

## Author's Purpose and Author's Point of View - Let 'Em Play God

### Define

An author's purpose for writing an informational text might be to inform, persuade, or entertain. Many times an author writes for a combination of reasons. Of course, there are times when discovering an author's purpose for writing is simple. You pick up a magazine and find an article with the title "Why Organic Farming Is the Future." You can tell from the title alone that the writer *really* likes the idea of organic farming. He promotes his idea with facts and details that help you know that the purpose of the article is to persuade readers to support this kind of farming.

Other times, identifying the author's purpose can be more difficult. It involves reading closely and paying attention to the information an author presents on a topic. It is often necessary to identify the author's point of view, or perspective, on the subject he or she writes about, and how it is conveyed in the text, in order to fully understand an author's purpose or intention. For example, the writer of the magazine article might state that organic foods are healthiest and taste best, which reflects the writer's favorable view of organic foods.

## Model

### Identification and Application:

- Authors writing to inform might offer readers facts and statistics that they can easily analyze. This kind of text may include graphic aids, such as charts and graphs, without much description.
- Authors writing to explain may break down complex information into text that is easy to understand. Look for descriptions that present a complicated process in plain language, or that offer examples to help describe a concept.
- An author writing to persuade may want to stress an opinion or idea with the help of emotional or figurative language. For example, an archaeological discovery might be described not just as "an important discovery" but as "the most shocking find of the decade," or "an Aladdin's cave of priceless treasures."
- To evaluate an author's purpose and how it is conveyed in a text:
  - Look at the details the author includes to support an idea. Is the author trying to amuse readers, convince them of something, or strictly present information?
  - Examine the language the author uses. Does he or she use emotional or figurative language to influence a reader's opinion?
  - Look for clue words, phrases, and techniques that reveal the author's purpose or point of view.
- Once you have determined an author's point of view or purpose in a text, analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

### Model:

The film director Alfred Hitchcock was famous for making such classic suspense films as *North by Northwest*, *Rear Window*, *The Birds*, *Vertigo*, and many others. In the article "Let 'Em Play God," which was first published in 1948, Hitchcock explains his point of view about the nature of suspense in motion pictures. This is his purpose for writing, and he wants to persuade readers to accept and share his point of view. All of this is revealed to the reader in the first two paragraphs of the essay:

**Every maker of mystery movies aims at getting the audience on the edge of their seats.** The ingredient to keep them there is called "**suspense.**" Producers **cry for it**, writers **cry in agony** to get it, and actors cry for joy when they do get it. **I've often been asked what it is.**

**As far as I'm concerned, you have suspense when you let the audience play God.**

In these two paragraphs, the language Hitchcock uses hints that suspense in a film is not an easy thing to achieve or create. Film producers don't just want it, they "cry for it." Not only that, but writers "cry in agony to get it" when they write a screenplay. The repetition of the word "cry" emphasizes the painstaking craft that goes into creating effective suspense. Then Hitchcock writes, "I've often been asked what it is." This sentence signals readers that Hitchcock is about to share what suspense means to him. He is going to express his point of view.

When writers share their point of view, they may sometimes use signal words and phrases. These phrases are their way of telling readers, "This is what I think." Hitchcock simply writes "as far as

I'm concerned. ..." This tells readers that the detail that follows is Hitchcock's point of view or opinion. It's what he thinks or believes. Hitchcock's point of view is that you have suspense when "you let the audience play God." In other words, when the audience knows more about what is going on than the actors on the screen, suspense is created.

Hitchcock then provides readers with an example:

Suppose, for instance, you have six characters involved in a mystery. **A man has been murdered and all six are possible suspects** but no one is sure including the audience.

One of the characters, a young man, is standing in a shadowy room with his back to the door when **an unidentified character in a cloak and black hat sneaks in and slugs him into insensibility**. It's a brutal act, but **if the audience does not know whether the young man is a killer or a hero** they will not know whether to cheer or weep.

**If the audience does know**, if they have been told all the secrets that the characters do not know, **they'll work like the devil for you** because they know what fate is facing the poor actors. **That is what is known as "playing God." That is suspense.**

Let's look at some of the words and phrases Hitchcock uses in his explanation of what creates suspense in a movie. A young man is standing in a shadowy room when "an unidentified character in a cloak and black hat sneaks in and slugs him." Hitchcock then maintains that the audience will not know whether to cheer or weep if they don't know whether the young man is a hero or a killer. But if they do know, they will "work like the devil for you because they know what fate is facing the poor actors." In other words, the audience will give the director what he or she wants—they will respond to the suspense. They will become tense and frightened, and completely involved with the plot of the movie and what happens to the characters.

The phrase "work like the devil" is an idiom. It means to work with great speed, effort, or intensity. Hitchcock could have written that the audience will "work hard for you" or "the audience will respond" but he chose this example of figurative language. He uses it to stress *how* the audience will respond in order to help persuade readers that his example of what creates suspense is not only possible, but makes perfect sense. So Hitchcock is not only trying to explain his point of view, but his purpose for writing is to persuade readers to accept it.

Now let's look at the end of the article. Often an author will acknowledge and respond to conflicting points of view, and that's what Hitchcock does in the last four paragraphs. "Just because there is a touch of murder and an air of mystery about a story," he writes, "it is not necessary to see transoms opening, clutching fingers, hooded creatures, and asp on the Chinese rug." Hitchcock is referring to other so-called "suspense" films that use these kinds of details. He is making fun of these elements, especially when he refers to asps—a type of venomous snake—on a "Chinese rug."

He then concludes by going back to his film *Rope*:

**John Dall is guilty of a bestial crime** which the audience sees him perform with young Granger. **But throughout the film he is grace and charm itself** and his apartment is gay and beautifully appointed. And when Granger plays the piano he picks a light and childish piece, a minuet. **Suspense involves contrast.**

By going back to the plot of the film he wrote about at the beginning of the article, Hitchcock is able to make another point about how suspense can be created in a film. Rather than show a villain in an obvious way, as some kind of "hooded figure" with "clutching fingers," Hitchcock's villains in *Rope* are "grace and charm itself." Suspense is created through contrast. Hitchcock acknowledges conflicting attitudes about suspense by contrasting elements in other films with his own.

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SET UP YOUR PAPER USING THE FORMAT FOR NAME, P, DATE, AND ASSIGNMENT TITLE.

THE ASSIGNMENT TITLE IS: **AP/APOV DEFINE & MODEL**



ON LINED PAPER, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AFTER READING:

**AUTHOR'S PURPOSE AND AUTHOR'S POINT OF VIEW DEFINE & MODEL "Let 'Em Play God"**

Copy the sentence starters and complete them with the phrase choices given. You will not use one of the choices.

1. Examples of an author's purpose include to \_\_\_\_\_, to \_\_\_\_\_, to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Another name for an author's perspective is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. To identify the author's purpose, readers should \_\_\_\_\_.

Phrases to complete the sentences; you will not use one of the choices.

author's point of view; read closely and pay close attention; author's purpose; inform, entertain, or persuade

Questions based on reading the MODEL. Answer in complete sentences.

4. What is the central idea of Let 'Em Play God?
5. How does the word "cry" give you a clue to the author's purpose?
6. What are some words that signal this is Hitchcock's point of view?
7. What is his point of view about suspense?
8. What three questions can help you identify point of view?
9. Why does Hitchcock give an example of what suspense is not?
10. What should you look for to find an author's point of view?

