

Serafina Wong

Jenkins

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Joel Stein Precis

In the opinion article, “Op-Ed: We’re teaching kids to follow their dreams. Maybe teach them to be helpful instead”, Joel Stein criticizes the common consensus that educators have about the need for teaching children to focus more on working hard and reaching their goal; and asserts that instead they should teach them to strive for any actual specific achievement to be made that would help benefit society and better the world. To do such a thing, Stein uses an anecdote over the course of his article, talking about his time attending his son’s re-enactment of famous figures at school and his utter bafflement at the issues he saw. This can be seen in his commentary on one of the presentations there, writing, “Ruth Bader Ginsburg did not toil to be one of the first female Supreme Court justices; she fought to expand the rights of all women.” Stein does this in order to show the wrong focus that the kids had on these stories, with instead of adding emphasis to the historical figures’ accomplishments, emphasizing instead the importance of persevering to reach their goals. By using this anecdote, Stein manages to show the utter strangeness of focusing on hard work instead of the importance of “being helpful” when talking about all the good and significant changes these figures made. By giving an anecdote relating to these already well known figures, Stein manages to add more persuasiveness to his message as the audience already knows about who these people are and what they’ve done, which helps them instantly connect to what Stein is trying to get at. Furthermore, by using an actual example of something he has witnessed before, Stein increases the effectiveness of his argument as it is

harder to argue against practical knowledge vs just theoretical ones. In addition to this, Stein also uses humor and colloquial language in order to keep a relative lightheartedness in his article.

This can be seen in his example about Gandhi, “His [Gandhi] strengths were, in fact, about restraining himself from doing all the things he wanted to do, like punch British soldiers and eat dal.” When Stein gives his example about Gandhi, he uses a funny way of arguing his point and uses colloquial speech such as “like”. This informal speech and humor helps Stein seem more down to earth and relatable, increasing his ethos and making his audience more receptive to his argument. This informal tone is especially important as compared to a formal or patronizing tone, it is easier to get someone to listen to your points if they feel like they are an equal with you. Overall, Stein throughout this article keeps up a incredulous tone as he works to convince educators that this way of thinking about favoring vague perseverance over specific, helpful goals has to be changed in order to have a more productive society.