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Concerns Raised about Long Summer Vacations: Analysis of Laura Mckenna's "Why Summer Vacations Should Be Shorter"

When I was a kid, I was hoping summer vacations could be longer, and complaining why happy hour in summer were so short, and curious about why parents always sent me to many activities. Recently, I read an article from parents' side explaining why summer vacations should be shorter. Laura Mckenna, in her article, "Why Summer Vacations Should Be Shorter", which first appeared in the September 2015 issue of *The Atlantic* magazine, mentions the disadvantages of a long summer break and provides several examples to support her argument. Mckenna points out that summer break often means expensive extracurriculars and an incredibly inconvenient schedule; however, the school year is unlikely to change because of politics and finances. She proposes her own examples to prove that parents would pay more in summer not only for activities but also for hiring someone to take care of their children. The author provides a strong argument for shorter summer vacations which would likely persuade her audience through rhetorical appeals, like logos, ethos and pathos, and by using a clear structure.

Mckenna uses simple structure and clear organization to contribute to the effectiveness of her argument. Rather than state her opinion directly, she first tries to take her own experience as an example to make the article reliable. She speaks the background directly to readers by writing "I'm shaking sand from the beach towels and tucking bathing suits into plastic storage bins in the

hall closet” and describes a scenario in which people spent daytime on the beach in summer vacations (par.1). This directness and personal narration in the beginning creates a more individual perspective than more official language. Mckenna also uses heading to separate a long article into three parts. In the first subtitle, Mckenna takes several examples which appeals to pathos to show parents’ concerns and to state her argument. In the second part, Mckenna puts emphasis on why summer vacations can’t be shorter, and how bad it is for low-income students by using a lot of logos. In the third section, Mckenna takes a few examples and factual data to show the high cost of extracurriculars and summer childcare, even tuition fees for community college. At the last paragraph, Mckenna draws a conclusion that it is hard to increase the school day due to the policy. However, she also mentions the solutions about how parents faced with vacations problems in this article . In the meantime, she struggles with summer vacations just like readers.

Usually, we use logos to explain the reason for an issue. On account of its strong logic, the audiences are willing to believe what the article said. Her use of logos includes informed opinions, quotations and factual data. In her example, Mckenna writes, “Indeed, summers not only relieve us from grueling routines, they also provide opportunities for the kids to learn skills that can’t be taught in a classroom” (par.2). This is an example of an informed opinion. We can see her emotion is positive about summer vacations because she escapes a heavy burden from working and life in summer vacations, and her children learn some skills, which are not shown in the textbook. She appeals to logos again when she explains the reason why children had a long summer vacation in the past by saying “why is the school year almost always limited to 180 days?” (par.4). Mckenna believes that children have a 12-week break because they helped their families with farming in the past (par.4). However, in the modern times, there is not too much

harvest to do due to machine production. What's more, she used factual data when it comes to "parents spend \$16.6 billion total annually on summer activities for their children.... the cost of summer child care-including camp, swimming pools, day trips, and babysitting-at \$433 per child (\$642 for affluent families)" (par.9). According to the study, extracurriculars are expensive, and summer childcare is also a burden for families. Some families can't even afford it. Mckenna uses numerical evidence to prove that parents would pay high fees in long summer vacations.

Ethos can make an author seem reliable which would help gain the reader's trust. Mckenna appeals to ethos when she introduces the background using her own example, she writes "This summer, my husband and I paid for three weeks of SAT classes for my older son I paid my older son to act his 'shadow' at the computer camp" (par.10). Mckenna thus far shows that children need variety of extra activities in summer and those are thousands of dollars to pay. The readers now know about a good choice for children to spend time in summer, for example, special activities and camp. Mckenna appeals to ethos when she mentions "I'm able to write from anywhere ...In the United States, the average worker spends 47 a week at his or her job and enjoy only 16 days a year of paid leave" (par.13). She provides her own situation and uses it to emphasize other's struggle. Through her own examples, Mckenna builds her ethos: "I kept a timer going to make sure that my youngest practiced his math through Khan Academy; I imperfectly enforced time restrictions on computer games" (par.11). The readers might respect her views through her example. If parents were not scheduling, supervising children's time and supervise children's homework in summer break, children would be able to do nothing and waste valuable summer time. Even worse, their children will be overtaken by other students. At this moment, she directly restates her argument.

Even though logos and ethos are the strongest appeals, Mckenna still uses pathos as well. Pathos is appealed to when the author uses emotion-inducing words in her writing. For example, “burden”(par.9), it makes readers feel the pressure from paying expensive activities fees in order to keep kids busy in summer. Mckenna uses “bittersweet” (par.2) to describes parents’ emotions. When the last week of summer vacations is coming, they are excited because they finally can get a break over a long summer, but they loath to part with their children at the same time. Mckenna appeals to pathos again when she writes, “They’re far more likely to be enrolled in pricey extracurricular programs or otherwise spending their days at home alone, watching *SpongeBob* in their pajamas until noon as they slowly forget their math facts” (par.4). Mckenna describes the situation with humorous tone and vivid description. She makes it much easier for readers to recognize that if parents would not arrange schedule for their children, they would be lazy and wasting time in summer.

Pathos is also appealed to when the author uses description, such as imagery and figurative language. Mckenna uses imagery when she talks about “I’m shaking sand from the beach towels and tucking bathing suits into plastic storage bins in the hall closet. The paperwork for fall sports and music classes is waiting on the kitchen counter” (par.1). She sketched out a picture that she enjoys the beach and sunbathing in summer vacations, but studies at the same time. It is much easier for readers to imagine what summer vacations looks like, and laid foundation for later development. Another example for description is in the third section, “This summer, I made countless trips to Barnes and Noble and the local library to keep the kids reading” (par.11). Mckenna describes “countless trips” to gain the readers’ sympathy, and makes readers to feel bad because it is truly tiring work in summer break. Mckenna applies a lot of pathos to make readers feel interested, especially for the figurative language “In the meantime,

I'm knee deep in beach towels and binders, more than ready for a return to the school routine" (par.17). Firstly, "knee deep" makes readers feel a heavy burden on her shoulder because summer break requires entertainment and learning at the same time. She not only sacrifices her time to play with children but also pays a lot for her children. Secondly, she makes a comparison between beach towels and binders. Beach towels represent recreational activities, and binders represent textbooks and knowledge that children have to learn in summer. At the end, she points out her desire that is school opening. Therefore, McKenna provides her ways to keep readers interested, instead of getting lost in such a long article.

As a result of her use of clear organization, vivid language and rhetorical appeals, McKenna is successful in persuading the readers that a long summer vacations may not be a good idea. By appealing to logos, ethos and pathos, readers will be convinced how the author makes her argument, about expensive extracurriculars, summer child care and maintaining academic proficiency. She evokes emotions from readers by using vivid words, her article is logical and organized by quoting factual data, and she builds trustworthiness with readers by using her own examples. By the meantime, she refers "beach towels" to do the first and last echoes. As a magazine reported, the article "Why Summer Vacations Should Be Shorter" written by Laura McKenna is professional, reliable and critical. Hopefully, the summer vacations will be shorter in the future.

Works Cited

McKenna, Laura. "Why Summer Vacations Should be Shorter." *The Atlantic Monthly*. 3

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