

## 17 Rhetorical Devices Used in Pericles' Funeral Oration

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### Smart summary:

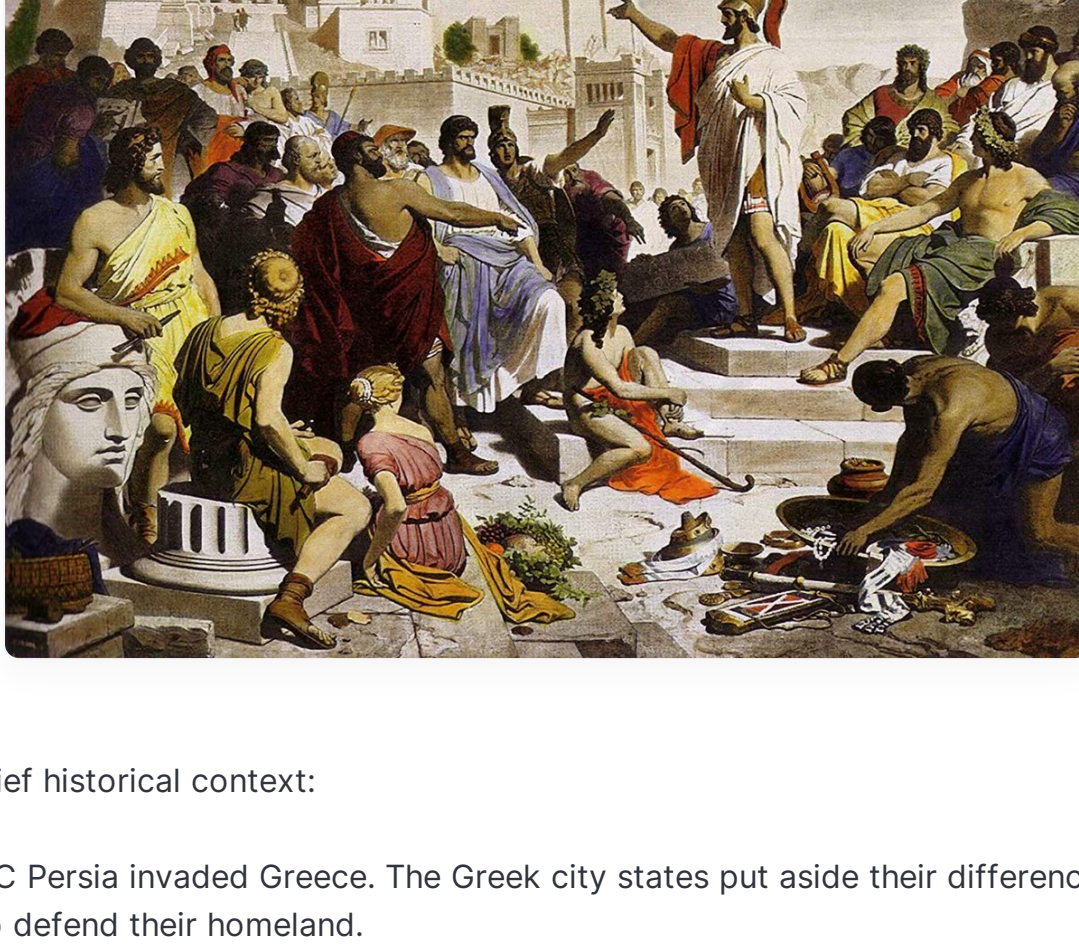
In this thread, the author analyses the rhetoric used in Pericles' funeral oration, a speech given in 430 BC. The author highlights 17 different rhetorical devices used in the speech, explaining how each one is used to persuade and inspire the audience.

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Analysing one of the greatest speeches in history: Pericles' funeral oration in 430 BC.

The rhetorical devices he used to inspire and persuade are just as effective now as they were then.

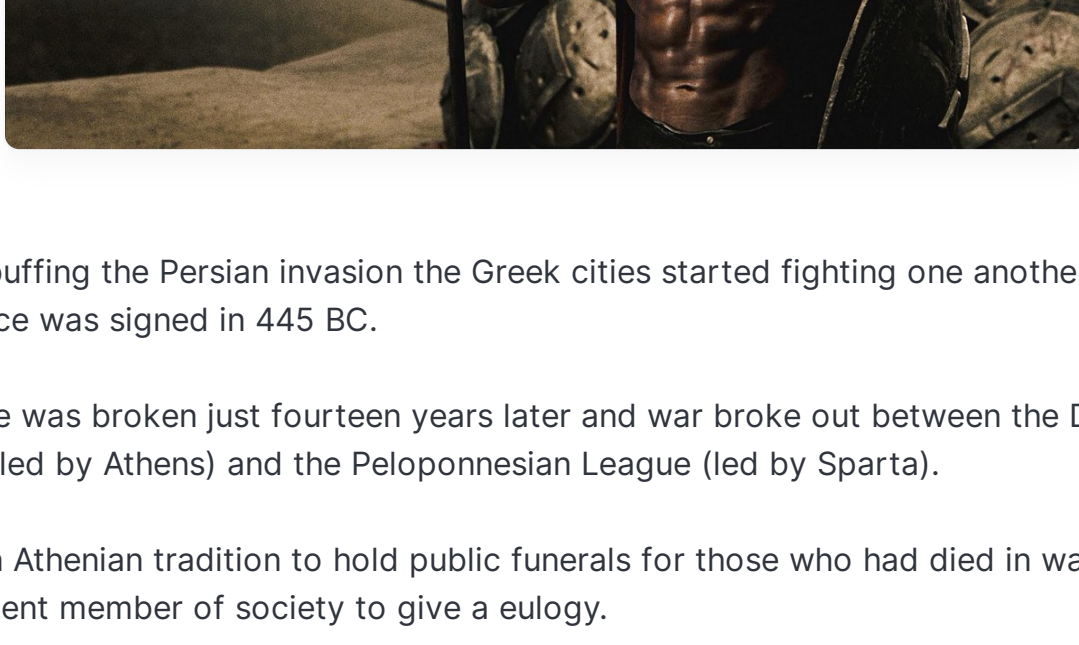
Here are 17 of the best:



Some brief historical context:

In 480 BC Persia invaded Greece. The Greek city states put aside their differences and united to defend their homeland.

This was when the famous Battle of Thermopylae took place (as made famous by the film 300):



After rebuffing the Persian invasion the Greek cities started fighting one another. A Thirty Year Truce was signed in 445 BC.

The truce was broken just fourteen years later and war broke out between the Delian League (led by Athens) and the Peloponnesian League (led by Sparta).

It was an Athenian tradition to hold public funerals for those who had died in war, and for a prominent member of society to give a eulogy.

In 430 BC, after the first year of the war, this duty fell to Pericles, the most important man in Athens at the time.



Now let's look at the rhetorical devices he used to inspire and persuade his fellow citizens...

(This version of his speech was translated into English by the great classical scholar Rex Warner; rhetorical techniques work in any language)

### 1. Antithesis

The contrasting of two ideas in a single sentence.

Contrasting two distinct ideas makes understanding the "right one" easier for the audience.

Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbours. It is more the case of our **being a model to others**, than of our **imitating anyone else**.

We make friends by **doing good** to others, not by **receiving good** from them.

### 2. Anacoluthon

The unexpected discontinuation in the expression of an idea, mid-sentence. Often accompanied by an abrupt and intentional grammatical mistake.

This grabs your audience's attention. Like a wake-up call. And it frames your ideas more sharply.

But this is good **fortune** for men to end their lives with honour, as these have done, and for you **honourable** to lament them, **their** life was set to a measure where death and happiness went hand in hand.

So and such they were, these **men** **worthy** of their city.

### 3. Asyndeton

When you skip one or more conjunctions (like the word 'and'). Again, technically a grammatical error.

It builds momentum. Removing the conjunction binds each clause together more closely. The audience senses a surging idea in your words.

In the fighting, they thought it more honourable to stand their ground and suffer death than to give in and save their lives. So they fled from the reproaches of men, shaming with life and limb the brunt of battle, and in a small moment of time, the **cheer of the warriors, a caducation, and a shout, and a shout, escape away from us**.

When you realise her greatness, then reflect that what made her great was men with a spirit of adventure, **men who knew their duty, men who were ashamed to fall below a certain standard**.

### 4. Anastrophe

When the normal word order of a sentence is changed.

This allows you to emphasise a particular word or part of the phrase. It can also add a lyrical, poetic quality to what you're saying.

Athen, **alone of the states we know**, comes to her resting time in a greatness that surpasses what was imagined of her.

**More to be desired than such things**, they chose to check the enemy's pride.

### 5. Anadiplosis

Repeating the last word of one clause at the beginning of the next.

It emphasises that word. It becomes the fulcrum of the sentence.

They gave her their lives, to her and to all of us, and for their own selves they won prizes that never grow old, the most splendid of **speachless** - not the **speechless** in which their bodies lie hid, but where their glory remains eternal and their minds, always there on the right occasion to stir ours on to speech or to action.

### 6. Antanagoge

Deflecting potential criticism of a negative by pointing out a positive.

It's great to show some humility - recognising a problem. And it's one step better to offer a solution.

Some of them, no doubt, had their **faults**, but what we ought to remember first is their **gallant conduct** against the enemy in defence of their native land.

For these reasons I shall not **commiserate** with those parents of the dead, who are present here. Instead I shall try to **confort** them.

### 7. Asterismos

A single word (or short phrase) that calls for the audience's attention at the start of the sentence.

A normal example is to start by saying "Listen." It is a way of asking the audience to pay careful attention to what comes next.

**This**, then, is the kind of city for which these men, who could not bear the thought of losing her, nobly fought and nobly died.

### 8. Eutrepismus

Laying out the order of your speech, either numerically or chronologically.

This does a couple of things. It gives your audience an idea of what to expect and it adds an overall clarity and structure to your speech, right from the start.

What I want to do is, in the **first place**, to discuss the **spirit in which we faced** our trials and also our **constitutions and the way of life which has made us great**. **After that** I shall speak in **praise of the dead**, believing that this kind of speech is not inappropriate to the present occasion, and that this whole assembly, of citizens and foreigners, may listen to it with advantage.

### 9. Procatlepsis

Raising a potential rebuttal to or problem with your speech and immediately addressing it.

This, of course, strengthens your argument. It also earns the trust of the audience by showing an awareness that there are potentially other views on the matter at hand.

Our belief in the courage and manliness of so many should not be hazarded on the goodness or badness of our man's speech. Then **it is not easy to speak with a proper sense of balance**, when a man, however frank it is difficult to believe in the truth of what one is saying. The man who knows the facts and loves the dead may well think that an oration tells less than what he knows and what he would like to hear, others who do not have so much may feel sorry for the dead, and think the orator over-praises them, when he speaks of exploits that are beyond their own capacities. Praise of other people is tolerable only up to a certain point, the point where one will believe that one could do oneself worse of the things one is hearing about. **Once you get beyond this point, you will find people becoming jealous and invidious**.

However, the fact is that this **constitution was set up and approved by our forefathers, and it is not done to follow the tradition** and do my best to meet the wishes and the expectations of every one of you.

### 10. Metonymy

Referring to something by a concept or object closely associated with it.

It sparks in the audience's mind: you can present an argument much more creatively and memorably by using metonymy.

Taking everything together then, I declare that our **city is an education to Greece**, and I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person, and do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility.

What I would prefer is that you should fix your eyes every day on the greatness of Athens as she really is, and should fall in love with her.

### 11. Anaphora

Repeating a word (or series of words) at the beginning of consecutive clauses or sentences.

It does several things, such as building momentum. It can also be used to contrast different ideas relating to those repeated words, or indeed point out similarities.

Our **love** of what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance; our **love** of the things of the mind does not make us soft.

Not **one** of these men weakened because he hoped to go on enjoying his escape into poverty and gave up.

### 12. Apophasis

Bringing something up by claiming you don't want to mention it.

This is normally either a humble brag or a shy dig. However, it can also serve as an indirect way of reminding your audience of something without going into detail.

I have no wish to make a long speech on subjects familiar to you all, **no I shall say nothing about the warlike deeds**, which we acquired our power or the battles in which **we** or our fathers **gallantly resisted our enemies**, Greek or foreign.

### 13. Aporia

An expression of doubt, real or feigned, in the whole purpose or nature of your argument/speech.

This catches the audience off-guard and intrigues them. It can also set you up to overcome that doubt later on, thereby exceeding your audience's expectations.

Our belief in the courage and manliness of so many should not be hazarded on the goodness or badness of **one man's speech**.

### 14. Exergasia

When an idea is repeated multiple times, but the way it is expressed changes.

This allows you to build momentum around a single point or idea. It can create a complex, compelling wave of logic or emotion which is hard for the audience to resist.

Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the **whole people**. When it is a question of setting private disputes, **everyone is equal before the law**; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, **what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses**. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. And, just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other. **We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbour if he enters himself in his own way; nor do we give him the kind of looks which, though they do no real harm, still do hurt people's feelings**. We are free and tolerant in our private lives, but in **public affairs we keep to the law**.

### 15. Dysphemism

When a negative term is used to replace a neutral one. The opposite of euphemism.

It can be funny, caustic, or manipulative. It certainly adds some texture - in the form of imaginative language - to your speech.

Our city is open to the world, and we have no periodical deportations in order to prevent people observing or finding out information which might be of military advantage to the enemy. This is because we rely, not on **secret weapons**, but on our own real courage and loyalty.

### 16. Litotes

Using an understatement to emphasise the idea you're referring to. Often features a double negative.

This works because a double negative catches the audience's attention and forces them to think. It also breaks the monotony of expressing things in the same way.

For to the inheritance they had received they added all the empire we have now, and it was **not without blood and toil** that they handed it down to us of the present generation.

When the Spartans invade our land, they do not come by themselves, but bring all their allies with them; whereas we, when we launch an attack abroad, do the job by ourselves, and, though fighting on foreign soil, do not often **fail** to defeat opponents who are fighting for their own benefits and homes.

### 17. Antimetabole

The use of a phrase in consecutive clauses but with reversed word order.

This adds lyrical quality to your speech. It also slows things down and adds an unexpected emphasis to your point.

In her case, and in her case alone, no invading enemy is ashamed of being defeated, and no subject can complain of being governed by people unfit for their responsibilities.

And that's enough for now. Rhetorical devices can be layered together, of course, as in many of the examples above. And there are many, many more...

But rhetoric isn't just for speaking; it's also for writing. Nobody would fail to benefit from studying the art of rhetoric.