Rhetorical Analysis Essay Walkthrough (Analysis of “Libraries Face Sad Chapter”)

Rhetorical Analysis definition: An essay that critiques the persuasiveness of an essay, speech, advertisement, or any other persuasive medium. Ethos, pathos, and logos guide the analysis (each would get its own body paragraph).

These paragraphs are very similar to short answers. You still need ABC, but you can have more than one B/C, and you do not need to stay within ten lines or twenty-six lines.

A thesis for a rhetorical analysis needs to include the following elements:

How effective was the piece + what was the goal of the piece + How did the piece use ethos, pathos, and logos.

A sample essay for “Libraries Face Sad Chapter” by Pete Hamill follows. (We used our Monday notes/chart on the article to help us write this essay):

Thesis: Hamill’s “Libraries Face Sad Chapter” is mostly effective in convincing New Yorkers to save public libraries because the author equally and strongly uses ethos, pathos, and logos to build his argument.

Hamill uses logos, known as logical reasons, to support his point, first bringing up that libraries are important to humans in general, but especially immigrants, and focusing on the cost second. He said that as humans, “we imagine, then we live” (533), showing how important imagination that books bring us is. Only by imagining can a human hope to have a meaningful life, and libraries help provide that. He says this is even more important for immigrant because, not only do they need the institutions for imagination’s sake, they need libraries to pursue practical “information…[on] this new world…to get better jobs…green cards… [and] citizenship” (533). Another effective reason he cites is the cost: today, “books and movies [are] more expensive than ever,” so free libraries are needed to connect people to meaningful entertainment and imagination, which he has established is essential to all humans. Otherwise, we would be denying people, especially the poor, access to a basic need. For all these reasons given, it can be said that Hamill uses logos in his argument effectively.

In addition, Hamill’s ethos is important to the piece’s persuasiveness because it shows the audience that he is fair, experienced, and respectful. He shows fairness by using counterargument, saying “Such reductions [cuts in libraries] are understandable” (534); this shows fairness because Hamill has done his research and considered what his opponents have faced. In other words, he is not so biased in his own opinion that he did not even consider opposing viewpoints. He is also credible because he is an experienced writer, being on “The New York Times Bestseller list” twice and also having a record as a journalist (529). Finally, he is of good character as shown by his level of respect for “the labor of those men and women who got us here” and who helped build the New York City libraries, saying we should “honor” them (534). Fairness, respect, and experience all aid in convincing an audience to trust any author, and so it helps strengthens Hamill’s piece specifically as well.

Finally, Hamill inserts pathos to make his argument touch readers’ hearts, stirring up emotions like sympathy. He creates sympathy for the plight of immigrants, stating a personal experience of how his own father, an immigrant from Belfast, “first read the Constitution in a book borrowed from the Prospect Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library” (533). This personal story is meant to create sympathy in readers so that they can understand how important it is for immigrants to be able to access a library—their very futures are at stake because knowing the Constitution is essential for citizen status and ability to stay in the United States. Showing this human story and not simply stating this fact is a more impactful way of getting his message across to the audience in this case. Therefore, Hamill uses the right amount of pathos and logos to balance out his argument.

Therefore, by using ethos to create trust, pathos to create sympathy, and logos to show the importance of libraries, Hamill builds a solid persuasive piece to save one of New York City’s most important public institutions of learning.