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# Practice Essay

Rhetorical Analysis – Michelle Obama



## Practice Essay

### Assignment Instructions

#### Overview

- **Write a short essay** in response to the assigned prompt.
- Then **evaluate three essays written by other students** in response to the same prompt.
- Then, finally, **evaluate your own essay** by comparing it to the other essays.

#### Step-by-Step

1. Review the rubric.
2. Study the prompt.
3. Read (and annotate) the text(s).
4. Write a short essay in response to the prompt (~ 400–500 words).
5. Read (and annotate) the three essays written by other students.
6. Fill out the scoring sheet, writing some specific notes about the essays to explain your choices.

#### Outcome

**On discussion day, you should have the following on your desk when class begins:** (1) the prompt with the text(s), (2) your essay, (3) the other student essays, (4) the rubric, and (5) your scoring sheet.

## Rhetorical Analysis

6 points

Michelle Obama was the First Lady of the United States during the presidential administration of her husband, Barack Obama (2009–2017). During that administration, she led programs including the Reach Higher Initiative, which encourages students to continue their education after high school. One way it does so is by supporting high school counselors' efforts to get students into college. On January 6, 2017, Obama gave her final speech as First Lady at an event honoring outstanding school counselors. The following passage is an excerpt from that speech. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Obama makes to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the United States.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer's rhetorical choices.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.



Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Thesis (0–1 points)	<b>0 points</b> For any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no defensible thesis.</li> <li>The intended thesis only restates the prompt.</li> <li>The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim.</li> <li>There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt.</li> </ul>	<b>1 point</b> Responds to the prompt with a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	<b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only restate the prompt.</li> <li>Fail to address the rhetorical choices the writer of the passage makes.</li> <li>Describe or repeat the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense.</li> </ul> <b>Examples that do not earn this point:</b> <b>Restate the prompt</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“In 2017, then First Lady Michelle Obama delivered her final speech as First Lady at an event honoring school counselors.”</i></li> </ul> <b>Make a claim, but do not address the writer’s rhetorical choices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“In her 2017 speech to school counselors, Michelle Obama set high expectations for her audience, the young people of America.”</i></li> </ul> <b>Repeat provided information from the passage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Michelle Obama claims in her speech that ‘our glorious diversity’ is what ‘makes us who we are.’”</i></li> </ul>	<b>Responses that earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt <u>and</u> clearly articulate a defensible thesis about the rhetorical choices Obama makes to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the United States.</li> </ul> <b>Examples that earn this point:</b> <b>Present a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> <li></li> <li></li> </ul>
	<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity.</li> <li>The thesis may be anywhere within the response.</li> <li>For a thesis to be defensible, the passage must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn’t do so to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning.</li> </ul>	



Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria				
Row B Evidence AND Commentary (0–4 points)	<b>0 points</b> Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.	<b>1 point</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides evidence that is mostly general.  <b>AND</b>  <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student’s argument.	<b>2 points</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides some specific, relevant evidence.  <b>AND</b>  <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.	<b>3 points</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.  <b>AND</b>  <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning. <b>AND</b> Explains how at least one rhetorical choice in the passage contributes to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.	<b>4 points</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.  <b>AND</b>  <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning. <b>AND</b> Explains how multiple rhetorical choices in the passage contribute to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.
	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>				
	<b>Typical responses that earn 0 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are incoherent or do not address the prompt.</li> <li>May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 1 point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tend to focus on summary or description of a passage rather than specific details or techniques.</li> <li>Mention rhetorical choices with little or no explanation.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 2 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities.</li> <li>May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument.</li> <li>May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim.</li> <li>Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 3 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.</li> <li>Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument.</li> <li>Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims.</li> <li>Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 4 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.</li> <li>Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument.</li> <li>Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained.</li> <li>Explain how the writer’s use of rhetorical choices contributes to the student’s interpretation of the passage.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row.</li> <li>To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same rhetorical choice if each instance further contributes to the argument, purpose, or message of the passage.</li> </ul>					



Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Sophistication (0–1 points)	<b>0 points</b> Does not meet the criteria for one point.	<b>1 point</b> Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.
	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>	
	<b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attempt to contextualize the text, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>In a world where . . .</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time . . .</i>”).</li> <li>Only hint at or suggest other arguments (“<i>While some may argue that . . .</i>” OR “<i>Some people say . . .</i>”).</li> <li>Examine individual rhetorical choices but do not examine the relationships among different choices throughout the text.</li> <li>Oversimplify complexities in the text.</li> <li>Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance their analysis.</li> </ul>	<b>Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explaining the significance or relevance of the writer’s rhetorical choices (given the rhetorical situation).</li> <li>Explaining a purpose or function of the passage’s complexities or tensions.</li> <li>Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.</li> </ol>
	<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the argument, not merely a phrase or reference.</li> </ul>	





## Question 2

**Suggested time—40 minutes**

(This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Michelle Obama was the First Lady of the United States during the presidential administration of her husband, Barack Obama (2009–2017). During that administration, she led programs including the Reach Higher Initiative, which encourages students to continue their education after high school. One way it does so is by supporting high school counselors' efforts to get students into college. On January 6, 2017, Obama gave her final speech as First Lady at an event honoring outstanding school counselors. The following passage is an excerpt from that speech. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Obama makes to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the United States.

In your response you should do the following:

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- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Line [A]s I end my time in the White House, I can think  
of no better message to send our young people in my  
last official remarks as First Lady. So, for all the  
5 young people in this room and those who are  
watching, know that this country belongs to you—to  
all of you, from every background and walk of life. If  
you or your parents are immigrants, know that you are  
part of a proud American tradition—the infusion of  
new cultures, talents and ideas, generation after  
10 generation, that has made us the greatest country on  
earth.

If your family doesn't have much money, I want  
you to remember that in this country, plenty of folks,  
including me and my husband—we started out with  
15 very little. But with a lot of hard work and a good  
education, anything is possible—even becoming  
President. That's what the American Dream is all  
about.

If you are a person of faith, know that religious  
20 diversity is a great American tradition, too. In fact,  
that's why people first came to this country—to  
worship freely. And whether you are Muslim,  
Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh—these religions are  
teaching our young people about justice, and  
25 compassion, and honesty. So I want our young people  
to continue to learn and practice those values with  
pride. You see, our glorious diversity—our diversities

of faiths and colors and creeds—that is not a threat to  
who we are, it makes us who we are. So the young  
30 people here and the young people out there: Do not  
ever let anyone make you feel like you don't matter,  
or like you don't have a place in our American  
story—because you do. And you have a right to be  
exactly who you are.

35 But I also want to be very clear: This right isn't just  
handed to you. No, this right has to be earned every  
single day. You cannot take your freedoms for  
granted. Just like generations who have come before  
you, you have to do your part to preserve and protect  
40 those freedoms. And that starts right now, when  
you're young.

Right now, you need to be preparing yourself to  
add your voice to our national conversation. You need  
to prepare yourself to be informed and engaged as a  
45 citizen, to serve and to lead, to stand up for our proud  
American values and to honor them in your daily  
lives. And that means getting the best education  
possible so you can think critically, so you can  
express yourself clearly, so you can get a good job  
50 and support yourself and your family, so you can be a  
positive force in your communities.

And when you encounter obstacles—because I  
guarantee you, you will, and many of you already  
have—when you are struggling and you start thinking



55 about giving up, I want you to remember something  
that my husband and I have talked about since we first  
started this journey nearly a decade ago, something  
that has carried us through every moment in this  
White House and every moment of our lives, and that  
60 is the power of hope—the belief that something better  
is always possible if you’re willing to work for it and  
fight for it.

It is our fundamental belief in the power of hope  
that has allowed us to rise above the voices of doubt  
and division, of anger and fear that we have faced in  
65 our own lives and in the life of this country. Our hope  
that if we work hard enough and believe in ourselves,  
then we can be whatever we dream, regardless of the  
limitations that others may place on us. The hope that  
70 when people see us for who we truly are, maybe, just  
maybe they, too, will be inspired to rise to their best  
possible selves.

That is the hope of students like Kyra<sup>1</sup> who fight to

discover their gifts and share them with the world. It’s  
75 the hope of school counselors like Terri<sup>2</sup> and all these  
folks up here who guide those students every step of  
the way, refusing to give up on even a single young  
person. Shoot, it’s the hope of my—folks like my dad  
who got up every day to do his job at the city water  
80 plant; the hope that one day, his kids would go to  
college and have opportunities he never dreamed of.

That’s the kind of hope that every single one of  
us—politicians, parents, preachers—all of us need to  
be providing for our young people. Because that is  
85 what moves this country forward every single  
day—our hope for the future and the hard work that  
hope inspires.

<sup>1</sup> a student who worked with school counselor Terri  
Tchorzynski

<sup>2</sup> Terri Tchorzynski, the 2017 National School Counselor  
of the Year and honoree of the event





In her last speech, Michelle Obama uses comparing and contrasting to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the United States.

She compares and relates to her and her husband's life leading up to their spot in the White House to an ordinary citizen. She expresses how they started with very little and with very hard work and time, they were able to work their way up to becoming the President and First Lady of the United States, which is what the American Dream is all about. Many ordinary, and even poorer, United States citizens coming from all different backgrounds and religions can do what they did through hard work and education. She states, "If your family doesn't have much money, I want you to remember that in this country, plenty of folks, including me and my husband---we started out with very little. But with a lot of hard work and a good education, anything is possible---even becoming President. That's what the American Dream is all about." She compares to life to an average citizen's life to actively display how they are capable of doing exactly what her and her husband did, while trying to encourage those people to work hard to get there, putting in effort and continuing their education after high school.



Former First Lady Michelle Obama was known for programs and projects that focused on the youth of the United States. Things that would help them become great citizens when they grow up. In her final speech as first lady, Obama uses repetition, emotional appeals and allusions to convey her message about her expectations and hope for young people in the US.

Former first lady Obama expresses her message about her hopes and expectations for young people by using allusions and emotional appeals. For example, she alludes to the pilgrims' reason for coming to the new world in paragraph three when she discusses the tradition of American religious diversity. This allusion is important because it provides an explanation for why we have the freedom of religion and why America is so religiously diverse, because people came here as a fresh start to be away from religious persecution and to practice and believe in whatever they want to believe in. It's important because it explains to her audience of young people that they do not have to be afraid of what they believe in because those differing religions contribute to the makeup of the nation. It exemplifies that part of the rich diversity of the United States is religious diversity; it makes the citizens of this nation who they are and it's important because without the US wouldn't be what it is and the ideas and concepts that are shared wouldn't be shared if there was no religious diversity. Obama also uses emotional appeals when she says, "If your family didn't have much money, I want you to remember that in this country plenty of folks..... started out with very little." This appeal is important because it illustrates how not only is she relating to her audience but also how other people relate with them as well. Her use of appeal in this sentence shows the audience that they are not alone when it comes to things that there are many other people who go through the same things. It's important to her audience of young people who may believe that they are less than because it shows them that they can get just as far as she has. Which conveys her message because it provides her audience hope that no matter the situation with hard work they can do anything they put their minds to and achieve their goals.

Obama also uses repetition to convey her message as well. For example, when she says, "If you.." or "If your..." The use of repetition is important because it emphasizes all the different potential characteristics or circumstances people could be going through. The use of repetition is important because it shows how Obama appeals to everyone, how her message is for everyone not one particular group of people but everyone. Which is important to her audience of young people because young people often have thoughts and questions on whether or not something applies to them or if they are included or a part of something. The repetition shows to them that they are included that this message applies to them and that her hope and expectations for are applied to them. That she's extending that hope and those expectations to every young person out there. She also uses repetition of the word "you" throughout her speech. The repeating of the word you is important because it directs the speech back to the audience. It helps to convey the expectation part of her message. It emphasizes that as young people they are the next leaders, the next doctors, the next lawyers etc and emphasizes as they the next generation of leaders that they need to prepare themselves for the challenges ahead but still also be proponents of change. Be the people who fix things, discover new things and make the United States a more free, and just nation by being an engaged citizen. Another example of repetition she uses is the phrase, "the hope..". The repetition of this phrase is important because it extends hope and encouragement that they will actively try to make their communities a better place. The repetition of this phrase is important because it illustrates to her audience of young people the hope she has for them. It shows them that she hopes they carry on like their ancestors and the people before them in being people of positive change. It displays to them not only the kind of hope she has but that everyone should have, despite their title, status, or occupation. That everyone should have hope and be hopeful that they can be proponents of change in their communities and their nation.



A strong powerful woman gave a push to the future generation of America. First lady Michelle Obama gave a speech in her final days in administration to encourage students to continue their education after high school. While speaking to the students at their high school Michelle uses a call to action, and broad speaking to relate and push these students.

Michelle states in her speech "...This right isn't just handed to you..." she makes it very clear to these students that this "right" is not easy to come about and takes lots of hard work. She reminds them that you will fail and you cannot take freedoms for granted. But that you need to think of this journey now, you need to plan and make sure that you can be successful when it comes to that point in life. "And that means getting the best education possible..." she states telling them to get engaged with this American freedom; resulting in a good job, being able to support your family, and being a positive force, as she states in paragraph 5.

This first lady wants all students to feel as though they can have a higher education after high school. She never pinpoints one social group or is directly talking to them, making each students feel like they have a chance at success after grade school. She is friendly and keeps everyone in mind, Michelle relates to everyone, even people of many religions, telling them they too can continue their learning of values, "So I want our young people to continue to learn and practice those values with pride." No one should miss out on education in Michelle Obama's eyes.

Obstacles, problems, money issues and all these experiences can be faced throughout schooling. But Michelle Obama wants you to know that nothing is impossible, that every minority has the chance to have a higher life. She pushes us to take that step now to prepare and not let any problem at hand stop you from trying, all students deserve and should have a education after high school.

## Scoring Sheet

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Circle one number in each category.*

Essay	Thesis	Evidence & Commentary	Sophistication	Total Score <i>Six points possible.</i>
<b>1</b>	0   1	0   1   2   3   4	0   1	
<i>Notes:</i>				
<b>2</b>	0   1	0   1   2   3   4	0   1	
<i>Notes:</i>				
<b>3</b>	0   1	0   1   2   3   4	0   1	
<i>Notes:</i>				
<b>Your Essay</b>	0   1	0   1   2   3   4	0   1	
<i>Notes:</i>				

