We, in our cities, spend our days running constantly to get to our jobs and our school, so much that we forget about the rest of the world. We forget about a whole community that lives outside of city limits—a community that works day in and day out to put food on our plate, yet to us, lives in the shadows. Pulitzer Prize winner John McPhee writes an enthralling essay on the Greenmarket, “Giving Good Weight,” and encourages city-dwellers and farmers to change their mentality about each other through the use of various rhetorical devices and structures.

It takes quite a while to get to know an entire community, but McPhee seems to have a deep appreciation for what the city is made of. Right off the bat, McPhee lists off the people he see in the market. He sees people of a variety of ethnicities, from Greeks to Puerto Ricans, from Jew to Muslims, from young to old. McPhee clearly demonstrates his connection to the city, but he also happens to be an expert on the life of a farmer. He describes the Brooklyn market, painting a vivid image for the reader, reciting the forty-seven different vegetables he and his friends are selling at the time, contrasting his expertise to the cluelessness of most of the customers before him. Through the use of exemplification, McPhee establishes his credibility on both the diversity of the city as well as the hard work that takes place on a farm, making sure his message gives good weight.

McPhee takes his wealth of knowledge and familiarity and carefully constructs a story for the reader, making narration play a huge role in this piece. He narrates his experiences with the people he talks to and the people he works with, and through this, he conveys the facts behind his respect for both farmers and urban residents. In one such narration, McPhee describes his interaction with his average customer, “‘Will you weigh this tomato, please?’ And meantime let us discuss theater, books, environment [sic].” McPhee sets up a logical backbone, suggesting that there is much to learn from the metropolitan citizens. In another instance of narration, he goes through his boss’ arduous daily ritual in which he spends twelve hours on his feet, “On market days, he gets up at four, is on the Thruway by five, is setting up tables and opening cartons at seven, has a working breakfast around nine (Egg McMuffin), and, with only a short break, sells on his feet until six or seven, when he packs up to drive home, take a shower, drop into bed, and rise again at four.” McPhee incites a profound respect within the city reader for the rural farmer and the hard work they put into their profession.

Not only does McPhee appeal logically, but emotionally as well. He does so by using a combination of dialogue and description. McPhee’s creative use of dialogue reflects the common opinion of city-livers in the farmer’s mind, and of the farmers in the city-liver’s mind. A farmer expresses his opinion that city residents are aggressive when he says, “They press on the melons until their thumbs push through … They’re brutal on the fruit.” Meanwhile, city-liver’s think of the farmers as greedy, as one says, “Wow! What a rip-off!” McPhee gives us this dialogue first to set the stage for the truth about both farmers and city inhabitants, and then he moves onto description. He describes the Hodgeson farm’s origin – how the family “had scarcely twenty acres” but now they have forty thousand chickens. The contrast he provides from opinion and fact using dialogue and description incites a sense of respect and realization within the reader. In the same way, McPhee uses description to show that the city-livers are not the aggressive beasts farmers make them out to be. He describes a man named Brooks-Smith who teaches at a school to bring knowledge and books to the poor of Harlem. This too, contrasting with the opinion he has set up earlier with dialogue, incites admiration for the city-livers and helps McPhee make his point that the two group’s hatred for one another is needless.

It is this admiration and respect for the other way of life that McPhee hoped to give the reader in his essay, “Giving Good Weight.” He does so using a variety of rhetorical devices and structures, including exemplification, narration, dialogue and description and creates an argument provoking both logical thought and emotional feelings, and leaves us thinking about the things that go on outside our little bubbles of experience.