# Assertion, Evidence, Commentary:

# AP Writing Structure for Rhetorical Analysis

# The Chain Gang Show (Excerpt) By Brent Staples

ANY ANIMAL WITH TEETH ENOUGH will chew off its leg to escape a trap. Human beings behaved similarly when chain gang imprisonment -- a successor to slavery -- swept through the labor-starved South during Reconstruction. Beaten and driven like maltreated beasts, shackled to one another around the clock, prisoners turned to self-mutilation to make themselves useless for work. They slashed their bodies, broke their own legs, crippled themselves by cutting their tendons.

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| **ASSERTION** (What do you claim about the author’s use of language? What is his purpose/desired effect?) | **EVIDENCE**  (Where is it in the text? Always cite a page, paragraph, or line number.) | **COMMENTARY**  (Why is the evidence *significant and effective* for the author’s purpose? How does it help him to convey his purpose?) |
| Staples effectively uses the rhetorical mode of **comparison** throughout the paragraph to convey the horrors of chain gangs. | “Any animal with teeth enough will chew off its leg to escape a trap” (Par. 1)  “Beaten and driven like maltreated beasts, shackled to on another around the clock, prisoners turned to self-mutilation to make themselves useless for work”  (Par. 1) | Significance:  Staples’ diction (word choice) **conveys** the grisly truth about prisoners on chain gangs, particularly “chew off its leg” and “self-mutilation”  Effect:  This choice al**lows** readers to understand that chain gangs brutally dehumanize their members  and  **elicits** feelings of horror, anger, and/or sympathy from readers |

**\*\*\*Important Note: You may make multiple assertions about a single passage of writing. However, each assertion MUST be supported by at least two pieces of evidence directly from the passage. In general, unless pieces of evidence are doing the same thing in a passage, each piece of evidence should have its own commentary.\*\*\***

**Student Sample—Supporting Analysis Paragraph**

Assertion Evidence Commentary

Brent Staples’ effective use of the rhetorical mode of comparison allows him to convey the horrors of chain gangs. He begins his essay by explaining how “any animal with teeth enough will chew off its leg to escape a trap.” In an attempt to emphasize the dehumanizing treatment of the members of the chain gang, he connects the concept of the trapped animal to the chain gang members by referring to the men as “beaten and driven like maltreated beasts” who are willing to turn to “self-mutilation to make themselves useless for work.” Such a connection immediately allows the reader to understand the horror of the chain gangs as Staples sees it. These graphic details elicit emotions of sympathy for the men, and the reader begins to feel anger towards the institution that allows such a practice; the reader is then prepared for Staples’ message.

*Read and analyze the following excerpt. Then fill in the chart.*

“This is it, this is it, this has to be it, there’s the school, there’s the school, there’s the garage, now we turn south.” To Perry, it seemed as though Dick were muttering jubilant mumbo-jumbo. They left the highway, sped through a deserted Holcomb, and crossed the Santa Fe tracks. “The bank, that must be the bank, now we turn west—see the trees? This is it, this has to be it.” The headlights disclosed a lane of Chinese elms; bundles of wind-blown thistle scurried across it. Dick doused the headlights, slowed down, and stopped until his eyes were adjusted to the moon-illuminated night. Presently, the car crept forward.

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| **ASSERTION (Task 1 from rhetoric notes)**  (What do you claim about the author’s use of language? What is his purpose?) | **EVIDENCE (Task 2 from rhetoric notes)**  (Where is it in the text?) | **COMMENTARY (Task 3 from rhetoric notes)**  (Why is the evidence *significant and effective* for the author’s purpose? How does it help him to convey his purpose?) |
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