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## A Relatable Case for the Arts

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## “A Relatable Case for the Arts,” by Julia Evanoff

### Instructor’s Note

This essay is Julia Evanoff’s analysis of Mark Slouka’s article “Dehumanized.” Julia does a great job speaking to a general audience that may or may not be familiar with Slouka’s article by first providing context for the article, as far as when and where it appeared, and then supplying enough summary, paraphrase, and direct quote to support her assertions in proper MLA format. Can you identify Julia’s organizational pattern? How else might she have chosen to organize her essay?

### Writer’s Biography

Julia Evanoff is a freshman biology major from Cincinnati. She has always enjoyed writing and reading fiction.

### A Relatable Case for the Arts

Something is seriously wrong with the status quo of our educational system. This is the cry of Mark Slouka in his article entitled “Dehumanized: When Math and Science Rule the School” that appeared in the September 2009 issue of *Harper’s Magazine*. In this article, Slouka outlines his major qualms with the current state of affairs regarding the neglect of the humanities in education. According to Slouka, the increasing shift in investment and focus toward math and science results in the detrimental loss of society’s ability to reason and think critically. He argues against this growing movement favoring mathematics and science through a persuasive blend of logos and pathos, mixing logical evidence with humor and relatability.

Slouka begins his article with a personal story demonstrating how the field of humanities is losing face in the world of popular opinion. Art, history, music—or literature, in Slouka’s case—are no longer regarded as a worthwhile profession. We are what we are taught, and

right now the humanities are quickly vanishing from the list of vitally important subjects. Slouka asserts that “What is taught, at any given time, in any culture, is an expression of what that culture considers important”(2). The educational system has experienced a dramatic shift toward the subjects that train young people to compete in the corporate world. The result is a “corporate culture, hypnotized by quarterly results and profit margins...”(2). What proceeds out of this is the belief that only the subjects directly involved with economic development are worth teaching. The humanities have essentially been “outmaneuvered” and replaced by more productive pursuits. This is extremely disconcerting for Slouka, and he goes on to tell us why.

Slouka then goes on to describe our culture’s obsession with the economy. He argues that everything ultimately finds worth within its relationship to the market. Every entertainer, athlete, artist, and institution must measure up to the demands of the economy. It all comes down to one question: Can your presence be justified in accordance with the terms of those who seek to gain capital?(3) If not, you are out. This is the fate of the humanities within the educational system. Slouka argues that by downsizing this important area of study, “...we’re well on the way to producing a nation of employees, not citizens”(2). Preparing students for future employment is not the only important thing. Personal growth must be achieved before technical training.

Having established this, Slouka continues by pointing out the flaw in the claims and logic used by several writers and editorialists. They argue that if economic growth is the end goal of education, then a good education system should be competitive. America is letting other countries like Singapore pass us up in the race to be the best. Naturally, the only solution to this problem is math and science. If educators focus all their energy on this, success will surely follow. Slouka argues that this is not the case. He criticizes the objective path to “success” by stating that higher SAT scores bring better outcomes just as “‘X equal[s] the cold’”(5). He also criticizes those supporters of the arts that are “contorting themselves to

fit”(6). Trying to save themselves, these people try to portray the arts as necessary for economic success. Therefore, art has no intrinsic value; creativity is simply a means to an economic end. This is not good enough for Slouka.

Slouka builds his case for the humanities by relating them to political freedom. This freedom, he argues, is “not an automatic by-product of a growing economy”(7). Therefore, an education system focused only on math and science will not promote democracy. Instruction in the humanities is needed to foster the growth of democratic values and ideas. However, this necessity is often overlooked because failure in the humanities is not as measureable as failure in math and science. The arts are viewed as “values education,” and therefore declared off-limits (8). Not wanting to be controversial, we have silenced the humanities. Slouka describes the counter-productiveness of this in saying, “Fearful of propaganda, we’ve taken away the only tools that could detect and counter it”(8). There is no such thing as humanities without values, but this is not a bad thing. The civic nature of the humanities infects people with the ability to question, form values, and take risks. This is nearly impossible in the science world separated from the general population by jargon.

Slouka continues by criticizing our country’s love affair with math and science. Not only is this subject area favored in the court of public opinion, but it is also promoted by the government. Presidents, corporations, and institutions are practically throwing money at it, establishing math and science as the only measurements of intelligence. The result is complacency and despair among proponents of the arts. Slouka counters this with several examples of individuals who haven’t given up. They are working diligently to reinstate the reputation of the arts and show that the humanities are a necessary investment in “what makes us human”(13).

I found Slouka’s argument to be persuasive because of his balance of pathos and logos. Never focusing too much on one or the other, Slouka maintains credibility by

responding to evidence in a relatable way. He creates logos by providing quotations and examples, and he creates pathos through his use of rhetorical questions, casual diction, and humor. This gives him a base for his claims and also helps him gain the attention and support of his audience. His overall conversational tone establishes his audience as his ally, causing them to feel as if they are already on his side.

Slouka develops logos through his response to the claims of other writers that have presented on the topic of education. By providing quotations and examples of opposing viewpoints, he is able to criticize the logical flaws that exist in the conflicting argument. His audience has a better picture of what he is trying to prove because they know how to disprove the opposite. An example of this occurs when Slouka cites a *New York Times* article describing how the education system is failing to produce the fluent writers necessary for a good economy. He responds to this by saying, “No doubt it is, but the sin of omission here is both telling and representative. Might there be another reason for seeking to develop fluent writers?”(3). By insinuating that the humanities have multiple purposes, he takes evidence in favor of one position and spins it to support his own argument. Another instance of this occurs when Slouka quotes from a *Times* article in which success is portrayed as a natural outcome of high SAT scores. Responding to this argument, Slouka claims, “Brooks hopes that we will overlook both the fact that his constant (success) is a variable and that the terms are way unequal, as the kids might say”(5). By referencing the flaws in the ideas of others, Slouka logically develops his own argument.

He develops an emotional connection by directly addressing his audience through rhetorical questions. When he asks, “What *do* our kids need to know today?” (4), he is trying to get his audience thinking. They want to know what he is going to say next. It makes them feel as if they are personally involved with his thought process. This in turn peaks the interest of the readers and gets them more invested in what he is trying to say. These questions serve

the double purpose of reinforcing his claims and relating to his audience, guiding them in the right direction. For example, Slouka asks, “Why is every Crisis in American Education cast as an economic threat and never a civic one? In part, because we don’t have the language for it” (7). His question peaks the interest of the reader, and his answer previews his argument that is to follow. This makes for a persuasive pattern.

Slouka cultivates this emotional connection further through idioms and casual diction. His careful combination of formal and informal language shows his desire to relate to his audience. Although he presents a valid and logical argument through facts and analysis, he does not rely solely on logos to persuade his readers. He uses figures of speech to reinforce his ideas in a way that will resonate with everyday people. For example, Slouka asks his audience to “*Cue the curtain*” after claiming that the education system is accountable to business (6). This idiomatic phrase follows up on his assertion and drives his point home. Readers can understand what Slouka is saying because they are familiar with how he is saying it. His inclusion of other expressions such as “*Everything else can go fish*” and “*Muzzle the trumpets, still the drums*” further emphasizes his desire to express his position to a wide audience. Most ordinary people may not respond to the idea of math and science *overwhelming* the market share, but they will probably get the picture of them *gobbling it up* (9). Slouka wants his argument to be heard by people of all backgrounds and intelligence levels, and to do that he must speak in language that makes a complex issue more understandable. His article is not just an appeal to his fellow academics, but a plea to the common man.

Another way Slouka establishes a connection with his audience is through humor. Again he appeals to his audience in a relatable way. Most of this humor is expressed as facetiousness and sarcasm. By saying the opposite of what he really means, he reinforces his point. For example, after talking about how education is about more than job preparation, he says, “I’m joking, of course. Education in America today is almost exclusively about the

GDP”(3). He sarcastically presents the opposite point of view in order to strengthen his own. He does this again later in the article when he says, “Ah, Singapore. [...] If only we could be more like Singapore” (4). These humorous moments also provide a break in the serious tone of his argument. As a result, readers are more likely to feel interested and emotionally connected to what he has to say.

Slouka also develops pathos throughout his entire argument by establishing a conversational tone. This article was originally published in *Harper’s Magazine*, which is a magazine about the arts. Therefore Slouka’s intended audience was people who are already interested and sympathetic to his cause. By grouping his audience together with him through the use of collective pronouns such as “we,” he creates a sort of “Us vs. Them” mentality. This creates an emotional connection between him and his audience, making them more willing to listen. During one instance of this, Slouka says, “You have to admire the skill with which we’ve been outmaneuvered; there’s something almost chess-like in the way the other side has narrowed the field, neutralized lines of attack, co-opted the terms of battle”(2). By aligning himself with his audience, he creates an environment that encourages them to consider his point of view.

Mark Slouka’s appeal for the arts effectively persuades readers through a relevant tone and a logical response to different points of view. By building a sense of solidarity through rhetorical questions, casual diction, and humor, he succeeds in gaining the interest of his audience. Slouka knows that a well-rounded education is essential for all, so he wants his argument to be understood and appreciated by all. By blending logos with pathos, he ensures that his call to action will be beneficial for all.