

Rhetorical analysis essay



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Full Name Instructor Course Name Date Fact? Or Fiction? The story “ I Just Want Be Average”, written by Mike Rose offers up a personal account of how a testing mistake early in his high school days could have changed the course of his life for the worse and how these events and those that followed solidified his perception of the educational system as an adult. The author tries to establish credibility by writing in a first-person narrative of his life as a teenager growing up in early sass Los Angles and also with his complex sentence structure ND big words as an adult in reflection of his life during that time period.

This authority is also emphasized by the intro to the piece about his misfortunes as a teenager and his many accomplishments as an adult as an award-winning author and college professor. By putting such a glowing review about the author in front of the piece, it sets up the belief that what you’re about to read is righteous and true. Whether in whole or in part, I believe this piece is a work of fiction. I have done research of my own into this story that is supposed to be a recount of the author’s won history and found several untruths.

First, there is no high school in Los Angles called Our Lady of Mercy. The only school by that name in California is located in Mercer, California. It is in northern California, a few hundred miles from Los Angles. If the author wanted to change the name of the school to protect the privacy of the students and staff, then it should have been noted somewhere in the piece because now that I know that the school name was fictitious I am left wondering what other facts about his life are suspect. Which brings me to my second finding.

In the author's own words for a piece he did for *The American Scholar*, he says: " Most of the guys who attended our school? Catholic schools were then segregated by gender? came from blue-collar families. Some of us, myself included , were poor, but the parent's of others had worked their way into a comfortable version of sass middle-class life; a few came from families headed by professionals. " (" When the Light Goes On" 72) The author mentions in the original piece and in the article for *The American Scholar* that he went to a very small school.

If the bulk of the student body is from a middle-class background, then the picture the author paints of a school in crisis, a wasteland of forgotten souls like he states in his original piece " No matter how bad the school, you're going to encounter notions that don't fit with the assumptions and beliefs that you grew up with – maybe you'll hear these dissonant notions from teachers, maybe from the other students, and maybe you'll read them. (" I Just Want Be Average" 3) or " If you're a working- class kid in the vocational track, the options you'll have to deal with this will be unstrained in certain ways: you're defined by your school as " slow"; you're placed in a curriculum that isn't designed to liberate you but to occupy you, or, if you're lucky, train you, though the training is for work the society does not esteem; other students are picking up the cues from your school and your curriculum and interacting with you in particular ways. " (" I Just Want Be Average" 3), would only apply to a handful of students.

So if most of the student body came from " families that worked their way into a comfortable version of sass middle-class life" then statistically these kids could represent a sample of middle-class America that is also the

majority of the workforce in the United States which happens to be the most law abiding and prosperous in the country. They would most likely be ordinary teenagers, not drug dealers, pimps, and street fighters. The latter of these two examples from the original piece says more about the author than the school.

He implies that being working- class is something to be ashamed of, that “society does not esteem”. If this is how the author feels about the working-class, then maybe he has greater issues with his aren’t and how he grew up than with the school. Now I have doubts about his credibility and his purpose. I may have called into question the validity of his story and his intent only because the author is asking me to believe his story and trust his opinion. Trust is earned, and after further review I am skeptical. I have a lot of other questions. Like, was his entire school really that bad or just his experience there?

If it was just his experience at the school, then I have to wonder why he implies otherwise. Did he think that his audience wouldn’t take him or his subject more seriously if they knew that it affected only a small portion of the school? He does talk about how the Vocational De students are treated differently, sometimes abusively “ I hadn’t been there two months when one of his brisk, face-turning slaps had my glasses sliding down the aisle. ” (“ I Just Want Be Average” 1), and that is wrong on so many levels even if it only affects one student.

I am curious to know how much of the blame for the Vocational De. students being treated differently rests solely on the shoulders of the students in

these lasses themselves? Look at the teacher, Mr.. Monnet, from the original piece. “ Mr.. Monnet was a tiny man, slight, five foot six at the most, soft-spoken and delicate. Spanish was a particularly rowdy class, and Mr.. Monnet was as prepared for it as a doily maker at a hammer throw. ” (I Just Want Be Average” 2) The author never says that Mr.. Monnet is a bad teacher, only that he is weak and that his classmates are bullies.

Read also Rhetorical Analysis in the article “ Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder; Body Image; Skinny on a Weighty Issue”.

If you act like animals, then you shouldn't be surprised when you're treated like animals. Is this a chicken and the egg situation of circular logic? One begets the other? Maybe, but what if it is not. The crux of the author's argument rests on the fact that if kids are placed on a vocational De. Track they will become disenfranchised and fall through the cracks. This may be true, but in “ I Just Want Be Average” he states “ Worse yet, the years of defensive tuning out in elementary school had given me a way to escape quickly while seeming at least half alert. (2) and in “ When the Light Goes On” he states “ I'd had several good teachers in elementary school, but on the whole my education before Mr.. McFarland was unexceptional. (72) meaner that the author's attitude toward school didn't happen because a testing mistake landed him in Vocational De. , his attitude was already well established before he got to high school. Another question I have that concerns the author's credibility, and it's a big one, is whether or not Jack McFarland is a real person or a fictitious one?

In “ I Just Want Be Average”, his name is McFarland; and in “ When the Light Goes On”, his name is McFarland. If this man was the author’s savior, mentor, and lifelong friend, one would think he’d know how to spell the man’s name. Finding the author’s credibility questionable brings his motives for writing this piece into question as well for me as a reader. Maybe everything he has written is true and he is taking artistic license to make his point, but by not making clear what is true and what is embellished makes the foundation for his argument unsteady and tainted.

It’s a simple enough fix on his part. So why didn’t he do it? The original piece was written in 1989, so maybe he took for granted that it would be a lot of work for someone to research his claims and just expected people to take him at his word. He’s an acclaimed writer and a professor at a university; he supposedly has earned the right to be an authority on the subject of poor education, but based off of his experience in the school system he has a very narrow purview of the educational system as a whole. He went to a parochial school which is a private school outside of the public school system.

Was public school better or worse than the Catholic school he attended? He never says. This is important information that should have been noted somewhere in the piece, because now I’m reading “ I Just Want Be Average” as story of how he “ suffered” through high school, went to college, and has spent most of his adult life in academia. That he never even taught at a high school for underprivileged youth to help combat the issues he so righteously condemns or to become a Mac/McFarland to someone from the younger generations.

And if using your personal experience of high school and reading reports on the educational system and having an opinion is enough to make you an expert, then I can be an authority on the subject. I base this opinion on having only read the original piece by itself. Because of the research I did outside of the original piece I learned that the author left academia to teach inner city kids for several years. Again, this is really important information that should have been noted.

This information would bolster the author's credibility on the subject and should have been put in the forward instead of hawking his next book. Everything Vive said up to this point has been about whether this piece is a chronicle of fact or a work of fiction. It is a shame that I am questioning the author's writing at all and I'm sure that it is not the author's intent. Maybe he didn't want to get bogged down in the details and only wanted to focus on the content, or maybe he picked a hot-button issue so he could turn a profit on it.

Either way I have doubt and that is the death knell of any paper trying to garner support for the position being posited by the author. I believe that this piece is a work of fiction and any impact the author was trying to make with me, the reader, is lost in all of the inconsistencies. I see this piece as just a story and nothing more. His cause may be noble, but his execution is flawed and I would not consider him a trustworthy source on this or any other subject.

Trust and respect are hard won virtues for a reason and mine has been lost for him. If this story is true then I am sorry that author failed to convey his

message properly; but that is his Job as a writer, to present material beyond recrimination and above reproach. I am Just the reader. An average reader who disagrees. Work Cited Rose, Mike. " I Just Want Be Average. " Lives On The Boundary. New York: Penguin Books, 2005. Print. —. " When the Light Goes On" The American Scholar. Academic Search Premier: Spring 2010, Volvo. 79 Issue 2, pop-76.