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DTC 355

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13 October, 2011

Comics Can Be Very Persuasive

The rhetorical strategies I used when composing my embarrassing story and the comic which illustrated said story are convincing tools that teach a lesson. While writing out my embarrassing story in the blog, I found it most necessary to be as descriptive as possible in order to illustrate the entire scenario. It is necessary to establish ethos with my audience by giving appropriate context in order for the lesson to make any sense. For example, I first describe that this takes place on the first day of my freshman year of high school. I give a detailed description of the building structure. It's old and foreboding, and the setting I give paints the backdrop for the assumption that something bad is going to happen there. Illustrating an embarrassing story in this context connects a certain cultural understanding to the fact that yes, just about everything about freshman year in high school has the potential to be extremely embarrassing. And a dark and stormy day is never a good sign.

In writing my story, I used emotive and extremely descriptive language as a verbal strategy to connect with pathos. I brought the audience into my story by describing my thought process as a freshman. I describe myself as being shy, withdrawn, disheveled, confused and forgetful. These all appeal to the emotions of the audience by getting them to sympathize with my situation and feel embarrassed with me. I walked to school in the rain, so at the beginning of school day I'm dripping wet and uncomfortable. A fourteen year old kid cares more about looks and acceptance than is healthy, and already in this story I'm not feeling acceptable in my

appearance. Most audiences can relate a personal experience to this, unless I was overly insecure. Also, I can't remember where my classes are so I have to go stand in line because I don't know where I'm supposed to be. This is an experience shared by many, and again I am successful in achieving pathos. I used the terms, "I looked like a dorky freshman." Immediately I give the audience a visual to think of a sad dripping wet dorky teenager and to have pity. This draws them in to keep reading and to find out, what *is* going to happen. I cross paths with upperclassmen who actually know who I am. Most people would remember that this is a big deal. For me personally, being in their presence is enough to be embarrassing. I'm a freshman, they are gods, and anything I do or say can or will be held against me. The climax of the entire story is that I *dramatically* slipped and fell in their presence, *and* dropped my paperwork everywhere. A moment in time of complete humility that has in some way or another been shared by others through other similar experiences or emotions.

Turning my story into a comic was simple. The use of various photos on the first page of the comic is a strategy to establish ethos. I used a photo showing rainfall from what looked like the backside of my school, and a snapshot of a school hallway was manipulated with editing to look "slippery". I used a snapshot of myself giving an expression of surprise, prefacing that what is about to happen will in fact, be a shock. I used the concept of *vividness* in my comic by using real photographs and not cartooned spaces. I manipulated each section somewhat with editing capabilities within the Comic Life program to enhance the photos in the form of a comic. Yet, each picture was an actual photograph, which according to Hill, is more vivid than using illustrations. Hill states that "in psychological studies *vivid information* is identified as information that is emotionally interesting and concrete." (31) Many times in the telling of true tales we want to identify with the person, and see who is speaking. In prose that is never the case. In comics, it

can happen, especially in using digital photographs in *Comic Life*. Another version of this is illustrated in Art Spiegelman's *MAUS*. He uses "people" in his comics, but gave the varying characters different personas or images based on their race. The faces of Jews were depicted as mice, though having human bodily features. Following suit, the Nazis were cats, the Polish pigs and the French frogs. In my comic, vividness is very powerful in establishing pathos in this instance as well as using actual photographs in my comic.

There are differences that each version of my story makes. The verbal story is much more detailed due to the nature of written content. The visual is short and to the point. McCloud discusses "amplification through simplification." I believe the visual is more effective in communicating a lesson far better than the verbal because of telling the *lesson* of the story using amplification through simplification: a tactic that leaves out details to put emphasis on the main points of the text. Comics do this beautifully, and is why they can be most effective in storytelling. Art Spiegelman's *MAUS* is my absolute favorite example of this. A strategy I employed in the comic was placing dialogue, sounds and explanations in text bubbles to further describe what the visuals were conveying. This is an important and effective tool. According to Birdsell & Groarke, "Immediate verbal context also provides a basis for the interpretation of visual images." (6)

When I wrote the verbal version, I was mostly focused on content and length. The assignment called for a specific length and I focused on being descriptive yet captivating enough to not lose my audience. I also was not entirely focused on teaching a lesson with the writing since it wasn't emphasized in the actual assignment instructions. I just wanted to make it a good story to read. The comic was less lengthy and far less descriptive. I feel as if I could have done a better job executing the comic's *story*, but the comic as a persuasive device is successful. I could have

been more descriptive by being more artistic in the *way* I told the story. Yet, I am still convinced that this medium teaches a lesson more directly than my verbal attempt.

Each version of my story does have its own particular strengths and weaknesses. Prose does more to describe detail and to bring an audience into a realm of imagination, and convinces of a story most strongly through pathos. The comic appeals mostly to logos. There is a preface on the title page with the given title, "Slippery When Wet." On the title page there is an image of my surprised face which gives the reader the assumption that something scary or surprising is going to happen. Each subsequent page with images takes the audience logically through a scenario producing an expected and unsurprising lesson, "Don't run on wet tile floors after walking to school in the rain."

Works Cited

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