Rhetoric – Ethos Only video, edited transcript

[0:00] Let's start out with ethos—the character or persona of the writer as perceived by the reader or the audience.

[0:10] Okay, maybe that doesn't help a whole lot, so let's break it down a little bit further. Ethos assures your reader or your audience that you know what you're talking about. You've done your research, you've earned your degrees, or you've experienced it yourself. You're an expert. You know exactly what you're talking about.

[0:28] Now let's take a look and see what Calvin has to say about this. And remember, these are tools of persuasion. You're trying to persuade someone to think or feel the way you do, or to act, or to get them to do something. So let's take a look at how Calvin handles ethos.

[0:47] What is he trying to persuade you of? "I say it's a fallacy that kids need 12 years of school. Three months is plenty." Now, obviously, he's three months into the first grade. How does he support this argument? He uses himself as an example or an expert. "Look at me! I'm smart. I don't need eleven and a half more years of school. It's a complete waste of my time."

[1:11] Now, Hobbes says, "How on earth did you get all the way to the bus stop with both feet through one pant leg?" "I fell down a lot." "Why? What's your point?" "Nothing, I was just curious."

[1:28] Now, Calvin is using ethos because he's using himself as an example. "I'm an expert. I'm three months into this school thing, and I can tell you as an expert that we don't need any more schooling. Eleven and a half more years is a complete waste of time." Is it a very good argument? Not really. Hobbes is like, "Yeah, you're so brilliant, you couldn't even put your pants on right."

[1:49] Okay, so let's take a look at ethos in a real-life situation. This was spoken by Sojourner Truth in 1851 at the Women's Convention in Akron. The Women's Convention in Akron was basically trying to give a platform for women's rights, and Sojourner Truth was an African-American. She was a freed slave at that point in time. And she was trying to say that not only do women need rights, but African-American women need rights even more right now.

[2:25] She says, "That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches and to have the best place everywhere. But nobody helps me into carriages or over mud puddles or gives me any best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me. Look at my arm. I've plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as any man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well. And ain't I a woman?"

[2:55] Now, what she's saying here is African-American women need rights even more right now than other women, and she uses herself as the perfect example of why. I would listen to her, wouldn't you?

[3:10] That is ethos—a great tool of persuasion by using yourself as an expert.