**Rhetorical Analysis: Sample In-Class Essay Response**

Note: Immediately below this paragraph is the set of instructions that will come with your prompt, and below the line is a sample of the sort of response I’m looking for. Of course, I’m typing this sample on a computer at my leisure, and I have a LOT more experience doing this, so I don’t really expect your answers to be this well developed or (ahem) this well expressed. I just want you to see how these answers can look at their fullest.

**Overview**: You have learned the basics of rhetorical analysis; now you will practice those skills by writing an analysis of an argument.

**Directions:** Read the attached argument and discuss (concisely) how the following rhetorical elements are operating.

* Who seems to be the **intended audience** and how can you tell?
* What is the **context** for the argument—In other words, why should this audience care about this topic in the here and now?
* How does the writer establish her **ETHOS**: good sense, good morals, and good will? (Cover all 3)
* How does the writer use the **PATHOS** appeal: emotions, values, beliefs? (cover the first 2, at least)
* How does the writer use the **LOGOS** appeal: evidence and logical reasoning?

**Format:** PLEASE SKIP LINES! Write as NEATLY as possible. (If I can’t read it, you didn’t write it.)

**Find examples** from the argument **for each of the appeals** and **discuss** how they would likely operate on the audience.

**Sample Answer, based on “Regrets of an Accomplished Child”**

**Audience:** Based on both the subject matter and the forum, which was the “Education Life” supplement to the *New York Times*, this seems primarily intended for those with a particular interest in higher education: college students and older high school students, their parents, and people who work in higher education. More specifically, its target is those young people who might be following the path of what Pamela Paul calls the *merely* accomplished child, one who is focused on getting good grades but not necessarily a good education. She could also be addressing the adults (parents/teachers/counselors) who try to keep their child away from any “risky” behavior that might mar their chances of getting into the “right” kindergarten/prep school/college/corporation.

[Note: besides subject matter and forum, you might also get an argument that addresses the reader directly, such as “Message to my Freshman Students,” in which case you can bring in that sort of evidence, too.]

Context: The writer mentions some worrying trends in society today that she thinks might be producing to a whole generation that could be getting good grades but not really learning anything, neither in their classes nor in “real life,” because they are learning to avoid the kind of risk that is actually necessary for learning. She cites “over-protective parents, schools dedicated to acing exams, a college preparatory system that offers zero capacity for error.” By implication, she also suggests that major corporations who seek the kind of job candidate she became (ivy-league grads with bland but spotless records) might also be to blame.

Ethos:

* **Good sense**-- Ms. Paul shows that she is both smart enough to get into an ivy league school and wise enough to finally realize that she wasn’t getting the kind of education she would need to lead the kind of life she wanted. She also writes very well, which makes her sound both articulate and intelligent.
* **Good morals**— Although she presents herself as having a weak work ethic when she was young (organizing her class schedule around her favorite soap opera, for example), this makes her sound very relatable and non-judgmental, rather than striking a “holier-than-thou” pose. She also says she was motivated by “dreams of public service,” rather than just by ambition and greed, which most would see as ethical. She also expresses some dismay at the trend toward cheating in school, so it’s fair to assume she herself didn’t do this, even though it’s another way to look “accomplished” without doing the work or actually learning anything. She also shows courage in changing her life path, even after many years on it.
* **Good will**— The whole essay seems designed to save the reader from the kind of mistakes she made, and, again, she manages to not come across as “yet another wizened Gen Xer wagging a precipitately middle-aged finger at millennial youth,” even though she is offering them advice. She also takes full responsibility for making what she now sees as bad choices when young, rather than blaming society or her parents, as so many do.

Pathos: The story of how she almost ended up in a job that didn’t really match up with her dreams is likely to appeal to the emotions of those who actually did fall into that trap (e.g. some parents reading this), and also to college students who fear doing this themselves. The older people might feel regret and maybe shame, while the younger people might feel fear. In terms of values, she appeals to the idea that people should “follow their bliss” when choosing a life path, not just take the safe-but-dull route. Obviously not everyone values this more than security/status/high pay, but since “the pursuit of happiness” is protected in our Constitution, it is something Americans do tend to value highly. Those whose beliefs run more towards family tradition/parental authority, rather than a young person’s individual choice, might not agree with this, though.

Logos: Most of the evidence for Ms. Paul’s claim that our society has become too risk-averse and “success”-oriented in its child-rearing and education comes from personal experience, details about the approach she took to fit into the environment she was brought up in. However, she also brings in testimony from her friend, the creative writing teacher, to show that other students today have this focus on jumping through hoops, rather than real learning. The anecdote about the hoop-jumping kindergartener is further evidence. Finally, she brings in a genuine expert, David McCullough Jr., to provide some scientific support about her claim that we are raising a new generation that is discouraged from taking risks. She also cites the scientific-sounding term “risk homeostasis” to support her claim that there is something in human nature that actually needs and seeks out risk. Later she brings in evidence from her own risky journey to Thailand to suggest that this is what saved her from a soul-less corporate life and led her back to her dream of writing for a living. This is reinforced by the last line about her current job with the *NY Times.*