**LANGUAGE ARTS 10**

**RHETORICAL ANALYSIS UNIT**

**CULMINATING ACTIVITY—RHETORICAL ANALYSIS**

What follows below are excerpts from President Barack Obama’s speech on March 7, 2015, commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the march over the Edmund Pettus bridge in Selma, Alabama. On that day 50 years ago, non-violent marchers planned to march from Selma to the state capital in Montgomery. The marchers were met by state troopers, and county deputies attacked the protesters with billy clubs and tear gas after they crossed the county line. The events of that day are considered among the most central of the Civil Rights movement.

**PART ONE**

For your culminating activity, you will read and annotate the speech below. Please be sure to mark any rhetorical devices you come across in your reading (there are many).

There are places, and moments in America where this nation’s destiny has been decided. Many are sites of war – Concord and Lexington, Appomattox and Gettysburg. Others are sites that symbolize the daring of America’s character – Independence Hall and Seneca Falls, Kitty Hawk and Cape Canaveral.

Selma is such a place.

In one afternoon fifty years ago, so much of our turbulent history – the stain of slavery and anguish of civil war; the yoke of segregation and tyranny of Jim Crow; the death of four little girls in Birmingham, and the dream of a Baptist preacher – met on this bridge.

It was not a clash of armies, but a clash of wills; a contest to determine the meaning of America.

…

The Americans who crossed this bridge were not physically imposing. But they gave courage to millions. They held no elected office. But they led a nation. They marched as Americans who had endured hundreds of years of brutal violence, and countless daily indignities – but they didn’t seek special treatment, just the equal treatment promised to them almost a century before.

What they did here will reverberate through the ages. Not because the change they won was preordained; not because their victory was complete; but because they proved that nonviolent change is possible; that love and hope can conquer hate.

…

That’s why Selma is not some outlier in the American experience. That’s why it’s not a museum or static monument to behold from a distance. It is instead the manifestation of a creed written into our founding documents:

“We the People…in order to form a more perfect union.”

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

These are not just words. They are a living thing, a call to action, a roadmap for citizenship and an insistence in the capacity of free men and women to shape our own destiny. For founders like Franklin and Jefferson, for leaders like Lincoln and FDR, the success of our experiment in self-government rested on engaging all our citizens in this work. That’s what we celebrate here in Selma. That’s what this movement was all about, one leg in our long journey toward freedom.

The American instinct that led these young men and women to pick up the torch and cross this bridge is the same instinct that moved patriots to choose revolution over tyranny. It’s the same instinct that drew immigrants from across oceans and the Rio Grande; the same instinct that led women to reach for the ballot and workers to organize against an unjust status quo; the same instinct that led us to plant a flag at Iwo Jima and on the surface of the Moon.

It’s the idea held by generations of citizens who believed that America is a constant work in progress; who believed that loving this country requires more than singing its praises or avoiding uncomfortable truths. It requires the occasional disruption, the willingness to speak out for what’s right and shake up the status quo.

That’s what makes us unique, and cements our reputation as a beacon of opportunity. Young people behind the Iron Curtain would see Selma and eventually tear down a wall. Young people in Soweto would hear Bobby Kennedy talk about ripples of hope and eventually banish the scourge of apartheid. Young people in Burma went to prison rather than submit to military rule. From the streets of Tunis to the Maidan in Ukraine, this generation of young people can draw strength from this place, where the powerless could change the world’s greatest superpower, and push their leaders to expand the boundaries of freedom.

They saw that idea made real in Selma, Alabama. They saw it made real in America.

Because of campaigns like this, a Voting Rights Act was passed. Political, economic, and social barriers came down, and the change these men and women wrought is visible here today in the presence of African-Americans who run boardrooms, who sit on the bench, who serve in elected office from small towns to big cities; from the Congressional Black Caucus to the Oval Office.

Because of what they did, the doors of opportunity swung open not just for African-Americans, but for every American. Women marched through those doors. Latinos marched through those doors. Asian-Americans, gay Americans, and Americans with disabilities came through those doors. Their endeavors gave the entire South the chance to rise again, not by reasserting the past, but by transcending the past.

What a glorious thing, Dr. King might say.

What a solemn debt we owe.

Which leads us to ask, just how might we repay that debt?

First and foremost, we have to recognize that one day’s commemoration, no matter how special, is not enough. If Selma taught us anything, it’s that our work is never done – the American experiment in self-government gives work and purpose to each generation.

Selma teaches us, too, that action requires that we shed our cynicism. For when it comes to the pursuit of justice, we can afford neither complacency nor despair.

…

Fellow marchers, so much has changed in fifty years. We’ve endured war, and fashioned peace. We’ve seen technological wonders that touch every aspect of our lives, and take for granted convenience our parents might scarcely imagine. But what has not changed is the imperative of citizenship, that willingness of a 26 year-old deacon, or a Unitarian minister, or a young mother of five, to decide they loved this country so much that they’d risk everything to realize its promise.

That’s what it means to love America. That’s what it means to believe in America. That’s what it means when we say America is exceptional.

For we were born of change. We broke the old aristocracies, declaring ourselves entitled not by bloodline, but endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights. We secure our rights and responsibilities through a system of self-government, of and by and for the people. That’s why we argue and fight with so much passion and conviction, because we know our efforts matter. We know America is what we make of it.

We are Lewis and Clark and Sacajawea – pioneers who braved the unfamiliar, followed by a stampede of farmers and miners, entrepreneurs and hucksters. That’s our spirit.

We are Sojourner Truth and Fannie Lou Hamer, women who could do as much as any man and then some; and we’re Susan B. Anthony, who shook the system until the law reflected that truth. That’s our character.

We’re the immigrants who stowed away on ships to reach these shores, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free – Holocaust survivors, Soviet defectors, the Lost Boys of Sudan. We are the hopeful strivers who cross the Rio Grande because they want their kids to know a better life. That’s how we came to be.

We’re the slaves who built the White House and the economy of the South. We’re the ranch hands and cowboys who opened the West, and countless laborers who laid rail, and raised skyscrapers, and organized for workers’ rights.

We’re the fresh-faced GIs who fought to liberate a continent, and we’re the Tuskeegee Airmen, Navajo code-talkers, and Japanese-Americans who fought for this country even as their own liberty had been denied. We’re the firefighters who rushed into those buildings on 9/11, and the volunteers who signed up to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq.

We are the gay Americans whose blood ran on the streets of San Francisco and New York, just as blood ran down this bridge.

We are storytellers, writers, poets, and artists who abhor unfairness, and despise hypocrisy, and give voice to the voiceless, and tell truths that need to be told.

We are the inventors of gospel and jazz and the blues, bluegrass and country, hip-hop and rock and roll, our very own sounds with all the sweet sorrow and reckless joy of freedom.

We are Jackie Robinson, enduring scorn and spiked cleats and pitches coming straight to his head, and stealing home in the World Series anyway.

We are the people Langston Hughes wrote of, who “build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how.”

We are the people Emerson wrote of, “who for truth and honor’s sake stand fast and suffer long;” who are “never tired, so long as we can see far enough.”

That’s what America is. Not stock photos or airbrushed history or feeble attempts to define some of us as more American as others. We respect the past, but we don’t pine for it. We don’t fear the future; we grab for it. America is not some fragile thing; we are large, in the words of Whitman, containing multitudes. We are boisterous and diverse and full of energy, perpetually young in spirit. That’s why someone like John Lewis at the ripe age of 25 could lead a mighty march.

And that’s what the young people here today and listening all across the country must take away from this day. You are America. Unconstrained by habits and convention. Unencumbered by what is, and ready to seize what ought to be. For everywhere in this country, there are first steps to be taken, and new ground to cover, and bridges to be crossed. And it is you, the young and fearless at heart, the most diverse and educated generation in our history, who the nation is waiting to follow.

Because Selma shows us that America is not the project of any one person.

Because the single most powerful word in our democracy is the word “We.” We The People. We Shall Overcome. Yes We Can. It is owned by no one. It belongs to everyone. Oh, what a glorious task we are given, to continually try to improve this great nation of ours.

Fifty years from Bloody Sunday, our march is not yet finished. But we are getting closer. Two hundred and thirty-nine years after this nation’s founding, our union is not yet perfect. But we are getting closer. Our job’s easier because somebody already got us through that first mile. Somebody already got us over that bridge. When it feels the road’s too hard, when the torch we’ve been passed feels too heavy, we will remember these early travelers, and draw strength from their example, and hold firmly the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint.”

We honor those who walked so we could run. We must run so our children soar. And we will not grow weary. For we believe in the power of an awesome God, and we believe in this country’s sacred promise.

May He bless those warriors of justice no longer with us, and bless the United States of America.

**PART TWO:**

**SOAPSTone ANALYSIS**

Once you have finished reading the speech, complete a SOAPStone analysis. Pay particular attention to the purpose element: what is the main idea of the speech?

**PART THREE:**

**PARAGRAPH RESPONSE**

Once you have completed the SOAPStone analysis, you will be writing a FOUR CHUNK paragraph in which you explain how President Obama uses rhetorical devices to enforce the main idea of the speech.

In order to complete this task successfully, you need to:

1. Identify the main idea of the speech

2. Identify at least four different specific examples of rhetorical devices from the text

3. Explain how each of these rhetorical devices enforces the main idea of the text.