Rhetorical Analysis of Atticus Finch's Speech to the Jury

In Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird

Atticus Finch uses ethos, pathos, and logos in his speech to the jury to persuade them of Tom's innocence. His effective use of these rhetorical devices ultimately demonstrates his values and reflects his person. Though no one else would step up to represent Tom due to his race, Atticus did not back off from the challenge even though he knew inside that it was likely a futile venture. Atticus attempts to provide the jurors with a sense of duty to take the high road and acknowledge Tom Robinson as an equal in the courts: "It can be the Supreme Court of the United States or the humblest J.P. court in the land, or this honorable court which you serve.

“Our courts have their faults, as does any human institution, but in this country our courts are the great levelers, and in our courts all men are created equal" (205). Atticus uses words like "honorable" and "great" because they elevate the importance of maintaining the long lived code of equality in the courts. After using emotion to build pity for Mayella Ewell, Atticus uses pathos to get the jurors to feel a connection with Tom by mentioning that "a quite, respectable, humble Negro who had the unmitigated temerity to 'feel sorry' for a white woman has had to put his word against two white people's" (204). Not only can this statement lead the jurors to take pity on Tom, but it can also relate the jurors to Tom by revealing that they all share pity for Mayella. Lastly, Atticus exhibits logos in his speech when he explains why Tom could not have been guilty: "There is circumstantial evidence to indicate that Mayella Ewell was beaten savagely by someone who led almost exclusively with his left... and Tom Robinson nowsits before you, having taken the oath with the only good hand he possesses -his right hand" (204). Atticus thoroughly disproves the possibility that Tom is guilty by providing solid evidence that is logically sound. Although Tom was ultimately found guilty, all of the persuasion techniques that Atticus uses make his speech more convincing overall.