times when the music can overpower the lyrics, so in essence, the message becomes muffled. As her levels show, she moves from "understand the slang in the song, English makes sense" to "sometimes could understand the slang, English makes sense" to "slang is bad, can't speak English" to finally "No English." In order to identify and describe the rhetorical situation students must match their description to the meaning of the rhetorical element. For instance, this student could use the information in her description "understand the song, English makes sense" to one element of the rhetorical situation [exigence, intended message, audience, structure], in this case, the intended message to her song of choice.

In the annotations it was evident that some students read the song lyrics and kept the structure of the song in mind. One student example shows that he not only kept the structure of the song in mind, his rubric critiqued his song choice. What I found in his annotations was more attention to the structure of the song and his interpretation of it with a rubric that was straightforward. Even with terse descriptors in his rubric "the lyrics were well put together," he can tie it back to rhetorical elements which would direct him to elaborate more than he did in his rubric description.

Realizing that the evaluation tool the students created could also work as a tool for directing them into the written response to me changed my initial perspective on what a student generated rubric could do. I now realize that with students leading the way with describing aspects of a song or a text, the descriptions could be juxtaposed to their rhetorical element which will lead them into writing about their rhetorical situation.. I did not anticipate an evaluation tool could be used in this capacity, but I am glad that it led me to this conclusion.

The final element of this activity assesses the use of using graphic organizers to listen to, analyze and defend a song's title. For this assessment, I have incorporated a series of graphic organizers, along with the lyrics of a pop song. Using various forms of text (video, TED speech) students would demonstrate their ability to analyze these text forms for the rhetorical situation through using a graphic organizer to determine the songwriter's argument. The video included in the assessment supports one of the topics illustrated in the assessment song. The third portion of the assessment requires students to comparatively analyze the video with the pop song. The fourth portion of the assessment has students writing a paragraph that defends the titles of both texts by analyzing each aspect of the rhetorical situation. A way to allow for some student ownership of the assessment would be to let them select the song and text they would like to comparatively analyze for the rhetorical situation. It is the set up of the graphic sequences that invite students to make greater meaning. Whether it is a herringbone map, a double-t chart or a sunburst, visually capturing thoughts and phrases from multiple texts allows students to process large amounts of information in a way that is meaningful and memorable.

Appendix #1

Implementing Teaching Standards

AP Language and Composition: Big Ideas and Enduring Understandings

Enduring Understanding: Claims and Evidence (CLE)- Writers make claims about subjects, rely on evidence that supports the reasoning that justifies the claim, and often acknowledges or respond to other, possibly opposing, arguments.

4A Writing

Develop a paragraph that includes a claim and evidence supporting the claim.

As writers, students will make claims about the autobiographical excerpt “*Shame*” and the song “*All Falls Down*” relying on evidence from both texts that support their reasoning justifying their claim, acknowledging the counterclaim, in addition to using compare and contrast signal words in order to defend the titles of both songs.

As writers, students will make claims about what they know, want to know and learned about a topic using notes from a graphic organizer in “*K-W-L Sunburst with Color*.” Students rely on evidence from various texts that support their reasoning in various colors in order to write their claim.

As writers, students make a strategic claim in “*Color K-W-L w/3 in 1 Claim Paragraph*” about a subject from color coded notes taken from their graphic organizer. Students rely on evidence from the graphic organizer to write a paragraph in support of the claim.

Enduring Understanding: Reasoning and Organization (REO)- Writers guide understanding of a text’s lines of reasoning and claims through that text’s organization and integration of evidence.

5B Reading

Explain how the organization of a text creates unity and coherence and reflects a line of reasoning.

Readers will explain how the organization of a song creates unity and coherence and reflects a line of reasoning by exploring assumptions in the exercise “That’s Debatable: Assuming a Song’s Meaning.”

Readers will explain how the organization of a song or text creates unity and coherence and reflects a line of reasoning using elements of the rhetorical situation in the activity “*In the Mix: Understanding the Rhetorical Situation in Music and Personal Narrative*.”

Writers will use a graphic organizer to guide their understanding of “Billy Austin” for its line of reasoning and claims through organizing and integrating the rhetorical situation in *“Herringbone Map with Jigsaw plus Writing”* and *“Targeting the Herringbone.”*

Writers will use a multi-column graphic organizer to guide their understanding of Kanye West’s song “All Falls Down” and Dick Gregory’s autobiographical excerpt “Shame” for its line of reasoning and claims through the organization and integration of the rhetorical situation by using *“Herringbone Map with Jigsaw plus Writing.”*

Enduring Understanding: Reasoning and Organization (REO)- Writers guide understanding of a text’s lines of reasoning and claims through that text’s organization and integration of evidence.

6B Writing

Use transitional elements to guide the reader through the line of reasoning in an argument.

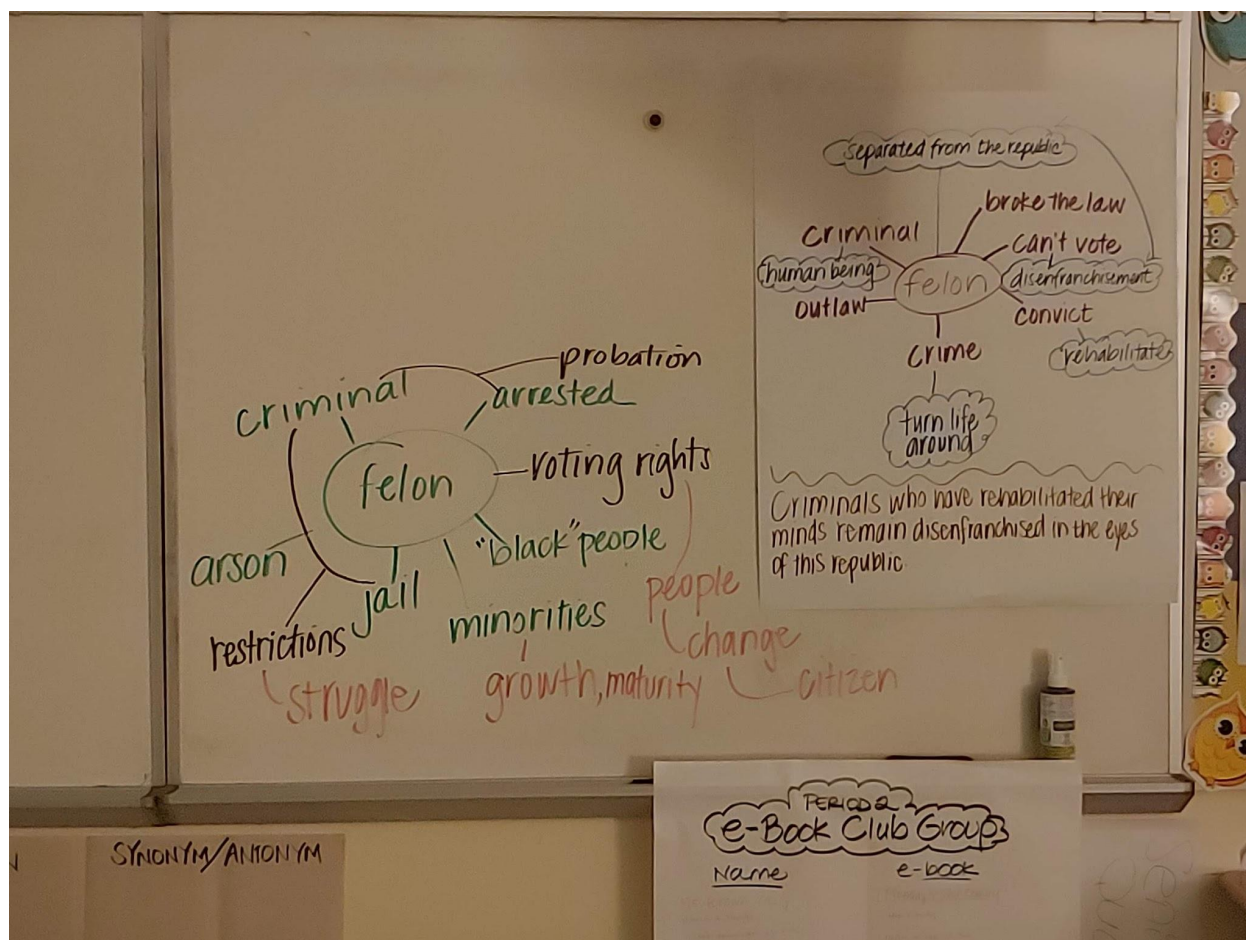
Writer’s will guide their understanding of a text’s line of reasoning and claims in *“Music, Oratory and the Message”* through identifying signal words as transitional elements to guide the reader through the line of reasoning in the song and the autobiographical excerpt’s argument.

Writer’s will use transitional elements in *“What Makes a Song A Good One? Pick a Song, Create and Rubric + Writing”* by self-designing a rubric that guides the reader through self designed criteria and categories for listening to their song choice. Writer’s will write a paragraph that incorporates descriptions from the rubric to reveal their line of reasoning for the rhetorical situation.

Appendix #2

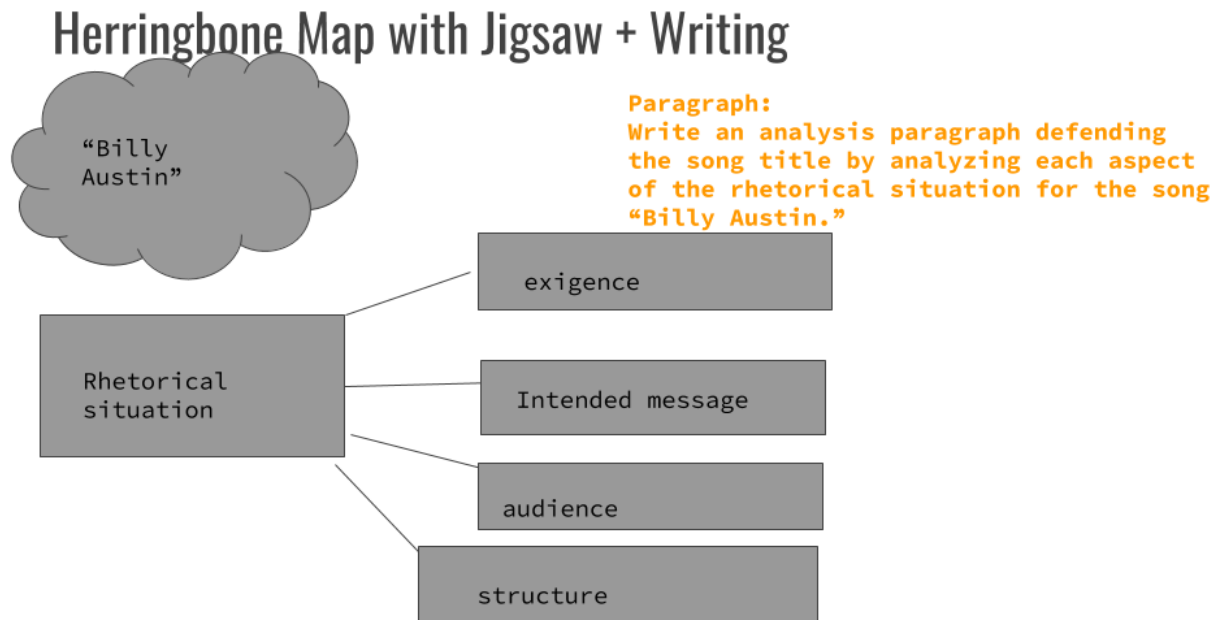
Instructional Slides

K-W-L Sunburst with Color



Appendix #3

Herringbone Map with Jigsaw + Writing



Appendix #4

Line of Reasoning Worksheet

Activity: Uncovering the Line of Reasoning

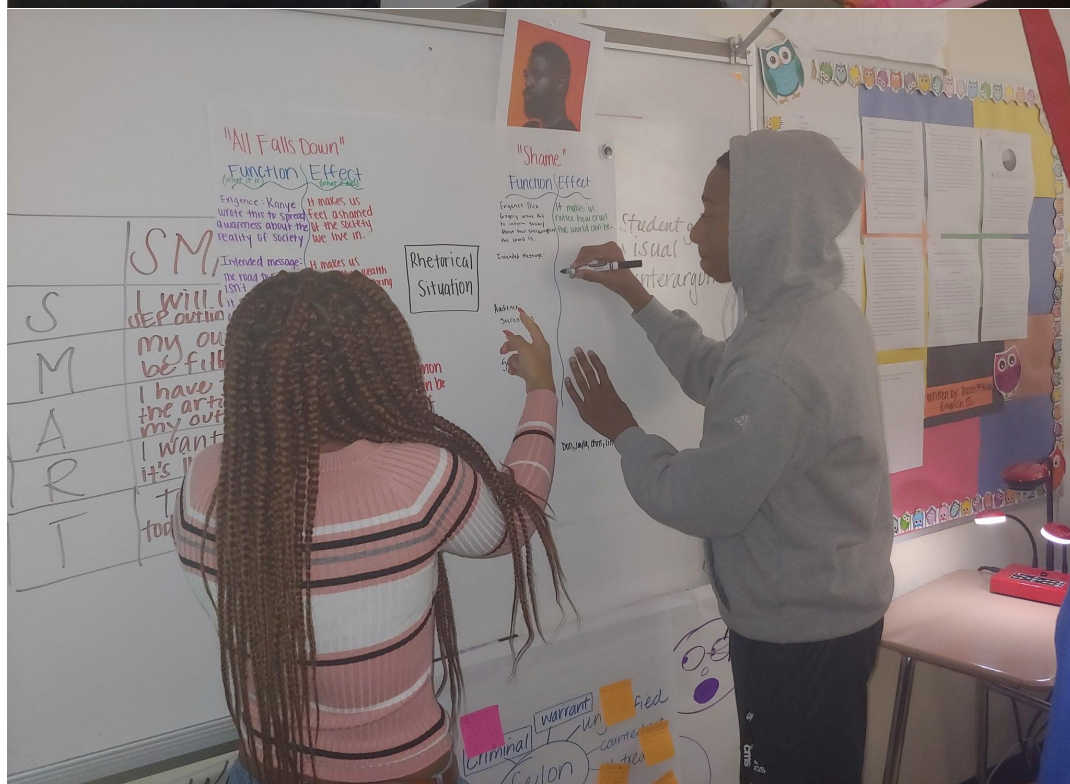
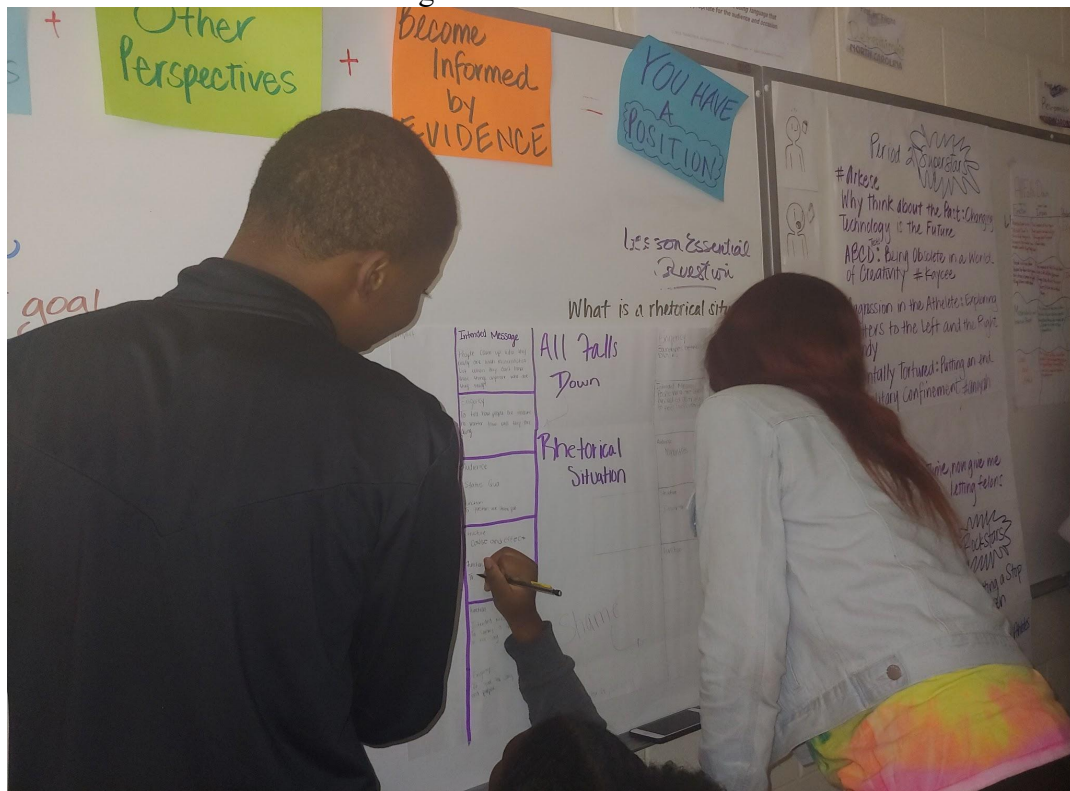
Goal: Unpack Kanye West's Lyrical Argument "All Falls Down"

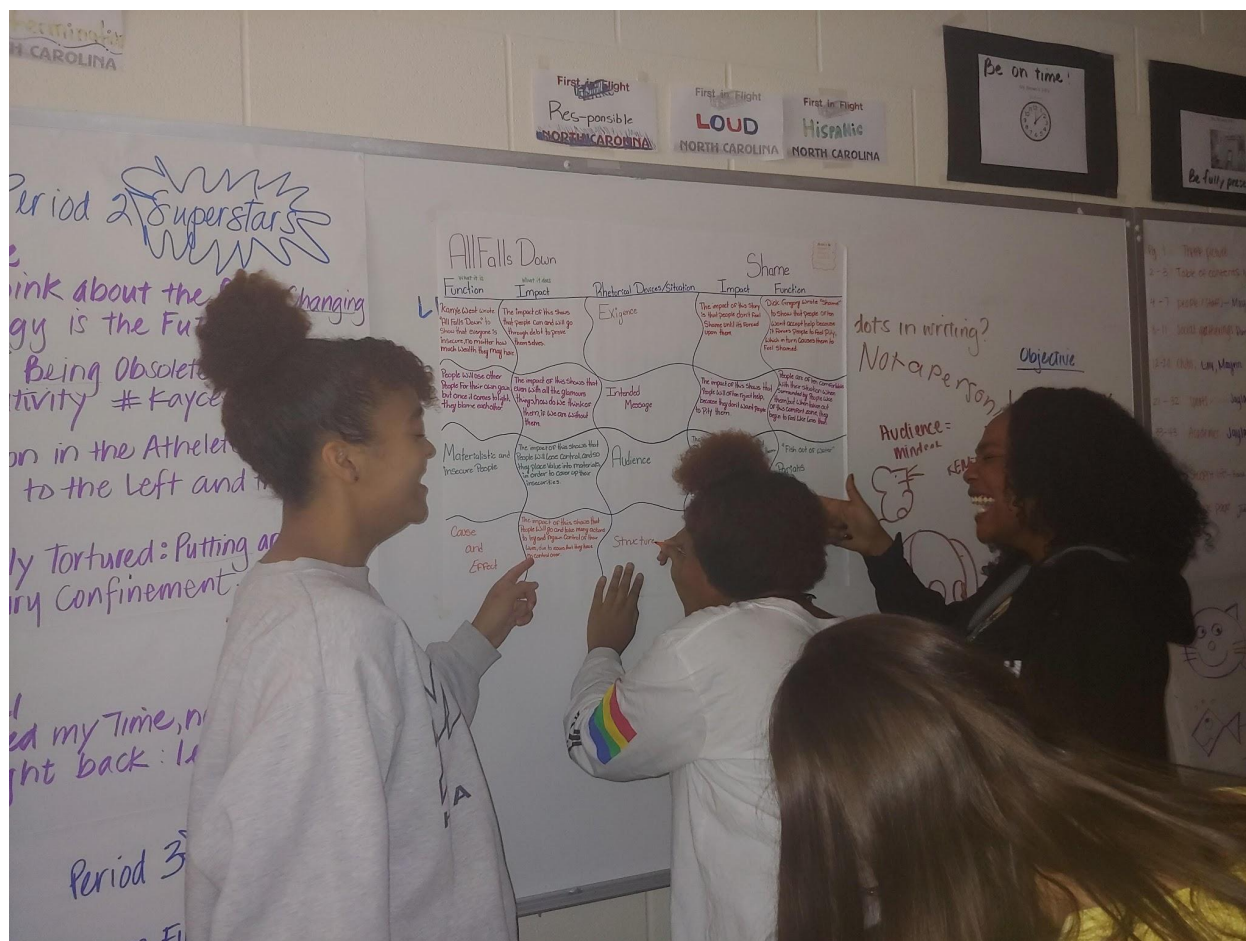
I can locate **transitional elements** (signal words) in the lyrics of Kanye West's song "All Falls Down" by identifying and underlining text structure signal words to illustrate West's line of reasoning, so I can determine the lyrical text structure.

Verse	<u>Signal Words</u>	Text Structure	Kanye's Argument
Example: She has no idea what she's doing in college That major that she majored in don't make no money But she won't drop out, her parents will look at her funny	[inferred] <i>consequently</i> "But she won't drop out/her parents will look at her funny"	Cause and effect	Due to her lack of research, she chose a college major with no real financial future to it but she refuses to drop out and look like a failure in the eyes of her parents so she'll suffer the consequences over time.

Appendix #5

Part I: In the Mix: Understanding the Rhetorical Situation in Music and Personal Narrative





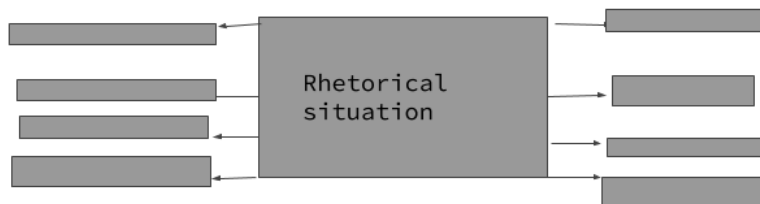
Poster + Writing

Exigence
Intended message
Audience
structure

Function
impact

“All Falls Down”

“Shame”



Write an analysis paragraph defending the song title “All Falls Down” and the autobiographical title “Shame” by analyzing each aspect of the rhetorical situation.

Appendix #6

What Makes a Song a Good One? Pick a Song, Design a Rubric

Pick a Song, Write a Rubric

1. **Select a song** you enjoy listening to
2. **Read** its lyrics
3. **Annotate the lyrics** [*intro, verse, refrain, chorus, hook, bridge, break, outro*]
4. Create your **song lyric** rubric
5. **Determine** the argument and map out its rhetorical situation
6. Write an **analysis** paragraph defending the song title using each aspect of the **rhetorical situation**

What Makes a Song a GOOD One?

You have been selected to judge songs that will be performed on "American Teen Idol."

As the judge, you will set the criteria and categories for each song's possible inclusion in the show's rotation.

Your rubric must reflect your criteria and categories.

Criteria

Categories		

Appendix #7

AP English III

Music, Oratory and the Message

Understanding the Rhetorical Situation



Part I: Reading the Song Lyrics

Whitney Houston [“The Greatest Love of All”](#)

I believe the children are our future

Teach them well and let them lead the way

Show them all the beauty they possess inside

Give them a sense of pride to make it easier

Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be

Everybody searching for a hero

People need someone to look up to

I never found anyone who fulfill my needs
A lonely place to be
And so I learned to depend on me
I decided long ago
Never to walk in anyone's shadows
If I fail, if I succeed
At least I'll live as I believe
No matter what they take from me
They can't take away my dignity
Because the greatest
Love of all is happening to me
I found the greatest
Love of all inside of me
The greatest love of all
Is easy to achieve
Learning to love yourself
It is the greatest love of all
I believe the children are our future
Teach them well and let them lead the way
Show them all the beauty they possess inside
Give them a sense of pride to make it easier
Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be
I decided long ago

Never to walk in anyone's shadows

If I fail, if I succeed

At least I'll live as I believe

No matter what they take from me

They can't take away my dignity

Because the greatest

Love of all is happening to me

I found the greatest

Love of all inside of me

The greatest love of all

Is easy to achieve

Learning to love yourself

It is the greatest love of all

And if, by chance, that special place

That you've been dreaming of

Leads you to a lonely place

Find your strength in love

Source: [LyricFind](#)

Songwriters: Linda Creed / Michael Masser

Greatest Love of All lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

Part II Message in the Music

Verse	Signal Words	Text Structure	Houston's Argument

Part III [TED Talk](#) Makayla Pearce “Learning to Love your Insecurities”

The screenshot shows the TED website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links: WATCH, DISCOVER, ATTEND, PARTICIPATE, ABOUT, LOGIN, and a search icon. Below the navigation bar, the main content area features a large video player on the left showing Makayla Pearce on stage. To the right of the video player are interactive buttons: Share, Add to list, Like, and Recommend. Further right is a section titled "What inspires you?" with a "Get Started" button and various interest tags like "A new perspective", "Ideas for self-improvement", "Insights about issues the", "Nature", "Smart entertainment", "Inspiration or motivation", "Design", "Collaboration", "Personal growth", "Science", "Innovation", "A sense of i", "ter", "Child development", "Activism", "Communication", and "Technology". Below this is a "Watch next" section with two video thumbnails: "Embracing otherness, embracing myself" (3.0M views) and "A passionate, personal case for education" (1.2M views). At the bottom right, there's a "New! Activity Feed" button. The bottom of the screen shows a Windows taskbar with the date 11/10/2019 and time 2:55 AM.

Part III Multi-Column Map Rhetorical Situation Houston and Pearce

“The Greatest Love of All”

“Love Your Insecurities”

Function	Impact	Rhetorical Situation	Function	Impact
		exigence		
		audience		
		intended message		
		structure		

Part IV *Defending the Title* Paragraph Writing [compare/contrast [signal word list](#)]

Prompt: Write an analysis paragraph defending the song title “The Greatest Love of All” and the TED talk “Love Your Insecurities” by analyzing each aspect of the rhetorical situation.

claim

reason

evidence

counterargument

conclusion

Appendix #8

Materials for Classroom Use

Laptop Computers- Students use the computers to access final assessment, song with lyrics and google doc worksheets.

Post-It Note Poster Paper and Markers- Students use the poster paper to create large graphic organizers to map out the rhetorical situation for selected texts.

Post-It Notes- Students use Post-It notes to tag graphic organizer posters for a gallery walk.

Appendix #9

Resource List

Song and lyrics- Students will need to have available lyrics and music of their favorite song to complete the activity. Students were allowed to print off a copy of the song lyrics in the classroom if they were unable to bring in a copy from home.

Resources for Teachers

Song Lyrics Rubric This is the rubric I had students use as an example of how to establish categories and criteria. Students were not allowed to use the same language on this rubric, only use it guide for developing their own criteria, categories and points. It is a pdf and this is the website I visited to access it.

https://www.d70schools.org/teachersites/lib/redirect.php?res_id=14049

Language of Composition: Reading, Writing, Rhetoric, 2nd edition, 2013. This is the standard book to teach this course. In this book, there is an article on Felons. This article was the springboard into the felon unit. The information from this article is dated, but it is a good resource for students to read and learn how long it takes for real change to happen in America for people who have completed their period of incarceration.

The College Board, “AP Syllabus Development Guide: AP English Language and Composition, College Board, 2014. These are the curriculum requirements for the course. It contains evaluative criteria and sample evidence that would constitute standards based instruction.

Rosa, Alfred F., and Paul A. Eschholz. 2012. *Models for Writers: Short Essays for Composition*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins. I used this text to select the reading “Shame” by Dick Gregory. It is also a great resource for students to practice rhetorical mode writing.

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