

### Assignment 3: Putting Rhetorical Analysis to Use

You and your classmates have worked through a short rhetorical analysis of Rita Dove's "Parsley" together. Now, it's time for you to start working on a rhetorical analysis of a longer text. In order to continue this work, we'll be turning to Joe Sacco's comic "The Underground War in Gaza," which originally appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* in 2003.

First, read and take notes on Sacco's comic, which you can find in the *Reader* on pages 151-154. As you read, make marks in the margin or on a separate piece of paper when you notice aspects of the comic that you find interesting or surprising. All you need to do at this point is allow yourself to accumulate and record any observations you make about the text you are reading.

You might begin by observing choices that Sacco made as an artist and a writer in this comic that seem different to you than other comics. What strikes you as noteworthy or significant about how the comic is arranged on the page, how it's drawn, the way that language that is used? What is surprising about this comic? You might also note what doesn't stand out: What just seemed natural to you in the text, unsurprising, just how things are? Noting what you take for granted can also help you understand how and why you interpret a text as you do. In your notes, try to be as specific as possible about the places in the text where you made these observations. These references will help you participate in class discussions and compose your responses to Sacco's comic.

When you're done reading and taking notes, carefully look back over your notes and any markings you've made on the text. Based on your reading and your observations, write a response of three or more paragraphs that explains your initial understanding of Sacco's comic. You should refer back to the concepts about rhetoric (pages 2-12 in *The DK Handbook*) that you used for your previous assignment to help you create this response. What kind of purpose do you believe Joe Sacco had for making this comic? How do you know? What kinds of choices from your notes help you come to this conclusion? Similarly, how does Sacco's comic respond to particular "attitudes" that members of his audience might bring with them? What about those attitudes most concerns him, and where can you see evidence of that in his text? Finally, what do you know, from your reading and your own life experiences, about the context for this comic? Can you see any choices or strategies in your notes that might have been influenced by this context?

On a separate piece of paper, write one or two questions about the comic for you and your colleagues to pursue in class discussion.

Bring your notes, your writing, and your questions, along with the required course texts, to our next class meeting.

## Assignment 4: Thinking About Choices

### PART 1: MAKING A COMIC

In class today, you and your classmates worked with pages 132-141 and 170-173 in *The DK Handbook* to discuss more about how you might analyze visual texts, specifically “The Underground War in Gaza” by Joe Sacco. In addition, you’ve spent some time considering how and why Sacco might have made some of the composing decisions he did in his comic. In order to keep thinking about these choices, I’m going to ask you to make some composing decisions of your own.

For this part of the assignment, please create a 3-6 frame comic that depicts a news event that is interesting or important to you. You could choose a local event, such as one you read about in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, or you could look at national or international news in the *New York Times* or other major news outlets. Whatever you choose, you should try to use your comic to represent as much of the situation as possible, as well as what is important to you about this event.

You can create this comic by hand on paper, or use digital programs to help you illustrate it if you know how. Think carefully about how you want to represent this news event with the materials that are available to you. Remember, “Every choice is a strategy affecting how your audience responds” (*The DK Handbook* page 10). What kinds of composing strategies will work best for your rhetorical situation?

### PART 2: REFLECTING ON CHOICES

Once you’ve put the finishing touches on your comic, please write a response of three paragraphs or more that addresses the following questions:

1. First, write about your process for making the comic. How and why did you make some of the composing decisions you did for the comic? Why did you use some strategies and not others? How do you connect these decisions to your purpose, context, audience, and medium?
2. If you had more time or different materials, how might you choose to change or revise this comic? What were you most satisfied with? What needed more work?
3. Look back at your notes and observations about Joe Sacco’s comic. Discuss the similarities and differences between the choices you made in your comic and Sacco’s choices in “The Underground War in Gaza.” Try to be as specific as possible about the choices you’re noticing.
4. Can you account for the similarities and differences in choices between Sacco’s comic and your own? Why, given his purpose, context, audience, and medium, might Sacco have made some different choices? Why did you choose different writing strategies given your own rhetorical situation? What about the similarities?

Bring a hard copy of your comic, your response, and all of your course texts to our next meeting.

### **Assignment 5: Interpreting a Comic Using Rhetorical Analysis**

So far, you've spent time looking carefully at the composing choices of a writer in order to start connecting them to his rhetorical situation. And, you've had a chance to make some of your own composing choices to help you consider how and why an author of a comic might decide to use specific writing strategies. Now, you'll use that work to help you produce an interpretation of Joe Sacco's comic "The Underground War in Gaza."

For this assignment, use all of the thinking and writing you have done thus far to compose a two-page response that articulates your sense of Joe Sacco's purpose for writing his comic. This purpose should be something about moving people with a particular set of values, beliefs, and concerns to consider something they might not have otherwise. Thinking about some of the following questions should help you get started:

What might be motivating Sacco to write the comic he has written? What is it about the time he is living in? What historical events or changes are shaping how he sees the world and might be affecting what he wants to do with this writing? How does Sacco imagine his readers? How does he want to touch, reach, or affect them? What might he want the people who read it to take away from it? What is it about his readers that leads him to have the purpose he has, given the time he is writing in? And why try to accomplish that through a comic, instead of some other medium? What kinds of changes might he be seeking by writing the comic?

As you write about Sacco's purpose, use the observations you have made about his writing choices to help you explain how and why you are interpreting his purpose in this way. Looking back at your notes, choose five major strategies that Sacco employs in the comic. Write several sentences about each of these strategies that connect them to your sense of his purpose. For each choice, ask, "Why might he have done that?," "How might that further his purpose?," "Given what he seems concerned about in the world around him, and what he sees in his audience, why might he have chosen to do that?," and "What effects do you think his choices might have on his readers?"?

Bring your writing and your course texts to our next class meeting.

**In-class Activity for Assignment 6: Working with Interpretive Questions**

This activity is designed to get you thinking about how you can use the process of rhetorical analysis to help you make a larger critical interpretation of a text. Interpretive questions can be useful for moving from where you are now—making initial observations and interpretations of a text—to shaping and pursuing academic questions that you find interesting, provocative, and fruitful.

Eventually, you will develop and answer your own interpretive questions, but for now, focus on using the work we have done with Sacco's comic and rhetorical analysis to discuss the questions below. In particular, look for questions that do not seem to fit with your current sense of Sacco's comic and what you believe he is trying to accomplish in it. Look for questions that seem to go in a different direction than you have been going or point to elements of the text to which you have not paid much attention.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Sacco's piece draws on the conventions of two different mediums—comics and journalism (or news reporting). Based on your reading, why do you think he chose to include both of these types of conventions in his text? What does this particular combination allow Sacco to do? How do our expectations about what is usually expressed in a "comic" or a "news report" shape our reading experience?
2. It is easy to identify two major groups with something at stake—or "stakeholders"—depicted in Sacco's comic: The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the Palestinian civilians living along the Egyptian border. What other invisible or implied stakeholders might we be able to identify in a closer examination? How are these groups represented in the comic through language and image? What differences do you note between the way stakeholders are portrayed, and what can those differences tell you about Sacco's purpose, context, and audience?
3. In his comic, Sacco focuses on the borders and boundaries between places. The story takes place on the border between Palestine and Egypt, marked by a "25-foot-high metal wall." Many of the characters are upset about losing (or potentially losing) their private homes, the space that they claim as their own. And the IDF is very concerned about underground tunnels that might allow terrorists or smugglers to move between demarcated spaces in secret. How does Sacco represent these borders on the page through language and image? How does he want us to feel about these borders? What evidence do you have?
4. Sacco states in the preface to his book *Journalism*, in which this comic was reprinted, that although he believes comic drawings are interpretive and subjective, "The journalist's standard obligations—to report accurately, to get quotes right, and to check claims—still pertain" (xii). How does Sacco employ strategies in his comic to help the reader find his text credible, believable, and fair? How do language and image work together to help him accomplish this? Are there ways that Sacco is able to establish his credibility by using language and image together that wouldn't be possible without both?

### **Assignment 6: Developing a Critical Interpretive Essay**

In class today, you and your classmates discussed several interpretive questions about Joe Sacco's "The Underground War in Gaza," which hopefully helped you to think about the comic in new ways. Using what you have learned from this activity, your earlier rhetorical analysis, and all your thinking and writing thus far, choose one of those interpretive questions to pursue in a formal essay that creates a clear and coherent interpretation of the comic as a whole. How do Sacco's main strategies (the choices you identified in and explained in earlier assignments) fit together in order to accomplish his overall purpose, given his context and audience? Use your sense of Sacco's purpose to support the interpretation you offer of his comic. As you write, be sure to use specific evidence from "The Underground War in Gaza"—quotations, summaries, paraphrases, and images or descriptions of images.

Before you begin, read pages 20-21 in *The DK Handbook*. The writing you have been doing so far in this class has been to help you "figure out what you think, believe, or feel," or "composing to learn." In this essay assignment, you'll be "composing to communicate," using writing to help you "shape your ideas so that others can understand them." As a result, you'll need to pay attention to how you're using language to communicate your ideas to others. In part, this means you should attend to how others might interpret the Sacco text differently from you and take time to address what might matter to them. This also means that you should pay attention to the conventions that have developed over time in academic writing. For help with this, see Part 5 (Organizing) and Part 7 (Revising with Style) in *The DK Handbook*.

Bring your writing and your course texts to our next class meeting.