

**“Facts You Did Not Know About Me”: Rhetoric, Persuasion, and Speaking in Character**

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**Grade Level:** University

**Time Frame:** 50 minutes

**Objective:** Students will create a list of “little-known facts” that a fictional or non-fictional character might use as a persuasive strategy in the creation of a public argument.

**Prior Knowledge and Skills:** Students will need a basic understanding of rhetorical strategies, rhetorical situation, and rhetorical appeals to complete this lesson. This lesson is designed as an introductory activity for a unit on public argument or persuasion.

**Required Materials:** Recording of Roger Bonair-Agard, “the all-black penguin speaks: 17 facts you did not know about me”; computer with audio/video playback capability. Recording is available on [voca](#), the Poetry Center’s online audio/video library.

### **Sequence of Activities**

**Introduction:** 10 minutes

Give students a brief introduction to **voca**, the Poetry Center’s online audio/video library. Introduce the idea of “character” in poetry: poets often speak in terms of an “I,” which may or may not be autobiographical. Persona poetry, for example, usually functions as a dramatic monologue in the voice of a specific character, and slam and performance poetry also frequently incorporate defined characters.

Have students view Roger Bonair-Agard’s “the all-black penguin speaks: 17 facts you did not know about me” on [voca](#).

**Discussion:** 10 minutes

Tell students that this poem frequently surprises viewers. Why is this? What does Bonair-Agard do in this poem to disrupt our expectations? How do these surprises help him to develop the penguin as a character in this poem?

Bonair-Agard uses this character to make some very specific points about the culture we live in. How would you characterize his argument and its rhetorical situation: what is his purpose, who is his audience, and what is the context? Why might the persona poem be useful in this rhetorical situation? What rhetorical strategies does Bonair-Agard use? In particular, why is the revelation of “facts you did not know about me” a powerful persuasive tool?

Split students into three groups. Play the poem again and have students listen for specific rhetorical appeals: Group 1 will focus on ethos, Group 2 on logos, and Group 3 on pathos.

Give students a few minutes to discuss their findings. Have students report to the group as a whole. How does Bonair-Agard deploy rhetorical appeals, and what effect do these appeals have on his audience?

**Writing Activity:** 20 minutes

Ask students to think of a character (fictional or non-fictional) who has a stake in a controversy. How (and to whom) might this person speak in order to make a public argument? Have students jot down the name of their character, the character’s audience, and a brief assessment of the tone the character might use given this audience and context.

Then have students write a list of 10 “facts you did not know about me” in the voice of this character. These facts should help to advance the character’s public argument; they should also be genuinely surprising to the character’s audience.

**Closing:** 10 minutes

Share student writing with the class.