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Maintaining a free spirit: Antimaterialism

Material and comfort provide a temporary happiness that will not last. So, to live a life of wholesome fulfillment, we look to the past for wisdom. One writer in particular can remind us how to live the good life. Henry David Thoreau in “Where I lived and what I lived for” is able to show the importance of free spirit while we live in a materialistic world. In this chapter of Walden, Thoreau built his credibility first. Then, he made references to draw on emotions which are follow up by supportive facts. The flow of information in a specific manner adds to the effectiveness of the arguments defense. However, from an analytical stance, his intent for an audience seems unclear.

Thoreau used three basic components of argument when he illustrated his points. The concepts were ethos, pathos and logos. More important than what each subject meant, was the order in which he presented them. The author used ethos and gained his audiences trust to begin with. This clearly demonstrated his persuasive effort and connected his personality to the work. Next, he moved to the weakest component, emotional appeal or pathos. He placed the weakest substance as the glue in the middle. Finally he ended the Chapter on cold, hard facts. These logos statements drove home the fluid and meaningful points he made with the weaker pathos. Thoreau intended each segment with a specific purpose and the placement worked well.

Thoreau wrote this chapter of Walden and described his journey before he acquired Walden Pond. This work used common persuasive techniques and built the authors credibility. As humans, we trust based on corroboration and experience. So Thoreau casually dropped two subtle facts, that he was both knowledgeable and known by others to be knowledgeable about property analysis. He accomplished this when he mentioned his friend’s viewed him as a bit of a real estate broker. This excellently demonstrated an appeal to his audience’s ethos and established credibility right off the bat.

The literary work intended to defend several viewpoints. The first, why Thoreau took his time and evaluated a several lands thoroughly before he purchased the deed of one. As he defended this concept, he used arguments with vivid details and quotes to draw on emotions. He first mentioned the taste of wild apples that grew on the farmer Hollowell’s land. This sweet reward eluded to the benefit of a hard day’s work. Thoreau pursued something more than temporary gratification. His vision included a much bigger picture than simply an apple. He intended to get lost in the beauty of the land while he looked for his answers. Was this the farm for him? As he described this savored apple, he showed us that the adventure was more than any part or piece of the farm. He wanted to truly love the land before he signed his name to a document. Furthermore, he demonstrated his depth when he appreciated a lands flaws equally as much as the benefits. In a brief paragraph that described the Hollowell Farm’s attractions, Thoreau mentioned the dilapidated state of the fence and the run down bar. With these realistic descriptors he painted an all-inclusive scene of the farm. This captured the feeling of what made the Hollowell place stand out from the other properties to Thoreau. Thoreau also backed this concept of patient analysis with a quote from one of the Ancient Greek philosophers named Cato:

When you think of getting a farm turn it thus in your mind, not to buy greedily; nor spare your pains to look at it, and do not think it enough to go round it once. The oftener you go there the more it will please you, if it is good." (Walden – Chapter 2)

This careful evaluation showed how important it was for him to slow down and stay in the present moment.

Thoreau made freedom another point of defense. As he fortified this concept, he relied on logic and facts. First he stated that it is best to live free from all commitments, whether to jail or farm. He backed this opinion with facts from his lifestyle and evidence. Thoreau recalled the fact that he only ever owned a boat and tent for residence. These two possessions showed how he preferred to live. Whenever he wanted a change, he could easily have sailed his boat down river. Also he could have moved the tent to any place he liked most. These facts, both strong examples of logos, bolstered the argument for total detachment from commitments.

When the work is evaluated for an audience, it’s difficult to understand exactly who this Chapter was written for. Thoreau never addressed future generations specifically, it’s also unclear if he established a specific relationship with the reader. At certain times it seemed like Thoreau wrote this work to any section of society that suffered from materialism. At other time the document related to anyone who loved dialogue and the art of conversation.

The organization of Chapter 2 from Walden contributed to the effect of the argument. Thoreau ordered each concept by importance and strength. He wanted to build trust before he jumped into a persuasive dialog, so he started with credibility. His audience needed to know about him before they believed in his message. After he gained the audiences trust, he moved to emotions. Emotional appeal provided the much needed substance to pull the audience in to the adventure with him. As the final note, he moved to the facts that solidified the emotional response. This transition between these three concepts added to the success of the argument. The audience of this paper was uncertain. Thoreau wrote “Where I lived and what I lived for” in an ambiguous manner, so the only qualm resided in who exactly he wrote this for.