

“The Trouble With Television” by Robert MacNeil
Literary Analysis: Persuasive Techniques

Persuasive techniques are the methods that a writer uses to convince an audience to think or act a certain way.

- **Repetition** is an effective way to drive home a point.
- **Rhetorical questions** (questions with obvious answers) make readers more likely to agree with later, more controversial points.

In “The Trouble With Television,” Robert MacNeil uses both repetition and rhetorical questioning to drive home a point to his audience. Here is an example of the latter.

Who can quarrel with a medium that so brilliantly packages escapist entertainment as a mass-marketing tool?

This rhetorical question forces readers to acknowledge the obvious answer: It is hard to argue against such a successful combination of entertainment and marketing.

DIRECTIONS: *Decide whether you find each of the following passages from the selection convincing, and then answer the questions.*

1. “It has become fashionable to think that, like fast food, fast ideas are the way to get to a fast-moving, impatient public.”

A. MacNeil use the word *fast* three times. What three things is he describing?

B. How does the repetition in the preceding sentence convey the author’s negative attitude toward television?

2. “When before in human history has so much humanity collectively surrendered so much of its leisure to one toy, one mass diversion?”

A. How would you answer the rhetorical question?

B. Does answering the question help persuade you to support the author’s argument? Explain.

3. “When before in human history has so much humanity collectively surrendered so much of its leisure to one toy, one mass diversion? When before has virtually an entire nation surrendered itself wholesale to a medium for selling?”

A. Why might MacNeil have repeated the word *surrendered*?

B. Do you find the repetition effective? Explain.
