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A Talk to Teachers Reflection

James Baldwin communicates his experiences growing up in the United States as an African American individual. While the literary piece was originally delivered as a speech, its persuasive value does not diminish as a written piece. The audience is taking down a road that many of us would like to pretend does not and never did exist. However, the harsh reality is that it did and still does have relevance in today's world. Baldwin manages to accurately portray education in American culture, in a nature similar to Maya Angelou, through his extensive use of imagery and details.

The amount of disturbing images in the world is unimaginable. They can be as close to home as abandoned dogs in a Sarah McLachlan video to the brutal murder of a citizen in the Middle East. As human beings we tend to believe that these events are isolated and do not pertain to us. In reality these tragedies are closer to home than many of us might have ever imagined. Baldwin builds his credibility through his accounts of his childhood. This is particularly effective because of human's tendency to believe in a child's innocence. The author proves this is not the case. He recounts growing up in New York, a city we would all like to believe is the pinnacle of modern lifestyle. His worries did not include becoming educated in the slightest. He tells the tales of watching youth being shot, hosed down, and blown up. How could he learn in an environment like this? Similar to Maya Angelou, Baldwin understands that the

white kids in his community were at an advantage. It becomes even harder to do so once you realize that his teachers weren't qualified in the slightest.

Baldwin uses the Third Reich as an example to prove that education can be used for evil instead of good. He talks about how even though the kids were being educated in an effective manner, they were being turned into "barbarians". The same thing was happening in the United States. The white kids were growing up and being taught to hate his people. At the same time, he was learning how to behave and act politely. His recounts of experiences not understanding why he couldn't sit at the front of the bus, why he had to walk through the slums, why everyone hated him help build his credibility with the audience. How could they argue that he didn't understand the education system when it had failed him so tragically? While these elements worked to build his credibility they also affect the audience's values. They force the audience to reconsider what they thought was moral.

The entirety of the piece works heavily on the emotions associated with the topic and credibility of a man who lived through this time period. Baldwin engages the audience in a way that demonstrates the despair associated with education he felt as a child. Maya Angelou viewed education, specifically her graduation, as a time of glee. However, that didn't stop the whites of her time from casting a shadow over her. The same shadow that forced Baldwin to feel education had failed him. Leaving him to ponder the paradox that is education.