Rhetoric

For this sequence, students choose a public issue and write a persuasive essay putting forth their viewpoint. The authors explore their subjects, often in terms of their own personal life experiences, and address the concerns of those who feel differently. Though the essays in this section cover a broad range of topics—stem cell research, Proposition 8, driving laws for the elderly, financial education, social security, and offshore drilling—the authors propose a vision of the world they would like to see in the future.

Similarly, you will soon learn that a well-written and fully supported argument requires research both to support your own claims and to fairly depict opposing viewpoints. You will also learn to use the rhetorical aspects of ethos, pathos, and logos to persuade and connect with your chosen audience. Whatever topic you choose, it’s generally best to choose a focus that matters to you, something you want to understand better. Moreover, try not to approach your topic with a firmly held point-of-view. Rather, as you conduct research and learn about your topic, your position may shift. Rhetorical inquiry and engagement requires this kind of flexibility.
Protests are one of the primary forms of political expression in our modern democracy. What might this photo of an anti-Proposition 8 protest say about this form of political discourse? Notice the people—how they are dressed, what their body language is, the way people interact with each other, the types of people. Who is present in the picture and who is not? Consider the rest of the picture: how does the juxtaposition of people and this environment add meaning to the protest? Look at the traffic signs, buildings, etc. Lastly, what is the rhetoric of the individual signs held by the protestors? What do they say and how?