

"The Higher Education of Women," written in 1892, Anna Julia Cooper

For example, in the essay "The Higher Education of Women," written in 1892, Anna Julia Cooper, the daughter of a slave, argues that women (and specifically African-American women) should be highly educated. In this sense, her essay may be classified as a persuasive essay. But Cooper also shows how educating African American women would affect racial progress, so in this sense her essay may be seen as one of cause and effect, a type of expository writing that explains something. To make her case stronger, Cooper uses anecdotes from her own experience, making parts of the essay autobiographical. In this sense, the essay is narrative, because she is telling a story .

Cooper uses both the third-person and the first-person in her essay. To support her claims, she uses historical references, told in the third person:

Later on, during the Renaissance period, women were professors in mathematics, physics, metaphysics, and the classic languages in Bologna, Pavia, Padua, and Brescia. Olympia Fulvia Morata, of Ferrara, a most interesting character, whose magnificent library was destroyed in 1553 in the invasion of Schweinfurt by Albert of Brandenburg, had acquired a most extensive education. It is said that this wonderful girl gave lectures on classical subjects in her sixteenth year, and had even before that written several very remarkable Greek and Latin poems, and what is also to the point, she married a professor at Heidelberg, and became a *help-meet for him* (p. 62).

Cooper uses the first-person to give anecdotal evidence that supports her position. Born to a slave mother before the outbreak of the Civil War, She was too young to remember the war. In the early years of Reconstruction, she was able to attend school and train to become a teacher.

My readers will pardon my illustrating my point and also giving a reason for the fear that is in me, by a little bit of personal experience. When a child I was put into a school near home that professed to be normal and collegiate, i.e. to prepare teachers for colored youth, furnish candidates for the ministry, and offer collegiate training for those who should be ready for it (p. 76).

Cooper continued her education and went on to become one of the first African American women to earn a Ph.D. Over the course of her long life, she tirelessly spoke

out for women's rights along with the rights of African Americans. Part of that effort is contained in her writing and public lectures, which are an oral form of the essay.

The word **rhetoric** is derived from a Greek word meaning the "art of an orator." The ancient Greeks had a strong oral tradition long before anyone was able use written language for mass communication.

Anna Julia Cooper was schooled in the classics, and her writing reflects both the rhetorical tradition of logic and the use of classical references to make her points. Even if we are not familiar with all the references she uses, we can understand her point because she includes so many examples.

Read the following passage at the beginning of "The Higher Education of Women."

...The author [of the book] declares that woman can use the alphabet only as Moliere predicted...that they have no occasion to peruse Ovid's *Ars Amoris*, that Madame Guion would have been far more adorable had she remained a beautiful ignoramus as nature made her; that Ruth, Naomi, the Spartan woman, the Amazons, Penelope, Andromache, Lucretia, Joan of Arc, Petrarch's Laura, the daughters of Charlemagne, could not spell their names; while Sappho, Aspasia, Madame de Maintenon, and Madame de Stael could read altogether too well for their good; finally, that if women were once permitted to read Sophocles and work with logarithms, or to nibble at any side of the apple of knowledge, there would be an end forever to their sewing on buttons and embroidering slippers. ...

[Admitting women to college] was felt to be an experiment—a rather dangerous experiment—and was adopted with fear and trembling by the good fathers, who looked as if they had been caught secretly mixing explosive compounds and were guiltily expecting every moment to see the foundations under them shaken and rent and their fair superstructure shattered into fragments.

But the girls came, and there was no upheaval. They performed their tasks modestly and intelligently (pp. 48-50).

Cooper makes her case logically. She explicitly uses female as well as male historical examples of well-known people, including women who had an effect on the world, to show the hollowness of the argument that women should not be educated. She then continues to point out that when women did gain entrance to college, the dangers that had been predicted all turned out to be false. This progression of ideas is a logical

refutation of the idea that women should remain homemakers, leading implicitly to the conclusion that women should have the same opportunities for education as men.

Cooper used her rhetorical skills in her lectures as well as in her writing. She is one of many in a long line of Americans who made an art of their speeches, but she was one of the very few African American women to do so. Today, because of mass communication and technology, we have easy access to lectures and speeches. For example, we can listen to the speeches of people such as Martin Luther King, Jr., considered by many to have been a master of rhetoric.