

Pathos

Pathos Definition

Pathos is a quality of an experience in life, or a work of art, that stirs up emotions of pity, sympathy, and sorrow. Pathos can be expressed through words, pictures, or even with gestures of the body.

Pathos is an important tool of [persuasion](#) in arguments. Pathos is a method of convincing people with an [argument](#) drawn out through an emotional response. Analyzing examples of pathos, one would come to the conclusion that it differs from other “ingredients of persuasion,” namely “[ethos](#)” and “[logos](#).” Ethos means convincing others through the credibility of a persuader, while logos is a method to convince others by employing logic and reason.

Common Examples of Pathos

For a better understanding of the subject, let us examine a few pathos examples from daily conversations:

“If we don’t leave this place soon, we’ll be yelling for help. There’s no one to help us here, let’s get out of here and live.” – This statement evokes emotions of fear.

The “Made in America” label on various products sold in America tries to enhance sales by appealing to customers’ sense of patriotism.

Ads encouraging charitable donations show small children living in pathetic conditions, to evoke pity in people.

Referring to a country as “the motherland” stirs up patriotic feelings in individuals living in that country or state.

A soft, instrumental symphony may arouse people emotionally.

Examples of Pathos in Literature

Let us turn to literature to trace some examples of pathos:

Example #1: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (By Mark Twain)

Consider this excerpt from chapter 8 of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*:

“He had meant the best in the world, and been treated like a dog—like a very dog. She would be sorry someday—maybe when it was too late. Ah, if he could only die TEMPORARILY!”

Here, Tom arouses feelings of pity in readers' minds by telling how the girl, whom he loved, had treated him like an animal, despite his honest feelings for her. He wishes he had died and then she would feel sorry for him.

Example #2: *Pride and Prejudice* (By Jane Austen)

Jane Austen's “Pride and Prejudice” is well known for its pathos. Mr. Collins' confession to Elizabeth that he wants her to be his future partner evokes feelings of sympathy in readers, as they feel an emotional intensity in his proposal.

“Believe me, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that your modesty adds to your other perfections. But you can hardly doubt the object of my [discourse](#), however your feminine delicacy may lead you to dissemble. For, as almost as soon as I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my future life!”

Example #3: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

Consider this excerpt from Act V of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*:

“Then she is well, and nothing can be ill.
Her body sleeps in Capels' monument,
And her immortal part with angels lives.
I saw her laid low in her kindred's vault ”

Romeo's servant Balthasar invokes pity among the [audience](#), when he informs Romeo – who was waiting impatiently to hear about Juliet – that Juliet is dead and is buried in her family's vault. We feel sorry for the untimely death of Juliet and her heartbroken Romeo.

Example #4: *Ol' Man River* (By Paul Robeson)

These lines are taken from *Ol' Man River*, a [lyric](#) composed by Paul Robeson:

“Darkies work on de Mississippi
Darkies work while de white folks play”

We feel overcome by pity for Black Americans [“Darkies”] who were enslaved to White Americans [“white folks”]. The [contrast](#) of the words “work” and “play” shows the social disparity between the two races.

Example #5: *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* (By Maya Angelou)

In Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, pathos is created by presenting a contrast between “the free bird” and “a caged bird.”

“The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the **grave** of dreams
his shadow **shouts** on a nightmare **scream**
his wings are **clipped** and his feet are **tied**
so he opens his throat to sing.”

In this excerpt, we see the words in bold above are associated with a bird in a cage, which makes us feel pity toward that miserable bird.

Function of Pathos

We humans are emotional beings, and writers know it very well. They introduce pathos in their works to touch upon our delicate senses of pity, sympathy, sorrow, trying to develop an emotional connection with readers.

In addition, emotions are part of real life. Thus, by giving pathos expression in their works, writers bring their narratives, characters, and themes closer to real life. Furthermore, the use of pathos by a debater in an argument appeals to people emotionally, making it a tool to convince people and change their opinions.

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