Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Strategy: **Absorbing SEAPSTone**

**How to infer rhetorical context through its primary features: Subject, exigence, audience, purpose, speaker, and tone.**

WHEN to use the strategy:

* Any time you approach a text, especially (for our purposes) essays, speeches, or other works of non-fiction.

WHY use this strategy:

* We have to understand the context that shapes any rhetorical situation so that we can understand why a speaker writes and how he tries to achieve his purpose. Understanding this allows us to see speaker intent and method, which is what allows each of us to see what speakers want from us and others.

HOW to use this strategy:

1. Time permitting, quickly read the entire text one time through. Or, when you are practiced enough, you may skip this step and move directly to step “2” and its sub-steps.
2. Reread the text with the following in mind: The following sub-steps may be approached in any order that seems natural to you, with the exception of “**Subject**” and “**Tone,**” which ought to be done first and second, respectively. Other than that, do whatever works best for you the text you’re reading.

**Subject** 🡪 First identify repetitive nouns and any synonyms and antonyms of those repetitive nouns (e.g., history, past, future, etc.). Second (or simultaneously), identify any adjectives (or phrases/clauses that work like adjectives) to modify those nouns and their synonyms/antonyms. This helps you narrow the speaker’s position on the broad subject.

**Exigence 🡪** Occasionally, a speaker will come right out and just tell you why he is writing the piece. Most often, though, this won’t happen; you’ll have to infer his motivation. First, determine the tone(s) of the text. Determining the tone will help you identify the attitude of the speaker toward the subject. Once you’ve pinned down the attitude, then you can infer what motivated the speaker to pick up the pen and start writing to his audience.

**Audience 🡪** Ask yourself the questions below, based primarily on your understanding of the subject. Answering these questions will help you to pin down.

* What is the time period of the text (e.g., 20th century, 19th century, etc.? You must infer this from context clues—e.g., modern words vs. old-fashioned words?
* Where (literal place) does the text appear to be published (e.g., British spellings? References to American values, etc.)? You must also infer this.
* Are there cultural/group/racial/ethnic references (e.g. iron curtain, quinceañera, 9/11, any biblical allusions, etc.)? Are they exclusionary or inclusive? If exclusionary, the intended audience will be the opposite of the exclusion. For example, if someone says, “We must root out those in America who still attempt to hide themselves behind the iron curtain,” then we can safely assume that the audience is not anyone from the former USSR, and is instead most likely from America (or other “Western” countries).
* Is the diction high or low (basically, hard or easy, respectively)? The higher the diction, the more educated the intended audience. Also, they are likely older and likely wealthier.
* Do they use imperative (i.e., commanding) sentences, or do they seem to be vested with some sort of authority? Or, conversely, do they seem victimized? (A good clue for this is any reference to the audience will appear as direct or indirect objects in a sentence.) This will tell you the level of power the audience likely has relative to the subject and speaker.
* Does the subject assume certain levels of poverty or affluence as familiar to the audience? Determine this level to determine the class of the audience.
* Does the subject seem to imply any gender bias? If so, this will likely indicate a primary gender for whom the message is intended.

**Purpose 🡪** Though the speaker will occasionally explicitly state this, you most often will need to infer it. This is often the last step, as inferring this is based on your understanding of all the other elements—subject, exigence, audience, speaker, and tone. From these, infer what the speaker wants the audience to believe or do. **Purpose is not what motivated the speaker to write the text, as exigence is, this is what the speaker wants the audience to believe/do as a result of listening/reading the text.**

**Speaker 🡪** Just as with audience, you are attempting to determine who the speaker is in as much detail as possible: age, class, gender, culture/group association/race/ethnicity, education level, authority level, etc. Ask yourself similar questions here as you did for the audience, but always flipping them around so that they are aimed at what sort of person would say these words on this subject?, as opposed to *for whom are these words intended?*(as the audience questions are directed).​

**Tone 🡪** Complete the tone strategy instruction. This step is best as a second step, but do what you think is best for the text you are analyzing.

MODEL

The Salem tragedy, which is about to begin in these pages, developed from a paradox. It is a paradox in whose grip we still live, and there is no prospect yet that we will discover its resolution. Simply, it was this: for good purposes, even high purposes, the people of Salem developed a theocracy, a combine of state and religious power whose function was to keep the community together, and to prevent any kind of disunity that might open it to destruction by material or ideological enemies. It was forged for a necessary purpose and accomplished that purpose. But all organization is and must be grounded on the idea of exclusion and prohibition, just as two objects cannot occupy the same space. Evidently the time came in New England when the repressions of order were heavier than seemed warranted by the dangers against which the order was organized. The witch-hunt was a perverse manifestation of the panic which set in among all classes when the balance began to turn toward greater individual freedom.