

Tricks of the Trade

In this chapter, we'll be learning about rhetoric; how to use language to persuade.

'Rhetoric' is a Greek word, meaning *the art of persuasion*.

It's not surprising that rhetoric is a Greek word, as persuasive public speaking was big in Ancient Athens. Rhetoric is an important part of democracy, which the Ancient Athenians invented in or around 500 BC (democracy is also a Greek word - it means 'rule by the people'). Democracy involves, like debating, different ideas competing, supporters of each trying to persuade people to agree with them. Some people think that the Ancient Athenians sat around in the sunshine debating the issues of the day in a calm, rational manner, listening carefully to each other and nodding their heads appreciatively at a particularly well made point, pausing in their discussions only to chew an olive or sip some ouzo. It wasn't like that. Thousands of men (I'm afraid they were all men - and slaves weren't allowed either) would gather on a hill in Athens called the Pnyx for regular assemblies to discuss the business of the city. Supporters of different policies would put their point of view, but they had to fight to be heard. You had to be loud, confident, entertaining and wily to get people just to listen to you, never mind agree with you. And it wasn't only the assemblies; the courts were like that too. The Ancient Athenians were very litigious (that is, they liked suing each other a lot). But unlike in our system, juries did not consist of twelve people sitting quietly in a box listening to the evidence; they ran to the hundreds, and they didn't hold back in letting the litigants know what they thought of them.

So, rhetoric in Ancient Athens was big, and it became big business. There was a whole class of people known as sophists, who could make a very good living teaching citizens the tricks of rhetoric; how to use language to persuade. In this chapter, we're going to be learning some of these tricks. It's useful to know them, as using them in the right way will help make your speeches more persuasive. They all have Greek words to describe them, which you can drop in if you want to impress your English or Classics teacher, but I'll also give them descriptions in English for clarity.

Anaphora (varied repetition)

Repeating the same phrase at the beginning of several phrases, sentences or paragraphs. Probably the most famous example is Martin Luther King's speech in favour of equal rights for African Americans in Washington in 1963 in which he begins successive sentences with the phrase 'I have a dream ... I have a dream ...', fixing