



The Three Appeals

Persuasion & Influence · Tier 1: How Persuasion Works · Component 2

Grades: 6–8 **Time:** 30–40 min (standard) **Format:** individual or pairs

Students learn to spot the three classic appeals — **logos** (logic), **ethos** (credibility), and **pathos** (emotion) — in real persuasive messages, and to *name* which appeal is doing the work.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Naming the appeal is the first move in *hearing* persuasion instead of just feeling it. A student who can say "that ad is making me afraid of missing out" is already half a step outside the pull. The goal isn't to reject appeals — it's to notice them.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- One copy of the **Student pages** (Student pp. 1–3) per student or pair.
- Optional: two or three real ads or posts you bring in, to label together as a warm-up.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. **Read the explainer together (8–10 min).** Student p. 1 defines each appeal and why it works. Stop after each one for a quick real-world example.
2. **Work the activity (15–20 min).** Students label the appeals in the sample messages (Student p. 2), then write their own (Student p. 3). Push them to underline the words that gave the appeal away.
3. **Debrief (10–15 min).** Run the Discussion Guide (Instructor p. 3).

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

- Students separating "it made me *feel* something" (pathos) from "it gave a *reason*" (logos) from "trust them because of *who they are*" (ethos).
- Noticing that most real messages stack *more than one* appeal at once — that's the insight, not an error.
- Disagreement is fine. Ask "what word tells you that?" rather than settling on one right label.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT (COMMON CORE)

Codes reflect the grade 6 band; the grade 7 and 8 equivalents (e.g. RI.7.8, RI.8.8) address the same skills and apply equally.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.8** — Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.3** — Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.3** — Use knowledge of language and its conventions; recognize how word choice shapes meaning and effect (emotional / loaded language).
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.1** — Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence (Part C: crafting each appeal).

Printing: Hand students the 3 Student pages. The 3 Instructor pages — this brief, the in-depth background, and the discussion guide — are for you.



The Three Appeals

In depth: what each appeal is, why it works, and how it's misused

The three appeals come from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and remain the backbone of persuasion analysis. Each is a different route to belief — and modern psychology explains why each works, which is also how each gets exploited. Atlas links point to the underlying mechanism.

APPEAL TO REASON

Logos

DEFINITION. Persuasion through the argument's content — evidence, data, numbers, cause-and-effect.

WHY IT WORKS. Numbers carry an aura of objectivity; easy-to-process information feels truer (fluency as truth), and a precise figure signals rigor even when nothing backs it (overconfidence in precision).

HOW IT'S MISUSED. Cherry-picked stats, false precision ("87.3% effective"), unsourced "studies show," correlation sold as cause.

MISCONCEPTION. That logos is "the honest appeal" — the opposite is true: because it looks objective, misused logos is the hardest to catch.

APPEAL TO CREDIBILITY

Ethos

DEFINITION. Persuasion through the source's perceived character or authority — "believe it because of who's saying it."

WHY IT WORKS. We can't verify everything, so we lean on authority as a shortcut (appeal to authority); a good impression in one area bleeds into unrelated judgments (halo effect bleed).

HOW IT'S MISUSED. Borrowed authority (a celebrity outside their field), credential inflation, vague "experts agree," confidence in place of evidence.

MISCONCEPTION. Conflating fame or confidence with expertise — separate authority *in the relevant subject* from authority in general.

APPEAL TO EMOTION

Pathos

DEFINITION. Persuasion by arousing feeling — fear, excitement, pride, belonging — so the audience acts on it.

WHY IT WORKS. Emotion runs ahead of reasoning; we swap "how do I feel?" for "what do I think?" (affect heuristic). Fear of losing beats an equal gain (loss aversion), and matching the crowd is its own pressure (bandwagon effect).

HOW IT'S MISUSED. Manufactured urgency and scarcity ("ends in 1 hour"), fear appeals, FOMO.

MISCONCEPTION. Labeling pathos "manipulative" by default — emotion is legitimate and unavoidable; the question is whether the feeling matches the facts.

TWO THINGS TO KEEP REPEATING

Appeals stack — most messages use two or three at once, so name each rather than hunting for "the one." **Naming isn't rejecting**: spotting an appeal just puts the student in the driver's seat.



The Three Appeals

Debrief prompts & a sample answer key

DISCUSSION ANCHOR

Open with the takeaway, then work the prompts. There are no single right answers — the skill is naming and defending a read.

- Which appeal is **easiest** to spot? Which one **sneaks past** you?
- Most real ads use **more than one** appeal at once. Why stack them instead of picking one?
- When is using **pathos** (emotion) fair? When does it cross a line into manipulation?
- Find one message from your **own week** — a post, an ad, a text. Which appeal was it using on you?

ONE-LINE TAKEAWAY

You don't have to reject an appeal to notice it. Naming it is the skill.

SAMPLE READS FOR PART A

Students may reasonably see more than one appeal. Push for the *strongest* and the evidence word.

MESSAGE	STRONGEST APPEAL(S)
1. "9 out of 10 dentists recommend BrightMint."	<i>Logos (the number) + ethos (dentists = authority).</i>
2. "Don't be the only kid without the new Zephyr sneakers."	<i>Pathos — fear of being left out.</i>
3. "As a nurse with 20 years of experience, I only use this brand."	<i>Ethos — credibility from a role and experience.</i>
4. "Buy now — this deal ends in 1 hour!"	<i>Pathos — urgency and pressure.</i>
5. "Our battery lasts 40% longer than last year's model."	<i>Logos — a factual, measurable reason.</i>
6. "Real fans wear the jersey to every game."	<i>Pathos + identity ("real fans"), a pull toward belonging.</i>



The Three Appeals

What they are, and why they work on us

Every ad, post, and pitch is trying to move you — to buy, click, believe, or belong. Most of them do it in one of three classic ways. Once you can name them, you can hear them coming.

APPEAL TO LOGIC

Logos

WHAT IT IS. Persuasion by giving **reasons** — facts, numbers, evidence, "because." It talks to the thinking part of you.

WHY IT WORKS. We're taught that numbers and reasons mean truth. A statistic feels solid and neutral, so a claim with a number in it feels *proven* — even when the number is cherry-picked, vague, or made up. The word "because" alone makes almost anything sound more reasonable.

SOUNDS LIKE: "studies show," "9 out of 10," "40% more," percentages, rankings, "because..."

WATCH FOR: a real reason vs. a reason-shaped decoration. Ask: *is that number actually about what they're selling? Where did it come from?*

APPEAL TO CREDIBILITY

Ethos

WHAT IT IS. Persuasion by **who's talking** — their authority, experience, or reputation. "Trust this because of who says it."

WHY IT WORKS. You can't check everything yourself, so you take smart shortcuts and trust experts, brands, and people like you. Usually that's fine — but it's easy to fake. A lab coat, a confident voice, a big follower count, or a familiar logo can *borrow* trust that was never earned.

SOUNDS LIKE: "as a doctor," "20 years of experience," "the #1 brand," "experts agree," a famous face.

WATCH FOR: real expertise *in the right subject* vs. borrowed or fake authority. A famous person isn't an expert on everything.

APPEAL TO EMOTION

Pathos

WHAT IT IS. Persuasion by making you **feel** something — excited, scared, proud, guilty, left out — so you act on the feeling.

WHY IT WORKS. Feelings move faster than thinking. When you feel something strongly, you're more likely to act *now* and think *later* — which is exactly what an urgent or scary message wants. Fear of missing out, the pull to belong, and pride are the easiest strings to pull.

SOUNDS LIKE: "don't miss out," "only a few left," "act now," "imagine how you'll feel," happy or scared faces.

WATCH FOR: the feeling isn't the argument. Notice the feeling first — then ask what they actually want you to *do*.

They travel together. Real messages usually stack two or three appeals at once. You don't have to pick just one — the skill is naming each one you can hear.



The Three Appeals

Name: _____ Date: _____

Quick recap: Logos = reasons & numbers · Ethos = who's saying it · Pathos = how it makes you feel

PART A — NAME THE APPEAL

For each message, write **L** (logos), **E** (ethos), or **P** (pathos) — you can write more than one — and underline the words that gave it away.

MESSAGE	APPEAL(S) — L / E / P
1. "9 out of 10 dentists recommend BrightMint."	
2. "Don't be the only kid without the new Zephyr sneakers."	
3. "As a nurse with 20 years of experience, I only use this brand."	
4. "Buy now — this deal ends in 1 hour!"	
5. "Our battery lasts 40% longer than last year's model."	
6. "Real fans wear the jersey to every game."	

PART B — WHICH IS STRONGEST?

Pick **one** message above. Which appeal is doing the *most* work, and how do you know?

**PART C — YOUR TURN**

You're selling a plain backpack. Write **one sentence** for each appeal.

Logos (give a reason)

Ethos (who says so, and why trust them)

Pathos (make them feel something)

PART D — IN THE WILD

Think of one real message you saw this week. Write it down, and name the appeal it used on *you*.
