

SOAPSTone analysis: Shirley Chisholm's 'Equal Rights for Women' — Teacher copy

Answers and suggested responses

Part I: SOAPSTone analysis

Read Shirley Chisholm's landmark address, 'Equal Rights for Women' (delivered to the House of Representatives on May 21, 1969):

<https://openbooks.library.umass.edu/giftsofspeech/chapter/shirley-chisholm-equal-rights-for-women-1969/>

Context: Shirley Chisholm (NY) was the first Black woman elected to Congress. In this 1969 speech, she urges support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

Note: The transcript uses historical discriminatory language. You may paraphrase it in your analysis.

Analytical vocabulary

- **Speaker (rhetor):** The voice delivering the message, including their background, perspective, and credibility (ethos).
- **Occasion:** The historical context, immediate setting, and specific problem or social issue (exigence) prompting the response.
- **Audience:** The primary and secondary groups being addressed, whose values and expectations shape the message.
- **Purpose:** The ultimate goal, call to action, or specific change the speaker urges the audience to support.
- **Subject:** The central topic, main idea, or core issue examined in the text.
- **Tone:** The speaker's attitude toward the subject and audience, conveyed through deliberate word choice.

SOAPSTone is a lens for our analysis. It does not establish how Chisholm planned her speech.

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1. Speaker (rhetor): Who is delivering this address? Describe her background and perspective using relevant historical context, and explain how she establishes credibility (ethos) using located textual evidence from the speech.

Answer: Shirley Chisholm, a New York representative and the first Black woman elected to Congress, delivers the address. Her perspective is shaped by her intersectional identity. She establishes experiential ethos through a first-person comparison of race and sex discrimination, arguing that she has faced more discrimination as a woman than as a Black person in the political arena.

2. Occasion (exigence): What is the immediate context, date, and location of this speech? What specific problem or social issue (exigence) prompted Chisholm to speak at this moment? Support your answer with located textual evidence or historical context.

Answer: The speech was delivered to the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., on May 21, 1969. The immediate exigence is the ongoing, pervasive sex discrimination in employment and public life, combined with inadequate legal protections, which motivates Chisholm to propose and advocate for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

3. Audience: Who is the primary, immediate audience being addressed, and who is the secondary audience? How does Chisholm tailor her arguments to appeal to these different groups? Support your answer with located textual evidence.

Answer: The primary, immediate audience consists of her fellow representatives in the House of Representatives. The secondary audience is the wider American public. Chisholm tailors her arguments by refuting specific legislative objections to address lawmakers directly, while using relatable workplace statistics and social examples to appeal to the broader public.

4. Purpose: What is Chisholm's ultimate goal or call to action? What specific change is she urging her audience to support? (Clearly distinguish this from the general subject, and support your answer with located textual evidence).

Answer: Chisholm's purpose is to urge her fellow representatives to support and pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to guarantee equal legal rights for women. This is a direct call for legislative action, which is distinct from the general subject of sex discrimination.

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5. Subject: What is the central topic or main idea of the speech? (Clearly distinguish this from the speaker's purpose, and support your answer with located textual evidence).

Answer: The subject is sex discrimination in employment and public life and legal equality. This is the general topic Chisholm examines, whereas her purpose is the specific legislative action she demands (supporting the ERA).

6. Tone: What is Chisholm's attitude toward her subject and audience? Select a defensible tone, quote a short phrase or paraphrase a located passage from the speech, and explain its rhetorical effect.

Answer: Chisholm establishes a critical and indignant tone, supported by her statement that 'this situation is outrageous' when discussing the lack of women in leadership roles. This tone confronts her audience with the stark reality of inequality. Alternatively, she uses a reasoned, measured tone when systematically refuting objections to the ERA, establishing her intellectual authority.

Part II: Rhetorical synthesis & précis

Complete Q8. Q7 is an optional extension. Use specific passages to support your interpretation.

7. Rhetorical synthesis & evaluation (optional extension): Evaluate one rhetorical choice Chisholm makes (e.g., her appeal to ethos, her logical structure, or her direct tone). How might this choice influence her intended audience, and what is a potential limitation of this strategy? A critical judgement is welcome.

Answer: Chisholm rebuts the claim that existing laws already provide adequate protection. Her examples of employment discrimination and low representation challenge that premise and may help persuade lawmakers to support the ERA. These examples do not establish that every listener was persuaded. Accept a different evaluation when the student identifies a specific rhetorical choice, supports it with a passage, and explains a plausible audience effect or limitation.

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8. The four-sentence rhetorical précis: Use the structured frame below to write a complete, cohesive four-sentence précis of Chisholm's speech.

1. Sentence 1 (author, title, date, genre and main claim): [Author], [credentials], in her [genre] '[Title]' (1969), argues that [claim].
2. Sentence 2 (development of the argument): She develops this claim by [how she develops/proves thesis].
3. Sentence 3 (purpose and intended outcome): Her purpose is to [action] in order to [outcome].
4. Sentence 4 (audience and tone): Addressing [audience], she establishes a [tone] tone to [effect].

Answer: In her May 21, 1969 address Equal Rights for Women, U.S. Representative Shirley Chisholm argues that persistent sex discrimination requires stronger legal protection. She develops this claim through workplace examples, representation statistics, personal experience and rebuttals to objections. Her purpose is to urge support for the Equal Rights Amendment so that women receive equal rights under law. Addressing fellow representatives and a wider public, she combines a critical tone with reasoned argument to challenge complacency.