

I'm sorry that I can't be with you today. We are going to put the penny prompt on hold until next week as I would like to walk you through how to write this type of essay. Don't lose it!

Students often moan that what they learn in school has no connection to the world. One of my greatest goals is to show you that what you learn does matter, but how much it matters often depends on what YOU do with what you know.

A couple of days ago, Barack Obama gave his farewell speech. Yesterday, Charles Blow, long-time editorial writer for the New York Times, shared his thoughts about Obama's departure.

Your assignment for today:

1. Slowly and carefully read the Charles Blow article. Savor it.
2. Thoroughly annotate the article. Don't just draw lines and make pointless comments. Think about what you are reading. What is Blow doing and why is he doing it?
3. Write all over the article. Make comments about what the author says in the margins. Focus on the writing. It might be that you love Obama; it might be that you hate Obama. That's not what this assignment is about. This assignment is about the writing, the rhetoric, the words. Focus there.
4. On the back of the page or on a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph or so about the rhetorical maneuver that you find the most provocative. If you don't know what "provocative" means, look it up on your phone.

PAUSE: I'd like to talk to you for a moment about logos, ethos, and pathos. I know that different teachers have told you different things. This is how I would like you to approach the Aristotelian appeals. Don't think of them as rhetorical or literary devices that you can throw into your essays. Think of them instead as background concepts. For example, writers understand that humans are innately emotional creatures. Therefore, appealing to fear or nostalgia or loss or whatever speaks directly to readers and listeners who then become sad or happy or angry or something else. Saying that a writer "uses pathos" is not useful. In fact, it's lazy, a first step when you should be going further. Describing what a writer is doing when he or she appeals to pathos, on the other hand, displays your deeper understanding of how language works. Don't use the fancy Greek words; just talk about what's happening. What is the imagery? What is the allusion? What is the timing? What is the effect?

5. Where do you see Blow invoking emotion? What is that emotion? Why? What does he want to accomplish?
6. You will have the entire period to work on this assignment. Finishing after ten or fifteen minutes is not a good thing. Look more carefully. Think more deeply.