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AP Language

“Understanding Brooks’ Binaries” OPR

Rachel Kolb’s thorough critique of David Brooks’ New York Times editorial “It’s Not About You,” captioned “Understanding Brooks’ Binaries,” presents a wide array of dichotomies and juxtapositions present in Brooks’ argument. By employing direct quotes from the editorial, juxtaposing various opposite pairs of rhetorical components, Kolb effectively demonstrates how Brooks constantly contrasts his inferences “on the basis of binary oppositions.” (Kolb, pg. 1) At the same time, Brooks uses rhetorical devices to paint a picture of what he believes to be the reality of the future of today’s graduates from the inadequacies of America’s modern educational system. Kolb states that rather than solely focusing on the logos of the argument, buttressing his claims with specific facts and external references, Brooks assumes himself to be an authority on his topic based on his “position as a baby boomer and *New York Times* columnist.” (Kolb, pg. 2) Similarly, in “Pages or Screens” by Gideon Rappaport, the argument is developed primarily on personal experience as a teacher, glorifying the successes of the students’ “predecessors,” assuming he was around to teach them, and provides little to no evidence supporting his stringent, traditional viewpoint.

Throughout each paragraph, Kolb identified and analyzed different rhetorical components substantiating Brooks’ argument. By summarizing the thesis of Brooks’ editorial, which was: “David Brooks argues that that structure of the modern educational system nevertheless leaves young people ill-prepared to meet the challenges of the real world” (Kolb, pg. 1), it signifies that Kolb recognizes the problem mentioned in Brooks’ publication and how he broke it down into greater detail and depth. Specifically, Brooks’ opinions oppose mainstream cultural messages reiterating the supposed “litany” of expressive individualism. Due to Kolb’s critical commentary on the author’s lack of evidence, she manages to describe how the author rather employs a wide range of realistic scenarios to prove the disappointments in life graduates will encounter due to their ill preparedness during high school. While this can serve as realistic bits of advice, they don’t exactly express the typical response during each situation, but more or less his own personal experiences as a graduate. Kolb represents how this causes his attitude towards the text to increase towards the middle, and how readers are sent off with a conclusion that isn’t challenging, but rather understanding and relative to the author’s purpose to inform/persuade.

The word binary itself can be defined as something consisting of two parts. I connected the concept with dichotomy and compare/contrast, because Brooks writes in a fashion that describes what is right and wrong to him, and what is the supposed ‘reality.’ What makes Brooks’ binary oppositions so notable and effective in the passage overall is his ability to use words to convey his message, while using rhetorical devices to paint a picture for the readers to obtain a better understanding of what he/she’s trying to say. For instance, imagery is present in “perversely structured youth” and “wide open adulthood,” because one might picture a kid with mental problems vs. a range of successful adult careers seeming light years away from what the ‘graduates’ have yet to achieve due to the shortcomings of the modern educational system. After reading Kolb’s analysis on Brooks’ editorial, I learned many new aspects of structure and style I didn’t previously notice while reading “It’s Not About You,” convincing me to assume a slightly different perspective towards today’s graduates and criticism of the educational system.