The Rhetoric of Travel
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For so many of our college students, their exposure to rhetoric and composition is limited to a few required courses and the ‘standard’ assignments embedded in the textbooks chosen for such courses. However, writing instructors might consider alternative assignments to promote student success in writing and reading. One rapidly-growing and exciting genre worth studying from a rhetorical perspective is travel writing. Travel writing is a broad term, and may refer to many forms, including newspaper and magazine articles, blogs, webzines, advertising and promotional materials, travel program scripts, and thoughtful travel narratives that explore human nature as well as places. Travel writing topics run the gamut: humorous road trip narratives, exciting outdoor tales, encounters with unfamiliar cultures, and reflections on interesting neighborhood places or unusual destinations far away. Because of this variety, students are sure to find something appealing. Travel writing presents rich possibilities for analysis, interpretation and discussion. Rhetorical concepts such as purpose, occasion, and audience may be vividly demonstrated. Aesthetic, expressive and entertainment purposes of writing are also exemplified in many works of travel literature. Studying travel writing improves composition skills and multimedia communication abilities as well. Students observe, discuss, and employ qualities of effective writing such as well-paced narrative structure and vivid detail. Students are more engaged with writing, as their interest is sparked by lively readings and the opportunity to write about their own experiences. Since travel writing assignments often focus on local sights, students develop a greater “sense of place” about their own communities.
What is travel writing?

The definitions are hotly debated. Travel writing takes many different forms, and may include many other genres, such as memoir or autobiography, adventure narratives, ethnography, scientific observation, ship’s logs, profiles of interesting people, and so on.

For simplicity’s sake, travel writing may be used as a broad term. The various types of travel writing might be sorted by rhetorical purpose. Thus, the study of various examples of travel writing can help students understand both rhetorical and literary terms.

Freewriting Activity: Why do people travel?
Rhetorical purposes

- Persuasive
- Informative
- Aesthetic
- Entertainment
Rhetorical Situation

- Subject
- Occasion
- Audience
- Purpose
Rhetorical Triangle
(Visual from Cleveland University)
Rhetorical Appeals

- Logos
- Ethos
- Pathos
Travel brochure activities to teach persuasion

- Examine brochures and websites to determine how the target audience is being persuaded. (Rhetorical Analysis)
- Develop persuasive brochures about local destinations and activities.

- Activity: Look at the various brochures at your table. What audiences do you think are being targeted? What emotions and values are the brochures trying to appeal to? Are there any logical appeals in the brochures? How is ethos projected?
Reading Travel Articles

- Persuasive travel texts such as brochures and promotional websites are only one small aspect of travel writing.
- Students also learn about rhetoric by looking at travel articles and the magazines, newspapers, and websites that they appeared in.
Discovering various purposes of travel writing


Last, check out a website for a river rafting company:

http://www.hatchriverexpeditions.com/

Activity: What are the similarities between these materials? What are the differences? Then write about an interesting person you met while travelling.
Magazine Activity

- Look through the various magazines on the tables, and try to determine who the audience is for each one.
- Then list what sorts of travel articles appear. Are there mostly “how-to” (informative or “service”) articles? Are there any that are more narrative in purpose (aesthetic or entertainment)?

- Team notetaker: the person who went camping last summer.
The “Guidebook” end of Travel Writing

- Students consider the needs of the audience (readers) while looking at guidebook and “how-to” articles found in newspapers and magazines. What do readers need to know in order to have a successful outing or trip?

- Students might develop their own guidebook to their community. Students might write their own “how-to” travel article about a local destination or activity.
Interesting Mesa Place short essay

Student articles are collected into a booklet called *East Valley Adventures*.

**STUDENTS DISCUSS HOW SUCH A COLLECTION WOULD PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT INEXPENSIVE ACTIVITIES FOR LOCAL OUTINGS. THEY ALSO CONSIDER OTHER BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY.**
Fiesta Village

*Empty for years
*Barbed wire
*Impact on nearby businesses
There are still interesting shops, cafes, and parks in the area. They would appreciate some publicity.

Atomic Comics  
Cup O’ Karma
Other informative travel writing ideas

Travel Blog
TripAdvisor (or similar site) Posting
Script and storyboard for a television or web travel program
Travel Narratives/ Travel Literature

- When reading travel literature, students will learn what literary devices the author has used to portray his or her experiences.

- Characters, plot, theme, symbolism, figurative language, dialogue, and other literary writing strategies may be examined. Therefore, students learn literary analysis while enjoying “true life” stories.
Literary Analysis Assignment

- Students may choose a travel literature essay to analyze, using literary features.

- One useful article to use as a lens: Jim Meyer’s “What is Literature? An Approach Based on Prototypes,” 1997. Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota 41: [33-42].
Excerpts from Michael Behar’s “The Selling of the Last Savage”


- Writing Activity: How did Behar project himself in this article? What was his ethos like?

- Describe a time that you experienced the “travail” of travel. (Some travellers face danger, while others just face inconvenience, like traffic jams or lost luggage.)
Excerpt from David Sedaris’s “Turbulence”

- [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/06/13/050613sh_shouts](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/06/13/050613sh_shouts)

- Writing Activity: Describe a funny incident that happened to you while you were on a trip.
Excerpt from Caitlin Flanagan’s “Price of Paradise”

- http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/01/03/050103fact_flanagan

- Writing Activity: As far as the overall insights and points made in the article, what issue did you connect with? The consumerist pressures of travel? (like those overpriced mini-bars...) Over-anticipating a trip to the point that no actual trip can live up to the expectation? Your notion of relaxation?

- Then, share a memory from your childhood about a family trip, or, if you are a parent, an experience you have had travelling with your children. Or maybe your family had an annual travel ritual, such as visiting cousins or camping. What memories do you have of such travels?
Students Write Their Own Travel Narratives

- After having read a number of travel narratives, and after having analyzed a work of travel literature, students are ready to write their own travel narrative.

- Additional freewriting prompts to help them develop ideas:
  - Describe an insight you have had while travelling (thoughtful or even a humorous).
  - Describe a place that had a particularly strong impact on you as far as aesthetics or meaning.
  - Describe an incident that occurred to you while travelling.

- These “seeds” of ideas might grow into a story.
Suggestions to Students from the Travel Narrative Assignment

- “You have been studying many articles in our textbook that are primarily travel literature examples. Now you will get to write your own travel narrative, and remember, travel writing can be about anything beyond your own front door, as we have been told.

- The informative travel article that you wrote earlier this semester employed helpful guidance and factual information as well as some lively stories and anecdotes. Now, for your “literary” travel essay, you will be sharing a story. You will still weave in background information and interesting tidbits along the way, but your rhetorical purpose is not that of a “guidebook,” but that of sharing an experience. You don’t need to have experienced some great adventure to have an interesting essay. Think about striking moments of insight or interesting observations that have occurred to you. Have you ever “changed” as a result of a travel experience? What interactions have you had with others while travelling? Even the classic family car trip can generate stories that resonate with other readers.”
Short Travel Narrative Writing Ideas

“Google Earth-Create a Map of Your Life and Journeys” workshop by Devon Adams

“Postcards Activity” suggested by Heather Hoyt, ASU instructor. Brief writings to fit on postcards, usually short anecdotes or observations.
Benefits of Travel Writing

- Student interest in reading is enhanced, as many students prefer the “real life” stories presented in travel literature.
- Male and female students are equally engaged, due to the variety of travel writers and topics.
- Global awareness and engagement is encouraged.
- Sensitivity to various cultures within the U.S. and abroad is modeled.
- Students of varying economic backgrounds can learn about other cultures and places despite not having the opportunity to travel great distances.
- Since travel writing also includes “local” travel topics, students develop a greater “sense of place” about their own communities.
- As travel writers include lots of background materials in their writings, students learn geography, history, languages, economics, forms of transportation, customs and traditions, and even research strategies.
- Students gain an understanding of literary features as well as rhetorical features of travel writing.
- Students enjoy the range of emotions expressed in travel writing, as some authors tell humorous anecdotes while others show how they faced fears during physical challenges or learned something about themselves in a new setting.
- Since travel writing appears in many forms, ranging from articles and books to weblogs, webzines, television programs, documentaries, and You-tube videos, it seems more relevant to today’s multimedia-loving students.
- Students become more familiar with technology, using programs such as GoogleEarth.
- Reading travel writing can also spark student writing. All students have experienced some form of travel, even if just a family car trip to a neighboring town to visit relatives. Students are often eager to create their own narratives or act as reporters and tell about an interesting place in their community.
Conclusion, or Bon Voyage…

“Travel and change of place impart new vigor to the mind.” – Seneca

“The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one’s own country as a foreign land.” – G. K. Chesterton

With their curiosity sparked, students might be motivated to continue their explorations with reading and writing.