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# Humanizing the Future

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## **“Humanizing the Future,” by Jessica Evanoff**

### **Instructor’s Note**

In this essay, Jessica Evanoff examines the rhetorical strategies Mark Slouka uses in his article “Dehumanized”. Jessica effectively achieves her purpose by writing a thesis that states her position on the overall effectiveness of Slouka’s rhetoric, as opposed to his position on his topic. What do you think works well in this essay? What could be improved upon and how?

### **Writer’s Biography**

Jessica Evanoff is a freshman Undeclared major from Cincinnati, Ohio. She has always enjoyed writing academically as well as for pleasure. Her other favorite activities include reading, singing, and hanging out with friends and family.

### **Humanizing the future**

Mark Slouka’s article “Dehumanized” argues that the humanities should not be trivialized in education. Slouka claims that the humanities play a vital role in shaping the human mind and are an indispensable part of the education system. He opposes the popular opinion which holds that math and science should be the school’s only focus. He condemns society’s practice of turning “American education into an adjunct of business, an instrument of production” (1). Today’s leaders favor math and science over the humanities because the products of the humanities cannot be objectively measured or observed. When addressing modifications to the education system, America’s standing in the global economy is of the greatest concern. Upon graduation, a person’s potential to obtain a job and contribute to the economy is of utmost importance. The humanities are rendered useless. Instead of producing a rise in the nation’s GDP, the humanities produce well-rounded citizens with democratic values (7). The fine arts

do not produce employees. In contrast, they produce critical thinkers who challenge the accepted and try to improve the human condition.

Slouka holds that the two sides fighting for control over education cannot be merged. Although some art supporters try to connect the humanities with economic growth, its acceptance is impossible because math and science always dominate. No matter how eager the humanities are to fit in, they will never belong and will always be ignored or infantilized (11). Champions for the humanities, Slouka suggests, should not accept society's devaluation. Instead of trying to appeal to economic potential, the humanities should advocate its own benefits, mainly its political values. The arts transform people into responsible, moral, influential citizens who can contribute more to the world than a dollar amount. Because economists cannot specifically identify and articulate the art's benefits, the vocational and civic will always be imbalanced in America's educational system (8). Another result of this imbalance will be the exclusion of values from the schools. Math and science, which are in most cases politically neutral, control the schools because they do not upset anyone. They only render product, which is almost always associated with "unambiguous good" (9). Slouka asserts that human character, not wealth and material products, are of true value.

Slouka effectively persuades his readers to support the teaching of humanities in schools by glorifying their effects on society and by emphasizing the potential consequences their exclusion might have on society. Slouka claims that the humanities are an essential part of education. The variety of data he supplies to support his claim also creates ethos. He persuades readers of his trustworthiness and credibility by choosing a vast array of sources. His sources include poets, *New York Times* editorialists, billionaires, Greek philosophers, scientists, English teachers, and more. Not only are his sources diverse in type, they also express different perspectives. For example, Slouka cites four *New York Times* editorialists who all view education in economic terms.

They all testify that the American education system is “failing to produce the fluent writers required by the new economy” (3). Slouka attests to the validity of their information by saying “no doubt it is” (3), but then goes on to scold them for pandering to only one viewpoint. In doing this, Slouka proves his responsibility. He shows readers that he has thoroughly examined both sides of the issue. His inclusion of his credentials as a Ph.D. in literature, a magazine editor, and an author also add to the authority of his arguments.

Slouka tries his best to paint the humanities in a positive light. He associates the humanities with ideas that hold positive connotations such as hope, morality, and democracy. The idea that the humanities “form citizens, men and women capable of furthering what’s best about humanity and forestalling what’s worst” (3) is purposefully emotionally appealing. This utilization of pathos aids in making readers supportive of the humanities. Throughout the article, the humanities are associated with the reasoned search for the truth of what it means to be fully human. Slouka knows that people today face a world of uncertainty when it comes to understanding the human condition. He tries to draw attention to the humanities by claiming that they take part in “expanding the reach of understanding” (7). He tries to convince readers that the humanities will give them insight or enlightenment into the meaning of their lives. The repetition of the various forms of the word ‘human’, such as ‘humanities’, ‘humanistic’ and ‘humanize’, is intended to make the reader feel an emotional connection to Slouka’s claim. Readers are humans. Slouka wants them to grasp the importance of the humanities in relation to humans.

Slouka’s warrant is especially effective. He practically forces readers to accept his logic by using phrases such as “one might assume” (3) and “one might reasonably expect” (10). His reference to an ambiguous third person creates logos in his argument. These phrases imply that any rational person would agree with his warrant and that the humanities are necessary to expand society’s perspectives. The warrant is backed by the notion that

society needs citizens who are able to resist to manipulation and to think critically. If the humanities fail, Slouka proposes that America will become “a nation of employees, not citizens” (2). This method of validating a claim by referencing an unknown person is a logical fallacy. Slouka begs the question when he compels readers to accept his argument as true without any evidence.

Slouka declares that excluding or disregarding the humanities in schools will have harmful consequences on society by employing pathos to invoke fear in readers. He warns that “by downsizing what is most dangerous (and most essential) about our education, namely the deep civic function of the arts and the humanities, the world will be made safe for commerce, but not safe” (2). Using fear to alienate readers from the economic perspective is a recurring tactic of Slouka’s. He creates a frightening image when he claims that if economists have their way, individual workers will be reduced to “the curricular equivalent of potted plants” (3). By suggesting that they plan on dehumanizing workers, Slouka distances readers from economic advocates. Slouka also includes very strong words to emphasize his viewpoint and weaken his opposition. Words such as “stunning” (3), “depressing” (4), “breathtaking” (4), and “foolishness” (5) all convey a negative tone towards the arguments of his opposition. This negative, emotional language will have a lasting impact on readers, making it difficult for them to agree with any other opinion but Slouka’s.

Firm, unyielding language permeates Slouka’s writing. He is very passionate in his attempt to persuade readers to his point of view. Often, he downright denies the validity of the arguments of those advocating against the humanities. His qualifier is that there are many things that math and science do well, but his rebuttal is that they do not inspire a democratic spirit of questioning. Although some scientists may disagree and argue that the sciences do produce critical thinkers, Slouka states that “it is not so. Science, by and large, keeps to its reservation, which explains why scientists tend to get in trouble only when they step outside the lab” (9). His bold criticism surprises

readers and forces them to question their preconceived notions about math and science.

Slouka refuses to allow advocates of math and science any room to claim that they have any connections to democracy. He states that “a democracy requires its citizens to actually risk something, to test the limits of the acceptable” (9). Math and science rarely do this, for example, “Nobody was ever sent to prison for espousing the wrong value for the Hubble constant” (8). It is the humanities that require one to look beyond the visible into the unknown. When one explores the mysterious and searches for truth through the humanities, political wisdom will emerge. Slouka also says that “political freedom, whatever the market evangelists may tell us, is not an automatic by-product of a growing economy” (7). Despite advocates of math and science who disagree, Slouka insists that democratic institutions “just don’t” spring up in the tire tracks of commerce (7). Slouka refuses to accede any victories, albeit small, to his opposition.

Slouka stresses the importance of the humanities with extreme urgency. His obvious passion easily translates to readers. The various persuasive techniques he uses are another testament to his determination to prove that the humanities should be a central part of the American education system. Readers cannot ignore the strong arguments he makes advocating the education of the humanities in schools instead of math and science. His inclusion of the Toulmin model, ethos, pathos and logos, repetition, and tone contribute to his effectiveness. Although his arguments contain logical fallacies, they actually coerce readers to into accepting his logic. Slouka attempts to create a more enlightened world by persuading his readers to care about the humanities.