

Ethos: Worksheet

1. Nancy Mairs was an author living with multiple sclerosis. In 1986, Mairs wrote an essay entitled "On Being a Cripple." The opening paragraph reads:

The other day I was thinking of writing an essay on being a cripple. I was thinking hard in one of the stalls of the women's room in my office building, as I was shoving my shirt into my jeans and tugging up my zipper. Preoccupied, I flushed, picked up my book bag, took my cane down from the hook, and unlatched the door. So many movements unbalanced me, and as I pulled the door open I fell over backward, landing fully clothed on the toilet seat with my legs splayed in front of me: the old beetle-on-its-back routine. Saturday afternoon, the building deserted, I was free to laugh aloud as I wriggled back to my feet, my voice bouncing off the yellowish tiles from all directions. Had anyone been there with me, I'd have been still and faint and hot with chagrin. I decided that it was high time to write the essay.

- A. What is the main point Mairs is trying to make? What is she trying to convince the audience of in this excerpt?

- B. Underline any appeals to ethos used in the excerpt. Write whether each appeal is an example of a direct or indirect appeal next to the text in question.

- C. How does Mairs use ethos to help convince her audience of her main point?



2. Consider each of the following hypothetical arguments:

Mr. A. says, "You should vote for me for mayor. I have the support of several celebrities, even the best actors and actresses like Marilyn Monroe. It wouldn't be a smart choice to choose Ms. B, as she is a supporter of a losing sports team."

Ms. B. says, "You should vote for me for mayor. I have lived in this city my whole life, so I am aware of the problems we have. I have already begun meeting with the Town Board to outline policies that will increase access to education and remedy the city's dangerous roads."

- A. Which argument do you find to be more persuasive?

- B. Reread each of the arguments. Underline any appeals to ethos. Write whether each appeal is an example of a direct or indirect appeal next to the text in question.

- C. Evaluate each candidate's argument. Does one candidate use ethos more effectively than the other? How so?