

Names _____

Guided Rhetorical Analysis With “Alexander Hamilton”

First, listen to “Alexander Hamilton” and as you do, annotate the lyrics printed below. Keep an eye out for interesting uses of language, rhetorical devices, and any other moments you consider especially powerful.

Then, review the lyrics again while answer the guiding questions beside them. If any of the questions prompt you to do a bit more investigating than you anticipated, don’t hesitate! Do a little research and develop a more comprehensive rhetorical analysis!

<p>Spoken by Burr, about Hamilton:</p> <p>How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean by providence impoverished, in squalor, grow up to be a hero and a scholar?</p>	<p>(1.1) Consider Burr’s description of Hamilton in the very first line of the song. What do we already know about the relationship between these two?</p> <p>(1.2) Describe the tone and attitude that Burr seems to project here – and then, describe the <u>impact</u> of that tone and attitude. How does that affect the meaning of these lines? Of the question he poses?</p> <p>(1.3) Two layers of purpose: First, what is Burr’s purpose in saying these words? Second, what is the playwright’s purpose in opening the song with these lines?</p>
<p>Spoken by Laurens, about Hamilton:</p> <p>The ten-dollar founding father without a father got a lot farther by working a lot harder, by being a lot smarter, by being a self-starter, by fourteen placed him in charge of a trading charter.</p>	<p>(2.1) Let’s identify some of the obvious things happening here. The reference to the ten-dollar bill is an <u>allusion</u>, and because the ten-dollar note did not exist in this capacity during the time period in which the musical (and song) was set, it’s also an <u>anachronism</u>. There are also a number of deliberate, momentum-building <u>repetitions</u> in this line. But that’s the easy part. The hard is considering <u>why</u> these rhetorical devices were used, and what <u>effect</u> they have on the listeners. Analyze all three for purpose and effect.</p> <p>(2.2) What purpose does the rest of this line serve? What does Laurens hope to achieve with all of the praise he seems to pay Hamilton? Is it effective – and if so, why? How would it be different if Hamilton explained these details himself?</p>

<p>Spoken by Jefferson, about Hamilton:</p> <p>And every day while slaves were being slaughtered and carted away across the waves, he struggled and kept his guard up. Inside, he was longing for something to be a part of. The brother was ready to beg, steal, borrow, or barter.</p>	<p>(3.1) There is a lot of deliberate word choice happening here. For instance, Jefferson uses the word “slaves.” (Had he said referred to these individuals as “servants,” “prisoners,” “animals,” or “property,” his meaning would be <u>much</u> different.) In this fashion, <u>analyze</u> his purposeful word choice pertaining to the words “slaughtered” and “carted.”</p> <p>(3.2) Jefferson refers to Hamilton as “the brother.” Why is this interesting? Yes, you can research the history of their relationship... it’s actually <i>very</i> interesting... but, rhetorically, what’s happening here? Is it the same as calling someone “pal” when they’re not really your pal? Is the mere fact that he’s using a colloquialism (i.e. a word or phrase that is not formal and is typically reserved for familiar conversation) rhetorically significant?</p>
<p>Spoken by Madison, about Hamilton:</p> <p>Then a hurricane came, and devastation reigned. Our man saw his future drip, dripping down the drain. Put a pencil to his temple, connected it to his brain and wrote his first refrain, a testament to his pain.</p>	<p>(4.1) The “hurricane” Madison references is documented as an actual storm that did a great deal of damage at the time. But that weren’t the case, would there still be symbolic power in this phrase? In the “hurricane”...? In what way?</p> <p>(4.2) Reigned sounds an awful lot like rained, doesn’t it. Why is this interesting? Why do we care? What’s the rhetorical <u>impact</u> of wordplay such as this?</p> <p>(4.3) Madison was a very skilled writer. (He wrote the first drafts of the constitution, remember?) So, how does knowing that impact the significance of his message? Of what seems to a positive commentary on Hamilton’s ability to write and think?</p>
<p>Spoken by Burr, about Hamilton:</p> <p>Well, the word got around, they said, “This kid is insane, man.” Took up a collection just to send him to the mainland. “Get your education, don’t forget from whence you came, and, the world is gonna know your name. What’s your name, man?”</p>	<p>(5.1) More anachronistic colloquialisms happening here. Rather than to consider what they’re doing for the argument that Burr is making about Hamilton... analyze what argument this kind of language makes about Hamilton’s <u>story</u>. (What is the lyricist, Lin-Manuel Miranda, arguing about Hamilton... about U.S. History... when he uses this kind of language in his lyrics? Why are modern audiences absolutely obsessed with lyrics like this? What’s happening here?!)</p>

<p>Spoken by Hamilton:</p> <p>Alexander Hamilton. My name is Alexander Hamilton. And there's a million things I haven't done, But just you wait. Just you wait...</p>	<p>(6.1) This is Hamilton's first line in the song. Why is this important? Analyze the specific words he uses, and consider the alternatives... (What if he had explained the details of his history, rather than Burr, Jefferson, Madison, etc.? What's the effect of having those guys handle that for him? What does ethos, pathos, and logos have to do with it? How is our perception of Hamilton delicately and deliberately crafted in this particular way?)</p>
<p>Spoken by Eliza, about Hamilton:</p> <p>When he was ten, his father split, full of it, debt-ridden. Two years later, see Alex and his mother bed-ridden, half-dead sittin' in their own sick, the scent thick... And Alex got better but his mother went quick.</p>	<p>(7.1) Eliza provides a few more character-building details here. This is important because, again, the information is not delivered by Hamilton, but from a third-party. <u>What is the intended effect?</u> (Is it more or less believable? Does being a third-party make us less likely to believe it, because it isn't coming from Hamilton himself ... or more likely? Is this always the case with third-party information?)</p> <p>(7.2) What's the point of sharing multiple tragedies and hardships associated with Hamilton's upbringing? Consider how this contributes to the rhetorical power of the argument at hand, and – on a grander scale – for the character, Hamilton.</p> <p>(7.3) Why “Alex”...?</p>
<p>Spoken by Washington, about Hamilton:</p> <p>Moved in with a cousin, the cousin committed suicide. Left him with nothin' but ruined pride, something new inside, a voice saying, “You gotta fend for yourself.” He started retreatin' and readin' every treatise on the shelf.</p>	<p>(8.1) There's something similar happening here, but with different details and a different speaker. Elaborate on the purpose and effect (...are they the same as when Eliza describes tragedies associated with Hamilton's life? Does the fact that it's George friggin' Washington change anything?)</p>

<p>Spoken by Burr, about Hamilton:</p> <p>There would have been nothin' left to do for someone less astutue. He woulda been dead or destitute, without a cent of restitution, started workin', clerkin' for his late mother's landlord, tradin' sugar cane and rum and all the things he can't afford. Scammin' for every book he can get his hands on, plannin' for the future. See him now as he stands on the bow of a ship headed for a new land. In New York, you can be a new man.</p>	<p>(9.1) Compare and contrast these words, spoken by Burr, with the very first line of the song. It seems that these two (Burr and Hamilton) have a complex relationship. Describe Burr's attitude and tone here (...do you sense envy, or dislike, or admiration, or <i>something else...</i>?) – and support your claims with textual evidence!</p> <p>(9.2) As Burr makes the claim that “In New York, you can be a new man” (...note the repetition of the word <i>new...</i>), harmonies arise, echoing the word “New York” in the style of “Empire State of Mind” by Jay Z and Alicia Keys. (Yes, this is an allusion, too. You get it now, the same way that Shakespeare's audience easily understood all of his allusions in the 1500's... but in five hundred years, will people recall “Empire State of Mind” so easily? Doubtful.) Anyway. What's the point of this particular allusion? Why the shout out to Jay Z?</p>
<p>Mulligan/Madison and Lafayette/Jefferson: We fought with him.</p> <p>Laurens/Philip: Me? I died for him.</p> <p>Washington: Me? I trusted him.</p> <p>Eliza & Angelica & Peggy/Maria: Me? I loved him.</p> <p>Burr: And me? I'm the damn fool that shot him.</p>	<p>(10.1) At the end of the song, we learn a lot about the speakers who have been going on at length about Hamilton. So, first of all, why does it take them this long to give us this information? What's the effect? How would it be different if the song <u>opened</u> with this information, rather than closing with it? (Especially Burr's information...)</p> <p>(10.2) How do these lines impact the meaning of the lyrics that preceded them? Are there any significant changes? Anything that has gained or lost power? Explain.</p> <p>(10.3) Burr says “I'm the damn fool that shot him.” If it's possible, <u>listen</u> to the way that he sings this. Now peel back the layers... analyze the words, the meaning, and the purpose. (Why does he call himself a damn fool? Why not just a fool, or an idiot, or something else? Does he mean it? Is he ashamed of having shot him... or is he bragging? Can it be both? And, in any case, how does this affect his credibility? His character? His words thus far?)</p>