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Rhetorical Analysis on "It's Not as Simple as It Seems"

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Rhetorical Analysis on "It's Not as Simple as It Seems"

Writing Process

I wrote this essay as an assignment for my English class, themed Remix Culture. Throughout the course, we examined the originality and even legality of numerous "remix" art forms from music mash ups to a classic novel. Delving further into the legality aspect, we examined the extent to which different works were plagiarized. Did Robin Thicke steal the beat for "Blurred Lines"? Did Harriet Beecher Stowe write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Or did God write it, as she claimed? Is anything truly original? Or is everything a derivative of some pre-existing elements? In "It's Not as Simple as It Seems," Leila Christenbury asks these questions, and claims plagiarism is hardly defined. My essay explores her effectiveness in conveying her claim via a close examination of her use of pathos, organization, and ethos.

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Rhetorical Analysis

In her featured article “It’s Not as Simple as It Seems,” professor Leila Christenbury of Virginia Commonwealth University claims “we must agree that plagiarism is hardly as simple as it seems” (20). With experience teaching middle school, high school, and college level courses, Christenbury explains to readers that plagiarism is not as well defined as it may seem and tailors her article toward students and English professionals. Having seen the troubles that students and even writers in general encounter with proper citation and documentation, Christenbury writes to raise awareness of the issue and suggests methods teachers can take to combat faulty work. Recounting her career, Christenbury notes different instances in which plagiarism occurred. With pathos, logical organization, and ethos, Christenbury effectively convinces readers that educators must make the effort to teach their students about proper citation and correct documentation.

Notably, Christenbury’s incorporation of pathos makes her article relatable. Her story of her high school class, for example, is amusing as she describes how an uproar erupted after she reminded a student to cite his sources. One student, whom Christenbury deems the “class spokesperson,” took it upon himself to e-mail her, saying her reminder was “disheartening” (19). Meanwhile, a parent sought to involve the school’s principal. Readers can likely associate with a situation in which a simple statement sparked significant drama and as a result can realize the silliness of the scenario. Her example is thus familiar, and readers can easily relate. Another example of pathos is evident in Christenbury’s satirical side remarks, namely the list of

“wonderfully revelatory” websites from which students can purchase a paper: “cheat house,” “research heaven,” and even “school sucks” (19). Her sarcastic wit satirizes the fact that some students would be willing to purchase a paper from such sites and again reiterates her claim that educators must take measures.

Perhaps Christenbury’s strongest presentation of pathos is revealed in her sympathy toward students guilty of plagiarism. She notes cultural barriers between Chinese and American learning styles as well as students feeling their personal property rights had been violated when *Turnitin.com* retained submitted papers. Thus she conveys her consideration while simultaneously proving plagiarism exists in different forms (19-20). Her ability to sympathize (let alone her declaration of her understanding) depicts her as a considerate individual and removes any stigmas of a teacher looking to catch (per se) her students. Seeing that Christenbury cares causes readers to do the same.

In addition to pathos, Christenbury’s structure produces efficiently arranged sections, and she organizes her argument in a way that is logical and easy to follow. She begins with the statement that plagiarism may take on different forms and that it lacks a definitive definition (17). After asserting her claim, she continues, citing examples from her career as evidence. She witnesses everything from an “otherwise unremarkable freshman” (18) who wrote an exceptional essay about a French author to a “well-respected colleague” who submitted a script copied nearly verbatim from a previously published newspaper article (23). These examples develop her thesis while setting the stage for her conclusion. She rounds out her article with solutions for teachers looking to eliminate plagiarism from their classroom. In a visually coherent bulleted list, Christenbury advises teachers to “experiment with collaborative research,” and “teach citation, summarizing, and paraphrasing skills” (22).

A second example of Christenbury's organization is illustrated by the incorporation of headings. Jumping from flashbacks, headings allow for clear indication of a change in topic. And with numerous recollections as well as points to convey, headings steer readers and prevent major focuses from running together. Through both her ordering and her use of headings, Christenbury strengthens her argument by presenting it in a well organized, logically arranged structure that is simple to follow and in turn more convincing.

Furthermore, Christenbury's appeal to ethos establishes her as a sound, credible author and supports her claim that plagiarism is not as clearly defined as believed. Vast teaching experience exposes Christenbury to plagiarism at numerous levels in the educational structure. Moreover, her experience instills validity in her propositions to teachers on how to circumvent plagiarism. Having students research their birthdays, she explains, naturally piques interest and forces them to refer to a variety of sources, as they check sports statistics, trends in culture, and major headlines. Christenbury's credibility is heightened, for she claims she has never had a student plagiarize the assignment. Recognizing students' innate "interest...in that ever-fascinating subject, [them]selves," she exhibits a clear understanding of students and proves that avoiding plagiarism is in fact possible (22).

Furthermore, serving as editor for *English Journal* and (in the process) having a colleague submit a plagiarized work exposes Christenbury to plagiarism outside the realm of academia. Possessing both perspectives, Christenbury is very familiar with plagiarism in different environments. Her propositions and claims are again highly respectable and credible.

From ancient times to our current point in history, students and individuals have sought to "prune what the...teacher asked [of] them and substitute for it what they were willing to do" (Christenbury 17). Simply stated, people have shortcut what is required and can be expected to

continue to do so. Plagiarism is one example. Drawing on humorous high school tales, revealing sympathy toward plagiarizing students, organizing her work clearly and logically, and offering a multi-dimensional take on the matter, author-professor Leila Christenbury fully convinces readers that plagiarism truly is not “as simple as it seems” (16).