

SAMPLE ESSAY A:

Benjamin Banneker, in a letter to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, maintains a firm position on the injustice of slavery in the United States in 1791. Banneker humbles himself before Jefferson to remind the founding father of the oppressed condition of the colonies under Great Britain's control and draws a parallel to the current plight of the slaves. The author encourages Jefferson and other supporters of slavery to try to relate with these slaves in order to convince them of their hypocrisy in allowing the institution of slavery.

Banneker uses careful diction to humble himself before such a revered leader and elevate Jefferson to make the man more receptive to his passionate argument. Addressing Jefferson as "sir" and using words like "suffer me" as well as "I entreat" puts Banneker at a position similar to that of the slaves. By doing this, Banneker seems not arrogant or defensive, but modest and sincere. He maintains that his respect for the leader's opinions and status. This is reflected when the author ends by commenting that Jefferson "need neither the direction of myself or others" in determining the righteousness of slavery. Banneker elevates Jefferson and puts him on a pedestal in order to emphasize to the revered leader that he believes Jefferson will make a morally sound judgment.

Banneker's main argument centers around the analogy of slavery to the oppression of the colonies under the British crown, which he uses to point out that the newly freed American people should be able to understand the feelings of the slaves. The author implores Jefferson to recall the "state of servitude... to which you were exposed." This choice of words allows Banneker to draw the parallel between colonial subservience to slavery that many would fail to make upon first glance. Just as the colonists wanted freedom, Banneker asserts that the slaves wanted and deserved it as well. Making an appeal to the authority of the Declaration of Independence (written by Jefferson himself), the author reminds Jefferson of the "unalienable rights" about which he had written not so long ago. In doing so, the author puts his audience into the shoes --or lack thereof-- of the slaves to make them understand the oppression and injustice the slaves feel.

In order to allow his audience to better understand the injustice of which he speaks, Banneker employs contrasting words to emphasize the hypocrisy of the colonists. First, the author reminds Jefferson of the "benevolence of the father of mankind" and of his equal and impartial distribution of ... rights and privileges." He reminds his reader that this is the reality the colonists longed for and were able to achieve, yet it is only a fantasy for "my brethren under groaning captivity and cruel oppression." The contrasting connotations in Banneker's words allow him to emphasize the righteousness of freedom versus the injustice of slavery. How can this newly liberated people not understand the desire for liberation? How can they complain of oppression when they are oppressing others themselves? It is precisely these questions that Banneker hopes Jefferson will consider before allowing slavery to continue.

SAMPLE ESSAY B:

Whether we like to think about it or not, slavery is associated with our country's history. There have been several opinions on the constitutional fairness, but, nevertheless, it happened and eradicating it from this nation was a struggle. During this struggle, Benjamin Banneker took a huge step and wrote Thomas Jefferson about his negative feelings on the institution of slavery in which he implemented several religious appeals, repetition, and an array of emotional diction.

Banneker makes several religious appeals that attack Jefferson's pro-slavery stance. He states that while Jefferson is "fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father" to all mankind, he "counteracts his mercies" by condoning slavery to continue. This skilled religious appeal serves a dual purpose, the first of which binds Banneker and Jefferson together under a common God. This serves to show Jefferson that he and Banneker have a mutual religious understanding. But while the aforementioned quote ties the two men together, it also scorns Jefferson. Banneker chooses to attack Jefferson under the eyes of God so that he can maintain a polite air while also reprimanding Jefferson. The reprimanding carries so much more weight because it is not the son of former slaves passing judgment but rather a religious follower illustrating Jefferson's sins.

In accordance with maintaining that political disposition, Banneker constantly refers to Jefferson as "Sir." Banneker opens his letter with "sir" and repeats it six times before concluding, saying it at least once in every paragraph. This serves to show that while Banneker does not condone Jefferson's practices, he still has the utmost respect for him and the position he holds. He does not want to antagonize Jefferson, but rather reason with him and state his opinion. Continually repeating "sir" shows Jefferson that he is a dignified person which destroys the possible notion that races makes people inferior. It also serves as a concession and make it hard for Jefferson to become enraged when Banneker is continually stroking Jefferson's ego and showing him the utmost respect.

Banneker also utilizes emotional diction in his argument against slavery. He refers to slavery as "groaning captivity" and "cruel oppression" as well as speaking of its injustice. All of these words were specifically chosen to represent the plight of the slave as well as depicting the horrendous life they must endure daily. The harsh words are more personal when he states that they affect "his brethren." Now the slaves in question are not just figures in the distance, but are people with feelings and connections to other people. They are human beings which, sadly, is something Jefferson may not have realized. Banneker vividly depicts what Jefferson's actions are doing to real people which is intended to instill so much needed guilt, as well as calling for a radical and instrumental change.

SAMPLE ESSAY I:

Benjamin Banneker--slave, farmer, astronomer, and author--characterizes the injustices of slavery through two main methods alone: ethos and logos. Here was a man of great distinction and also of great standing: the great Thomas Jefferson. And there was a man who stood, merely an African-American of his times, if not a slave then certainly seen by others as one. Banneker aptly argues his points not simply through ethos and logos, but through the use of repetition and biblical allusion as well.

Banneker's appeal to emotion arose almost immediately, towards the end of the first sentence: "look back I entreat you on the variety of dangers to which you were exposed..." Banneker was obviously well-read; he knew Thomas Jefferson as a body of political and moral right, who risked treason several times in the name of American freedom and justice. With this knowledge, Banneker was able to formulate a background and relationship for discussion. And on these grounds, Banneker was able to regard Jefferson as almost an equal, through repeated use of the word "sir." In each newly-formed paragraph, he starts by prefacing his statements with the title, writings such things as "This sir," or "here, sir" or "Sir, I suppose..."

The author was able to further his use of ethos by appealing to Jefferson's "tender feelings" for himself, which led him to declare that he had "proper ideas of the great valuation of liberty." Ethos, curiously enough, also led Banneker into appealing to logic. In the first two paragraphs, where the writer employed various forms of historical allusion of suppression by the British, Jefferson was portrayed as a man destined for slavery, for an eternal State of Servitude. Then we notice that Banneker curiously flips this argument into a criticism of slavery. Slavery, he asserts, is a form of being that Jefferson fought tooth and nail against, so how is it logical to imprison others by these very means? Banneker directly quoted the Declaration of Independence in his defense saying "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Once a logical argument against the British, Banneker uses the document as a means to produce a logical argument against slavery.

In appealing to logic, Banneker employs the use of repetition again, stating in lines 31-35 "sir, how pitiable is it that although you... with respect to yourself." Through the use of repetition, Banneker is able to hammer his points home, that is is paradoxical, ironic, and hypocritical that one whose eyes are so keen with liberty falls short of providing freedom to his own peers and countrymen.

As a whole, Banneker very successfully appealed to Jefferson in that he turned many of Jefferson's beliefs against him. Did he believe in slavery? No, but he practiced it himself. Did Jefferson state that all men are created equal? Yes, but somehow God's universal laws of equality didn't apply to some people. In reality, Banneker did indeed "suffer" through slavery and injustice. And his appeals to Thomas Jefferson surely can be characterized by emotion and logic.

SAMPLE 2A: