# Assertion, Evidence, Commentary: AP Writing Structure

# 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?) | **EVIDENCE**  (Where is it in the text?) | **COMMENTARY**  (Why is it significant and effective for the author’s purpose?) |
| He effectively uses the rhetorical mode of comparison throughout the paragraph | “Any animal with teeth…trap” (Par. 1)  “Beaten and driven …useless for work”  (Par. 1) | The Evidence:  **Allows** readers to understand that chain gangs dehumanize their members  **Conveys** Staples’ seemingly negative opinion about the chain gangs  **Elicits** feelings of horror, anger, and/or sympathy from readers (appeal to pathos) |

**Rhetorical Analysis**

**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.