

WRITING THROUGH THE RHETORICAL MODES

SECTION 1: A RHETORICAL MODES READER

Chapter Three: The Descriptive Mode

Description: Reading 2

Maxim Gorky, “Coney Island”

Maxim Gorky was a Russian and Soviet writer, whose writing did much to promote Communist values and won five nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Gorky wrote this essay while on a fundraising trip to the United States on behalf of the Bolshevik wing of the Communist Party.

<https://arch3522.wikispaces.com/file/view/gorky-boredom.pdf>

Questions for Reading and Discussion

- 1) Initially, Gorky is dazzled by the sights of Coney Island. Very soon, however, his wonder turns to irritation. Where does this turn occur, and what are the reasons for it? Point to passages in the text to support your answer.
- 2) As the editor states in his introduction to the article, Maxim Gorky had a reputation in the United States for being “The Bitter One.” What are the benefits of a bitter, grouchy, or pessimistic point of view? What does this point of view provide that a more cheery perspective can not?
- 3) Keeping in mind that Gorky is a Communist of the Russian revolutionary era and therefore a proponent of working and poor people all over the world, what reasons does he give for these people’s attraction to Coney Island, a place he so clearly dislikes? Do they enjoy what they see, or do they seek distraction at the amusement park for other reasons?

Questions for Writing and Research

- 1) For Gorky, boredom lives at the heart of “entertainment.” Where does it live for you? Describe boredom in two to three pages.
- 2) Describe an occasion when your mood was completely out of step with the people around you. What were the reasons for this disparity?

2) Gorky describes loosely Christian-themed attractions like “Hell,” “The World Beyond the Grave,” and “The Flood” that appealed to park-goers in 1907 but that might not appeal to us today. Write a research paper in which you contrast the attractions of the original parks at Coney Island to those of a contemporary amusement park. What attractions did the Coney Island parks have that seems strange, astonishing, or dangerous to us today? What can a contemporary park’s newest attractions tell us about our own culture?



Original content by Ashar Foley.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/).