

## AP Language and Composition Summer Reading

Your summer work is intended to bridge your work from Honors English 200 and prepare you for the first month of AP Language. Summer reading is not just one assignment; it drives what we do to start the class and is essential to your success in the course's first quarter.

### **Assignment: Commentaries on Rhetorical Choices**

In English classes thus far, you have undoubtedly studied choices that writers make. Your teachers might have called them stylistic choices, or literary devices, but when an author uses these tools to persuade his audience of something, they can be called rhetorical choices. Writers employ these choices to heighten the effectiveness of the messages. This summer you will study the rhetorical choices with which you are most familiar: diction, choice of detail, figurative language, and syntax.

**Diction:** The author's word choice, focusing on the connotation of words.

**Choice of Detail:** The details an author chooses to include or exclude.

**Figurative Language:** Metaphor, personification, simile, analogy, hyperbole, and understatement.

**Syntax:** The arrangement of words in sentences. Consider the length of a sentence: is it overly long? Short? Punctuated unusually?

Keep in mind: When noticing rhetorical devices in your reading, consider the *effect* of the rhetorical device, what it reveals about the author's tone or how it contributes to the overall meaning within the text.

**Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*:** This text is a critical look at life for those trying to live on minimum wage. In order to discover what this is like, Ehrenreich goes "undercover" and attempts to survive while working minimum-wage jobs. Her criticism of the system is often clearly stated, but I want you to observe how rhetorical choices also reveal her critical tone. When you observe rhetorical choices that reveal her tone, make note of them (with Post-Its or in a notebook). After each chapter (Chapters 1-3 and the Evaluation), review your choices, select what you consider to be the most powerful rhetorical choice(s) and write a one-page commentary (analysis) of that choice or those choices for each section. Your goal is to explain how the choices reveal, illustrate, or support Ehrenreich's critical tone. Your one-page commentary could focus on one passage that employs several rhetorical choices (see attached model), a pattern that you find (three powerful images, four metaphors, etc.) or your selection of one or a collection of powerful choices.

**On the first day of school,** you will bring a total of four one-page commentaries for *Nickel and Dimed* which will count as a test grade. If you have any questions over the summer, please feel free to contact Mrs. Bowden at: [nbowden@rutherfordschools.org](mailto:nbowden@rutherfordschools.org)

**Model Commentary:**  
**Connecting Rhetorical Devices (metaphor, diction) to Ehrenreich's Critical Tone**

*Note: In this commentary, we have chosen to focus on one passage that contains several rhetorical devices, which is one of your options. Also, notice the somewhat casual tone of this commentary—the use of “I” is okay, as is taking risks in your interpretation of the text (the offal/awful connection in this commentary, for example, might be a reach!).*

Ehrenreich describes a kitchen in which she is working this way:

“The kitchen is a cavern, a stomach leading to the lower intestine that is the garbage and dishwashing area, from which issue bizarre smells combining the edible and the offal: creamy carrion, pizza barf, and that unique and enigmatic Jerry’s scent, citrus fart.” (29)

This unpleasant extended metaphor clearly reveals Ehrenreich’s distaste for her place of employment. By comparing the kitchen to a cavernous stomach, she makes it seem dark, damp, and unpleasant. This effect is emphasized by continuing from the stomach to the lower intestine which, of course, is where human waste accumulates. One may not want to hear about the disgusting parts of an eating establishment, but Ehrenreich graphically confronts the flaws in this restaurant’s kitchen.

The smells here are a disgusting juxtaposition of pleasant and unpleasant: creamy, pizza, and citrus are linked to carrion, barf, and farts. So, this restaurant attempts to offer pleasant foods like pizza or creamy dishes; they even attempt to clean, as evidenced by the citrus smell, most likely coming from, I’m guessing, dishwashing soap. However, any possible pleasantries are squashed by barf, fart, and even carrion, a word that means rotting flesh. That choice of “carrion” implies that there’s not a lot of washing in the dishwashing area, if plates of discarded food are allowed to sit long enough to rot! And, the citrus of the dishwashing soap is apparently not enough to eradicate an ever-present fart smell, which she identifies as “Jerry’s scent,” a scent that doesn’t just exist, but *belongs* to this restaurant. Speaking of this fart scent, she calls it “unique” with a citrus-smelling quality, but also “enigmatic,” meaning that the fart smell is puzzling or inexplicable. This is a disturbing description: One does not want to be puzzled by the smells in a restaurant—that is not appetizing.

Informal diction, in particular “barf” and “fart,” greatly magnify her disgust with this restaurant. She uses lowly, slang-like terms in order to convey that this place is lowly. Ehrenreich is a writer, one who obviously has access to a more sophisticated term for “barf,” but she doesn’t use it—replacing the word “barf” with “vomit,” for example, wouldn’t suit her critical purpose; using the word vomit would, in fact, not sound as gross, it would be too euphemistic, too toned-down. It wouldn’t adequately convey her disgust. She is playing with other words as well: she pairs the edible with the “offal,” a word that refers to waste or rubbish, but also sounds like “awful,” helping to further her criticism.

Ehrenreich’s purpose in *Nickel and Dimed* is to criticize the working conditions of the low-wage worker. In this instance, she is exposing the working conditions of restaurant workers, in particular, waitresses. Since most restaurant patrons never see the kitchen or dishwashing area, she is describing a mostly unknown world to the reader. And her very bleak description of this place, a description that includes odd juxtapositions of words and inexplicable smells, is one that would discourage anyone from eating, let alone working, in that restaurant. So, in this instance, her attitude towards this restaurant and its working conditions goes beyond critical—her tone here is contemptuous!