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Guided Close Reading and Rhetorical Analysis of Miley Cyrus's "Flowers"

Begin by listening to Miley Cyrus's hit song "Flowers," and as you do, listen for any interesting or unexpected uses of language. Consider what argument the speaker is carefully crafting in the song, and whether or not that argument is effective. Then, use the graphic organizer and questions for analysis *below* to guide your analysis. Be thoughtful and thorough as you unpack and analyze this argument! Remember — every single word has been carefully selected to deliver a specific meaning, or to have a purposefully intended effect. Identify, unpack, and analyze *everything*!

Excerpted Lyrics	Questions for Analysis	Your Notes
We were good	With just three words, we gain a sudden insight into the speaker, the audience, and the relationship between them. Unpack that relationship here. (What do you know about the speaker, and how do you know it, based on what you've inferred from these words alone? What about the person that she is speaking to — the "we"...?) Why did the speaker open with the word "we"...? How is the meaning and impact different from an alternative phrasing, such as "You and I were good," or, "Our relationship was good"...? What is implied by the use of past tense ("were")? How is the meaning and the impact of these words different from alternative phrasings, such as "We've been good," or, "We're no longer good"...? Why does the speaker use the word "good" to describe how they "were"...? How is the meaning and impact different from alternative phrasings, such as "We were fine," or "We were okay," or "We were perfect"...?	
We were gold	Interestingly enough, the speaker follows the first line with an alternative phrasing of the same line. Why? How has the meaning changed? In what meaningful way is "gold" different from "good"...? (What is "gold"...? Is it beautiful? Pure? Precious? More than "good"...?) How might the allusion to the popular phrase (and poem), "nothing gold can stay" be purposefully referenced here?	

Kinda dream that can't be sold	Unpack the abstract idea that is central to this line: What does it mean to “sell” a dream? How does that meaning apply to the relationship between the speaker and the audience that has already been contextualized in the argument? What else might be implied by this line? Considering all that we know <i>so far</i>, including the fact that the speaker has been using the <i>past tense</i> with regard to their relationship... why is it interesting and insightful that they shared a “kinda dream that can’t be sold”...? (If we can infer that their relationship met its demise, what else can we infer about it from the language in this line?)	
We were right 'til we weren't	In the same manner as the previous line, unpack what the speaker means by this. What is she suggesting about the deterioration of their relationship? What might be inferred about the timing or trajectory of its demise?	
Built a home and watched it burn	Interestingly, the singer (Miley Cyrus) and the ex-spouse she is believed to have written this song for (Liam Hemsworth) did indeed have a home together that burned down in a wildfire. How does this very specific and personal reference to a tangible, real-life event impact the overall argument? Even without the knowledge of this line referencing an actual tragedy in the speaker’s life, it delivers an abstract message and has an impact on the song. What is that message? What does it mean, in a metaphorical sense, to “build a home and watch it burn”...? How does this line contribute to our understanding of the speaker, the audience, and the relationship between the two?	
I didn't wanna leave you I didn't wanna lie	Begin by analyzing the implied meaning of these lines. If the speaker is saying that she “didn’t wanna leave,” what have we learned? (Did she ultimately leave? Does this imply that she stayed longer than she should have, and that she resisted leaving? What else might be inferred about their relationship if she truly “didn’t wanna leave”...?) Likewise, does the second line imply that she <i>did</i> lie? Given your knowledge of the argument so far, what could this be referring to? (In what	

	way would she be lying? Who would she be lying to?) The juxtaposition of “leaving” and “lying” is interesting. Analyze this from a rhetorical standpoint. (In what way does this alliteration enhance or impact the argument? What is the relationship between “leaving” and “lying”...? Can those two ideas co-exist — i.e. would she be “lying” if she didn’t “leave”...?) What purpose do these lines serve in the larger scheme of this argument? What do they reveal about the speaker? About the speaker’s relationship to the person she is speaking to? About the speaker’s experience throughout this breakup?	
Started to cry but then remembered I	Why does the speaker indicate that she “started to cry”...? What is the intended rhetorical effect? (What is she hoping to convey to her ex-spouse?) What role does the word “started” have — and why might that have been purposefully selected over phrases such as “I kept crying,” or “I couldn’t stop crying,” or “I stopped crying but then remembered”...? This line represents a pivotal moment in the song. Why is the word “but” so important in this moment? How might it offer a different impact than a word like “and”...? What’s the effect of the speaker indicating that she “remembered” something? She could have just as easily said that she “started to cry but then <i>realized</i>”... so what’s the nuanced difference between these two choices? How is the meaning different?	
I can buy myself flowers	This is the song’s “hook,” and the line from which the song got its title. Clearly, this is an important moment — so begin by unpacking the argument’s message. Having analyzed the argument to this key moment, what is it that the speaker is arguing? What <u>message</u> is she trying to convey to her ex? Once you’ve staked out the argument’s message, unpack the meaning behind these words. Why does she indicate that she “can buy herself flowers”...? This might be considered a rather unordinary or obvious sentence outside of the context of these lyrics (we can all buy ourselves flowers, can’t we?), but the rest of the	

	argument supercharges and transforms this phrase. Why does she say it, and what does it mean? Consider alternative phrasings and why the speaker might have selected this one — for example, what’s the purposeful difference between “I can buy <i>my own</i> flowers” vs. “I can buy <i>myself</i> flowers”...? Or between “I <i>can</i> buy myself flowers” and “I <i>will</i> buy myself flowers”...? Analyze all of it! Every word matters! What might this line suggest about the speaker’s audience, i.e. the speaker’s ex? (Does this line diminish him in some way? Does it reduce him to being no more than a source of flowers? Does it imply that he is easily replaceable — or, beyond that, that the speaker does not even need another person in order to fill the small void he has left behind?) Extend your analysis! If this line isn’t intended to disparage the speaker’s ex, what might it be intended to suggest about the speaker herself? (About her independence? About her ability to fill the void he has left behind <i>herself</i>...?)	
Write my name in the sand	The speaker proceeds to offer additional examples of ways she can replace (or fill the void left behind by) her audience / her ex. These might be considered parallel phrasings to “I can buy myself flowers,” so begin by considering how the meaning offered by these words (“write my name in the sand”) enhance or expand upon the meaning offered by “I can buy myself flowers.” (Are these lines simply saying the same thing? What’s the difference between buying oneself flowers, and writing one’s name in the sand? Is there an emotional or sentimental escalation?) As was the case with the prior line, consider whether these words might contain a subtle “attack” on the speaker’s ex? (What might we infer about the value she places on the person she is speaking to if she truly believes that she can replace him by writing her own name in the sand?) Revisit the questions that you considered when analyzing the previous line: Is this an attack on the audience (her ex)? Is it a celebration of her strength and independence? Does it matter that this is something she “remembered” rather than something she newly “realized”...?	

Talk to myself for hours Say things you don't understand	Extend the analysis you began in the two lines above. Consider the purposeful succession of things the speaker describes she can do with or for herself. Why might this sequence have been intentional, and what is the intended impact? Further, consider the specific language used in this line; is it an attack, a celebration, or both?	
I can take myself dancing And I can hold my own hand Yeah, I can love me better than you can	The sequence of things that the speaker describes she can do with or for herself culminates here. First, analyze the newest (and final) things in the sequence: taking herself dancing, holding her own hand, and finally, loving herself better than he can. As with the prior lines, analyze the specific phrasings, the specific language, and the intended meaning and impact of the actions being described (i.e. why “dancing,” why “holding hands”....?). Then, zoom out and consider the collection of things that the speaker has described (beginning with buying herself flowers) as a whole. Analyze <i>everything</i>. (What is the intended impact of the manner in which these things are sequenced? What do these things have in common? Are any more profound or somehow different than the others? What might they reveal about both the speaker <i>and</i> her audience / her ex?) The chorus also culminates with the line, “I can love me better than you can.” What might this imply about all of the things she just described? (Has the speaker been attempting to represent “love” with these items — and, if so, what might we infer by her representation? Do flowers, holding hands, and dancing translate to “love”...? Or, conversely, has the speaker simply been trying to represent a more superficial version of love that her audience / her ex offered her — something more easily replaced?) Unpack the phrase, “I can love me better than you can.” What does this imply about the audience / her ex? (Was he even buying her flowers and holding her hand?) Analyze this line, and consider how it might influence our understanding of the entire argument / of all the lines that came before it.	
Can love me better I can love me better, baby	At this point in the song, the lines “can love me better, I can love me better” are repeated again and again. What is the intended effect of that repetition? Why <i>these</i> words? What, exactly, is being emphasized?	

	This is an appropriate moment in the argument to pause and consider its overarching purpose. Remember, the “message” is <u>what</u> the speaker is saying / <u>what</u> the speaker is trying to convey, whereas the “purpose” is the speaker’s <u>motivation</u> for saying it. What is the speaker trying to accomplish by crafting and delivering this argument? Why is she saying all of this? (Is she trying to convince her <i>ex</i> of something? Is she trying to convince <i>herself</i> of something? And, knowing that she has a global audience listening in, might she also be striving to convince the <i>world</i> of something?)	
Paint my nails, cherry red Match the roses that you left	After the argument delivers some of its most powerful, memorable, and repeated lines, there is a notable shift in the speaker. From a rhetorical standpoint, how do these lines (the opening lines of verse 2) compare with the first few lines of the song (the opening lines of verse 1)? Consider the speaker’s intention behind these words and these actions. Why would she inform her audience / her ex that she has painted (or will paint) her nails cherry red? Why would she intentionally (rather than incidentally) paint her nails to match the color of the roses that he left? (Or, if it was incidental, what might be revealed about the speaker in knowing that she <i>noticed</i> this similarity?) As you did earlier, unpack what might we infer about the speaker’s experience in this breakup based on this language. The speaker purposefully mentions the “roses that you left.” Why? As was the case earlier, unpack these words to better understand what she might be implying. (Why would he leave or buy her roses? What might that imply about <i>his</i> experience in this breakup? Why does she say “the roses that you <u>left</u>” as opposed to alternatives such as, “the roses that you <u>bought me</u>”...? What might the roses metaphorically represent? Why is it SO interesting that she remembers, references, and associates <i>roses</i> in a song that revolves around the phrase, “I can buy myself flowers”...? Speaking of metaphors, what might it <i>metaphorically</i> mean to “buy myself flowers”...?)	
No remorse, no regret	As the speaker echoes a similar sentiment twice in these four words, revisit the argument’s purpose. (Who is she suggesting doesn’t have	

	any remorse or regret, and how do you know? Why is she repeating this notion twice? Who is she trying to convince?) Continue to think carefully about these specific words. Is there a meaningful difference between “remorse” and “regret”...? Why might she have used these two similar words in such close proximity? When is a phrase like “No regrets,” or, “I don’t regret it,” typically said? (Do people who experience ordinary or highly positive situations ever say “no regrets”...? When do non-regretful people utter these words? How does this line inform our understanding of the speaker’s context, and the speaker’s relationship with her audience / her ex?)	
I forgive every word you said	Take a moment to revisit and extend your understanding of this argument’s purpose. How do these words, in which the speaker directly offers forgiveness to her audience, impact our understanding of the speaker’s motive? How might this line – an offer of forgiveness – function as a rhetorical device? (What does this line <i>imply</i>? What does it tell us without overtly telling us?)	
I did not wanna leave you, baby I didn't wanna fight	Continue the analysis you began with the prior line. What can be inferred here? How is our understanding of the song’s message, and the speaker’s purpose, impacted?	
Started to cry but then remembered I I can buy myself flowers	The speaker returns to these words again and again throughout the song. Take one final opportunity to unpack this language, and specifically, the phrase: “I can buy myself flowers.” Closely read and analyze every word, every choice, and every implied meaning in that sentence...!	

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Rhetorical Analysis of Miley Cyrus's "Flowers" – Part II

Now that you've conducted an extended close reading and rhetorical analysis of Miley Cyrus's hit song "Flowers," take some time to analyze the song with regard to the rhetorical triangle and rhetorical appeals. Use the table below to organize your thoughts and your analysis.

What do you know about the speaker? What insights have been revealed, and which <i>specific</i> moments in the text reveal them? How do these understandings about the speaker contribute to the strength of the argument?	What do you know about the audience? (Are there multiple audiences, e.g. the speaker's ex... and the general public that's listening in to the song?) Use textual evidence to substantiate your claims. What has been revealed about the audience's relationship to the speaker? How do these understandings about the audience contribute to the strength of the argument?	What is the message that the speaker is trying to convey here? (Don't confuse "message" with "purpose." The question here is "<u>what is she saying?</u>" ...which is different than, "why is she saying it?") Explore the relationship between this message and (1) the speaker, and (2) the audience.
In what ways, if any, does the speaker appeal to ethos? (How might she try to foster <u>credibility</u> – so that the audience values, respects, or believes what she says?) Is it effective?	In what ways, if any, does the speaker appeal to pathos? (How might she try to purposefully evoke emotions from the audience? Which emotions are evoked – how and why?) If it effective?	In what ways, if any, does the speaker appeal to logos? (How does she construct, or give the appearance of constructing, a logical, rational progression of ideas?) Is it effective?
What is this argument's purpose? (Why is the speaker delivering THAT message to THAT audience? What is her motive? What might she be trying to accomplish through this argument?)	Is this argument effective? Where is it most effective, and what makes those moments so strong? Where is it least effective, and how might those moments be improved? Use textual evidence to support your ideas!	

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Comparative Rhetorical Analysis of Miley Cyrus's "Flowers" & Bruno Mars's "When I Was Your Man"

Now that you've conducted an extensive close reading and rhetorical analysis of Miley Cyrus's "Flowers," it's time to consider a second argument – that made by Bruno Mars in his hit song, "When I Was Your Man." Use the graphic organizer below, which contains excerpted lyrics from both songs, to help you unpack, compare, and contrast each argument. As you do so, identify similarities and differences with regard to each argument's speaker, audience, message, and purpose. Consider how the arguments might appeal to ethos, pathos, and logos in similar and different ways. Look for interesting ways in which both arguments might use the same (or similar) language, but to accomplish different effects, and to serve different purposes.

When I Was Your Man	Your Notes & Analysis	Flowers
Same bed but it feels just a little bit bigger now Our song on the radio but it don't sound the same When our friends talk about you, all it does is just tear me down 'Cause my heart breaks a little when I hear your name It all just sounds like ooh, ooh, ooh Mm, too young, too dumb to realize That I should have bought you flowers And held your hand Should have gave you all my hours When I had the chance Take you to every party 'cause all you wanted to do was dance Now my baby's dancing But she's dancing with another man My pride, my ego, my needs, and my selfish ways Caused a good strong woman like you to walk out my life Now I never, never get to clean up the mess I made, oh And that haunts me every time I close my eyes It all just sounds like ooh, ooh, ooh Mm, too young, too dumb to realize That I should have bought you flowers And held your hand Should have gave you all my hours When I had the chance Take you to every party 'cause all you wanted to do was dance Now my baby's dancing But she's dancing with another man Although it hurts I'll be the first to say that I was wrong I know I'm probably much too late To try and apologize for my mistakes But I just want you to know I hope he buys you flowers I hope he holds your hand Give you all his hours When he has the chance Take you to every party 'Cause I remember how much you loved to dance Do all the things I should have done When I was your man Do all the things I should have done When I was your man		We were good, we were gold Kinda dream that can't be sold We were right 'til we weren't Built a home and watched it burn Mm, I didn't wanna leave you I didn't wanna lie Started to cry but then remembered I I can buy myself flowers Write my name in the sand Talk to myself for hours Say things you don't understand I can take myself dancing And I can hold my own hand Yeah, I can love me better than you can Can love me better I can love me better, baby Can love me better I can love me better, baby Paint my nails, cherry red Match the roses that you left No remorse, no regret I forgive every word you said Oh, I did not wanna leave you, baby I didn't wanna fight Started to cry but then remembered I I can buy myself flowers Write my name in the sand Talk to myself for hours, yeah Say things you don't understand I can take myself dancing, yeah I can hold my own hand Yeah, I can love me better than you can Can love me better I can love me better, baby Can love me better I did not wanna leave you I didn't wanna fight Started to cry but then remembered I I can buy myself flowers Write my name in the sand Talk to myself for hours Say things you don't understand I can take myself dancing, yeah I can hold my own hand Yeah, I can love me better than Yeah, I can love me better than you can Can love me better I can love me better, baby Can love me better

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Rhetorical Analysis & Synthesis: Miley Cyrus's "Flowers" + Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art"

Now that you've closely read and analyzed Miley Cyrus's "Flowers," you will have an opportunity to synthesize it with Elizabeth Bishop's famous poem, "One Art." In summary, "One Art" is a poem about losing things – and it's structured as a villanelle, which requires the first and third lines of the poem to repeat throughout. As a result of the poem's structure, the poem "One Art" is inevitably going to end with "disaster" – an inescapable and growing sense of loss.

Begin by closely reading and analyzing "One Art." (It's an amazing poem.) Then, use the graphic organizer below to put "One Art" into conversation with Miley Cyrus's "Flowers." Compare and contrast each speaker's use of language, choice of rhetorical devices, overarching messages, and overall purpose.

"One Art" by Elizabeth Bishop	Close Reading, Analysis, and Textual Connections to "Flowers"
The art of losing isn't hard to master; so many things seem filled with the intent to be lost that their loss is no disaster.	
Lose something every day. Accept the fluster of lost door keys, the hour badly spent. The art of losing isn't hard to master.	
Then practice losing farther, losing faster: places, and names, and where it was you meant to travel. None of these will bring disaster.	
I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or next-to-last, of three loved houses went. The art of losing isn't hard to master.	
I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster, some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent. I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.	
—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident the art of losing's not too hard to master though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.	
In what ways are these two arguments alike? (<i>What might the speakers, audiences, messages, and <u>purposes</u> have in common? How do you know? Use textual evidence to support your ideas!</i>)	
In what ways are these two arguments different? (<i>What important differences exist between the speakers, audiences, messages, and <u>purposes</u>? How do you know? Use textual evidence to support your ideas!</i>)	
If these two speakers – Miley Cyrus and Elizabeth Bishop – were to have a conversation, what would they say to each? (<i>What common ground exists between their arguments? How might one enhance, or contribute to, the other?</i>)	