

Student Sample

AP Language & Composition

Mrs. Floading

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The sample editorial analysis provided below is based on the essay provided in *The Language of Composition* textbook pgs. 6-7. Use this as a model for writing your own analyses.

Honoring Mothers and Families

Jody Heyman’s editorial for The Washington Post, “We Can Afford to Give Parents a Break” asserts that the U.S. would do well to honor the sacrifices made by parents not with a national holiday, but with more flexible maternity leave policies. She presents her argument by using three counterarguments – which she refers to as “myths” and focuses on each of them in turn. Her purpose is to draw attention to this national issue that receives little attention. This editorial is effective because it uses a combined approach of all three rhetorical appeals while Heyman’s language choices serve to reinforce their power.

The writer establishes ethos immediately by using the phrase “our government” – suggesting that she is taking on this issue for the benefit of the audience. Here she is appealing to the shared values of her audience. Heyman proves to be a reliable source on this topic because she is identified as an expert who has written a book on the topic and also “collected data – for Harvard University’s Project on Global Working Families and at McGill University” (Heyman 2). Because she has firsthand experience working on research related to this subject she has credibility as the writer of this opinion piece.

Heyman’s strongest appeal is to logos because she uses facts and figures extensively to approach this topic. She notes the policies in other countries and explains, “When children get

sick, parents in 37 countries are guaranteed at least a minimum amount of paid leave to care for them,” and “personal sick leave is a basic right of citizens in more than 150 countries around the world” (Heyman 2). The writer also uses cause and effect as a way to organize her editorial, pointing out that the situations of low- and middle-income mothers who do not have paid sick leave have a direct result on the health of their children. Using logos ensures that she is approaching a controversial topic with an economic perspective, which may allow her to win over a wider audience with her argument.

Although Heyman’s editorial is largely an appeal to ethos and logos, she does not ignore the impact of an emotional appeal, or pathos. She publishes this editorial about mothers on Mother’s Day and argues “If politicians...really valued mothers and families on Mother’s Day or any other day, they would commit to finally ensuring rights for American mothers and fathers that most parents around the world already enjoy” (Heyman 2). Here she is using the power of our warm feelings associated with Mother’s Day to make us consider her argument.

Heyman’s stylistic choices reinforce her passionate feelings about this topic. Although the editorial is largely composed of complex sentences that use subordination, she does use one short, simple sentence early in the piece to emphasize her tone of frustration. She writes “Not in America” immediately following a description of other countries that have guaranteed paid maternity leave (Heyman 1). This use of syntax draws attention to how she will structure her essay around the counterargument. She is attempting to surprise the reader by contrasting America with the other countries on the list. Another stylistic choice near the end of the editorial serves her appeal to pathos. Heyman begins several clauses with the phrase “They would” and uses this parallelism to emphasize how we would truly honor mothers and families if our leave policies were more flexible in this country.

Finally, Heyman's use of powerful word choice, or diction, emphasizes her tone of frustration. She begins her essay by identifying the "myths surrounding our government's treatment of mothers" (Heyman 1). The use of the word "myths" has a powerful connotation – here Heyman is attempting to prove that the American public has been misled. As a result, we are operating under beliefs that are not based in fact.

Works Cited

Heyman, Jody. "We Can Afford to Give Parents a Break". Editorial. The Washington Post. 14 May 2006. Web. 15 October 2012. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/12/AR2006051201817.html>