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Finalist

Short Essay Category

2019 Emerging Writers Contest

Can One Small Word Change It All?

Erica Strauss, author of *Zombies Vs. The Joy of Canning: Motivation in the Productive Home*, composes her essay with effective rhetorical techniques because she has identified her target audience. She engages these techniques through her stylistic prose and in the relatability of her message. Knowing her audience she designed her essay carefully, selecting specific details and words in which will be the most effective way to reach them. However, Strauss' argument is stunted with a few choice words which begin to weaken her argument. Strauss' descriptive word choices give the reader a glimpse of the world through her eyes, evoking detailed images for the reader to envision and engage to share her colorful description of her food. Through her selective design and execution choices, including stylistic prose, personal experience, and use of profanity, Strauss is able to structure her essay to ultimately end in her favor.

Strauss begins her essay with her first stylistic decision, a conversation between her and a friend. They are talking about getting together after dinner, but Strauss asks to postpone their meeting because she stayed up late the night before finishing her yearly supply of canning. This immediately propels thought in the reader, wondering why one would one be canning a whole year's worth supply in one night. Strauss uses this instilled connection she has created with the reader to further her thoughts about why to can and how she sees the benefits of having a productive home. She introduces words like "nurturing" and "home" to connect with the

audience of predominantly stay at home rural women. She says, “the simple pleasures that come from nurturing and creation in the home are sometimes lost” (Strauss 79). The word nurturing in the minds of these women interjects the thought of a mother and her child, a memory they all likely possess. It is a word that will make them reflect on their own childhoods with their mother or maternal figure. This visual helps amplify feelings of home and security surrounded by love and how love is a fundamental ingredient in all home cooked meals. Towards the end of the story, Strauss makes another stylistic decision by using the repetition of the word “because” followed by short blunt sentences to instill the importance of our personal relationship with home and food. She says, “ Because cooking dinner makes me proud. Because the food is delicious. Because the kind of works makes me happy. That’s why. And that's enough” (Strauss 80).

Strauss connection to the reader is where she collects most of her influential power. Strauss states that she is making her home a place of greater productivity and fewer consumptions (79). This challenges the reader to reflect on whether they hold similar values in their life, in their homes, in their decisions, while also bringing consciousness to those who are may not be as productive in their world. She offers her own relationships in her home and kitchen and provides a platform for the reader either to agree or disagree. She is clear that her reasoning is entirely her own and we are all entitled to our own reasons; we do not need the gratification or justification from others. Thus, she creates confidence in the reader which she hopes will leave a positive feeling to be associated with Strauss’ essay message. She also uses a small amount of comical effect to connect to her reader. She jokingly states to beware of the zombies and preventatively growing a garden. These so-called zombies are the corporate-dominated markets which rule in the food production industry. She is telling the reader to

establish their own way of production, a garden, rather than getting manipulated by the monstrous domination of the food industry.

Strauss' essay takes an unexpected turn when she writes some choice words. Profanity is not anything new to most people. In an everyday setting, people probably would not think much of it either considering it is widely used in spoken language among adults. However, in a professional setting such as this, it comes out as a form of attack, and it is even taken as an insult. Immediately, the author's credibility is at risk. Depending on the particular reader, these choice words could have an effect anywhere from putting a bad taste in someone's mouth to deterring the audience so much they stop reading entirely. When she says, "But I will rise back up and when I do, I'll be holding these homegrown, organic cantaloupes, motherfucker!" I believe her intent is to express her exuberant passion towards the movement to keep the simple pleasure of productive homes alive (Strauss 79). I believe a similar truth when she says, "You have to like bullshitting with farmers and ranchers and going out on field trips to where food is grown" (Strauss 80). She states that when push comes to shove you have to truly enjoy what you are doing. Unfortunately for Strauss, it ends up reinforcing a juvenile sense of behavior and leaves the reader with discontent. This results in a change in tone of how the reader receives the further information. No longer do they accept Strauss as someone whose opinions they trust. They see her as a vulgar angered author who is shaming anyone and everyone who does not agree with her.

Overall even though Strauss entangles some unfortunately misinterpreted statements her overall design and execution choices, in my opinion, have ended in her favor. Ignoring her profane language use she uses various attention grabbers and personal anecdotes that connect and entice the reader. Although, I feel as though I understand why she ended up adding those

few indecent choice words. Strauss wants to express the degree of passion and shock the reader into her own enthusiasm. This goes to show not every author can cater their paper to please everyone. As long as her message was impactful for those in which it was meant for, all of her rhetorical choices, even the bad ones, are forgiven.