

## Mystery Genre Rhetorical Analysis (Lesson Plan)

**Background/Goals:** I use this lesson plan early in the quarter, just before assigning a reading that students will be analyzing rhetorically. The point is to help students understand what rhetorical analysis is by giving them an engaging, interactive task (rather than lecturing, or having them jump straight to analyzing a more scholarly text).

**Preparation:** Before class, I create a packet of “mystery genres,” and I try to include unusual genres so students will have to read more carefully. For instance, I include an essay about Tupac’s intellectual life written by a high school student for a magazine geared toward high school students, an essay about John Coltrane that appears in the liner notes of an album, a CFP from the Gates Foundation, and a form used for disciplinary purposes in a middle school. I photocopy these texts so that the visual clues (such as the paper size, the typography, the images) are all intact, but I remove any obvious identifying markers (the bio of the author, for instance).

**In-Class Procedure:** I give each student a packet of all the texts. Then, I split students into groups, and each group works with one text. They have about 10-15 minutes to read the text and answer the following questions:

- Who wrote this text, and why?
- Who is the intended audience for this text?
- In what situation would this text be used?
- *For each of these questions, point to at least three specific clues—linguistic or visual—in the text that lead you to your answer.*

I stress that the point is not getting the right answer, but being able to provide sound, specific evidence for their answers.

Once students have answered these questions, each group has two minutes to present their answers and convince the class that these answers are correct. The rest of the class then has one minute to ask questions, provide alternate explanations, etc. (I keep this part moving quickly so that students focus on conveying their group’s most important points.)

After each group has gone, I tell the class where I found the text, and who wrote it. In my experience, when given enough time to read the text closely, students can come very close to guessing where the text has come from, even if the text is complicated, and my classes have gotten really invested—in a good way—in convincing their classmates that they’ve done good rhetorical detective work. If students have missed the mark somewhat, the whole class can read the text and look for clues that might have been overlooked.

**Follow-up:** I give students a new reading from the textbook (for instance, Pratt or Lippi-Green) and ask them to answer similar questions about that text as part of their homework.