

SAMPLE Rhetorical Analysis (1,336 words)

ENG 101: Fall 2008, Kreth

The Hidden Truths Behind the Olympic Games

Many people think that the Olympics are a celebration of world unity and friendly competition; however, in his essay, “The Olympics,” John Hoberman set out to disprove these ideas. With his effective organizing pattern, rhetorical appeals (logos and pathos), and tone, Hoberman presents a strong argument. Throughout the essay, he opens the reader’s eyes to the hidden truths behind the Olympic games and argues that the sense of greatness associated with them is not well-deserved. As a professor of Germanic Studies at the University of Texas, Austin, and the author of *The Olympic Crisis: Sport, Politics and the Moral Order* (1986), Hoberman already brings to the article a great deal of credibility.

Hoberman makes specific claims about the Olympics that allow the reader to clearly see his position on the games. The first discussion is about the Olympics being political. Hoberman explains that although some people believe the Olympics are helping human rights causes around the world, this is much less true than people are aware of. Hoberman also addresses the type and extent of social and economic changes experienced by the host countries and the amount of money made by Olympic sponsors and the media. He claims that the Beijing games are the most controversial yet, that the IOC is corrupt, and that the Olympics are not a “glorious tradition” as most people believe but a “racket that has provided the IOC’s ruling elite with small luxuries and a fleeting celebrity very few of them could have achieved on their own” (28).

One effective feature of the article that really stands out is the way it’s organized. After a very brief introduction, the body of the essay is presented as Hoberman’s responses to seven

Comment [C1]: This is an excellent example of a rhetorical analysis. It isn’t perfect, but perfection isn’t the goal. The essay does an extremely good job of meeting the assignment requirements, including being well-edited, and I’m sure it received at least an A-.

Comment [C2]: This is the writer’s thesis. The writer clearly identifies the three topics that will be addressed in the analysis and in the order they will be addressed. The thesis works well here, but it might also have been effectively placed at the end of the paragraph. Also, the rhetorical strategies the writer chose to focus on are, in fact, the one most relevant to the article.

Comment [C3]: Unfortunately, the writer never identifies who the intended readers are for Hoberman’s article, which appeared in the periodical *Foreign Policy*, 167 (Jul-Aug 2008): 22-28. This isn’t the kind of publication read by just anyone, is it? Here’s an excerpt from the “Writer’s Guidelines” for *Foreign Policy*, which are freely available from the *FP* web site:

FOREIGN POLICY readers are well-informed, intelligent individuals with a wide range of interests. But they are not necessarily specialists in international affairs—in fact, as many businesspeople read **FP** as academics and practitioners combined. Our readers want to be provoked, surprised, and presented with memorable information and rigorous analysis. They don’t want long-winded arguments, insider jargon, narrow topics, or excessively technical writing.

The ideal **FP** article strikes a balance: It is a reference for debate among specialists, but it also engages and informs a general-interest reader. Sharp analytical thinking should complement reporting. Opinion pieces or essays should use original data, anecdotes, and wit to draw in readers.

Thus, even though the writer of this rhetorical analysis does a good job of analyzing Hoberman’s article, the writer doesn’t do so explicitly in terms of the intended audience for the article but should have.

Comment [C4]: Here, the writer provides a comprehensive summary of the source. Without it, readers of this analysis will have no idea what Hoberman’s article is about, and the writer’s analysis wouldn’t have made much sense.

The first two paragraphs of this essay serve as the introduction. The third paragraph is the beginning of the analysis, i.e., the body of the essay. Notice that the first sentence of the third paragraph begins with a topic sentence that clearly indicates that “organization” is the topic being addressed, which is also the first topic mentioned back in the writer’s thesis statement.

commonly held (but in his view, mistaken) beliefs about the Olympics. Each belief is presented as a heading in large, bold type and is immediately followed by Hoberman's response. For example, the first belief he addresses is "The Olympics Aren't Political," and he responds with "Yes, they are," and goes on to explain why. The format is very user-friendly, allowing readers to clearly see what commonly held beliefs are being addressed and what stance the author takes on them and why. This is a very efficient and effective way to organize the article.

Comment [C5]: Notice that after the writer has made general claims about Hoberman's use of an effective organizational pattern, the writer cites a specific example from Hoberman's article to support the claim.

In addition to his use of an effective organizing structure, Hoberman also uses all three of the rhetorical appeals; however, his use of logos and pathos, combined with his existing reputation, make up his ethos, which most of his intended readers would find very credible, for the reasons mentioned earlier. He uses logos by providing factual information in response to each belief about the Olympics. In fact, each of these beliefs functions as an assertion (which is one of the Five A's: assertion, allusion, analogy, anecdote, and authority), as do Hoberman's responses. For example, according to Hoberman, the International Olympic Committee states very strongly that it is not a political organization and it does not make decisions with political results in mind. However, Hoberman is able to show that the IOC's claim is untrue for many reasons, not the least of which is that it has frequently "caved" (22) to countries ruled by dictators and oppressive governments that violated human rights. He includes many examples from history in which the IOC made bad decisions, like allowing Nazi Germany to host the games in 1936. He also notes that "the IOC's history of working with unsavory regimes didn't end with the Second World War. The 1968 Olympics in Mexico City were awarded to a one-party, faux democratic government that hoped to use the games to legitimize its rule" (22).

Comment [C6]: Here, the writer creates a transition from the previous topic (organization) to the next topic, i.e., Hoberman's use of logos and pathos to bolster his ethos.

Comment [C7]: Here, the writer focuses specifically on Hoberman's use of one of the Five As as a logos appeal.

Comment [C8]: Again, the writer provides a specific example from Hoberman's article to support the writer's general observation about Hoberman's use of assertion as a logos appeal.

Hoberman cites other examples, too, such as the 1980 Moscow Olympics, which he says were awarded to the Soviet Union because it threatened to stop participating in the games; and the

Comment [C9]: And here's another example.

1988 Seoul Olympics, which had been awarded to South Korea only a year after its military had massacred hundreds of people in Kwangju.

In addition to assertion, Hoberman also uses analogy as a logos strategy, as when he compares the IOC today to the IOC during Nazi Germany: “Like the officials who thought they were changing Hitler’s behavior in 1936, modern Olympic officials imagine that they can influence the autocrats in Beijing” (24). He also corrects mistaken analogies. For example, early in the article he notes that “Some argue that the United Nations follows the same principle [of amoral universalism]. But don’t be fooled. On a good day, the United Nations can affect the balance of war and peace. On its best day, the IOC cannot” (23).

Hoberman’s tone helps readers understand and perhaps agree with his views. His tone might be considered even more effective than the historical facts he presents. His word choices seem to be very deliberate and intended to make his readers feel his anger toward the IOC. For example, in referring to the IOC, the Olympic games, and some of the host countries, he uses words and phrases such as “amoral,” “political manipulation,” “exploitation,” “notorious,” “abuses,” “persecution,” and, as we’ve already seen, “massacre” and “racket.” I am sure his readers could easily perceive his anger and disgust toward the Olympics. In the concluding paragraph, Hoberman uses an ironic tone to show more of his disgust: “The real genius of the committee [IOC] is its ability to create and sustain the myth that it promotes peace” (28). Referring to the IOC’s “genius” is both ironic and sarcastic. Hoberman must have thought that a critical tone would help readers see the truth about the Olympics, which tells me that his readers are not just average sports fans but people who are better educated and know more about history than the average person. If Hoberman had been writing for sports fans, then his tone would not persuade them; it would just make them angry.

Comment [C10]: Here, the writer creates a transition from the previous topic (i.e., Hoberman’s use of assertion as a logos appeal) to the new topic (i.e., Hoberman’s use of analogy as a logos appeal). Again, the writer follows up with an example.

Comment [C11]: Here, there’s no transition, but the reader can clearly see that a new topic is being introduced, i.e., tone.

Comment [C12]: This is the word the writer has chosen to reflect Hoberman’s tone. Recall that “tone” refers to how an author *sounds* by way of the words he/she uses to express emotion; thus, tone is one element of pathos and ethos. The question of whether an author’s tone is effective or appropriate depends on the audience for and purpose of the author’s text.

Comment [C13]: Again, notice how the writer has cited specific examples from the author’s text to illustrate the author’s tone. Additional examples for slightly different types of tone are offered in the rest of the paragraph.

Comment [C14]: This is the only indication we see in this essay that the writer is at least somewhat aware of the audience Hoberman was writing for.

Comment [C15]: Here, we see evidence that the writer is aware that if Hoberman had been writing for a different audience, his rhetorical strategies, specifically tone, probably wouldn’t have been effective.

The author's main use of pathos is closely connected to his tone, but it is also seen in his focus on human rights (and this is also an ethos issue because it deals with what is moral and ethical). For example, Hoberman says that Olympics supporters believe in "a form of amoral universalism in which all countries are entitle to take part in the games no matter how barbaric their leaders may be" (23). By using the word "amoral", Hoberman probably hoped to make readers angry at the IOC and to make them reconsider their own assumptions about the morality of the games. In contrast to what most people think the Olympics are, Hoberman describes them as "a highly commercial global sports spectacle" and that this fact was recently seen when the "the IOC and the United States Olympic Committee quarreled in Beijing over their shares of global revenues from the games"(23). This and other similar examples are used by Hoberman to elicit emotional responses from his readers, the most likely being anger and shame.

Comment [C16]: Here, the writer explicitly acknowledges that Hoberman's tone is one part of the author's use of pathos. The writer feels that other part has to do with the specific topics Hoberman addresses in his article, such as human rights.

I found Hoberman's article very interesting and persuasive. The strategies he uses are effective and would easily persuade readers to reconsider their assumptions about the "glorious tradition" of the Olympics. Still, he could have made it a stronger argument by using more of the Five A's, especially authority. For example, Hoberman doesn't cite any of his sources; his is the only voice of authority. On the other hand, the reader knows that he is a professor and author of a book about the Olympics, so they don't have any reason to assume that his facts are not accurate or reliable. (If he was writing for other professors and researchers, he would have to cite his sources.) Hoberman might also have addressed issues directly related to the Olympic athletes; he doesn't even address them directly in the section in which he describes the Olympics as "an enormous marketing scheme for everyone from major multinational corporations to billionaire developers" (24). It was strange to read an article about the Olympics that doesn't discuss the athletes or their concerns. I wonder how they would react to Hoberman's argument?

Comment [C17]: This section constitutes an important and insightful observation.

Comment [C18]: The writer does a good job here of noting an issue the author fails to address but doesn't seem aware that the topic isn't particularly relevant to Hoberman's purpose or for his intended readers.

Works Cited

Hoberman, John. "The Olympics." *Foreign Policy*, 167 (Jul-Aug 2008): 22-28.

---. *The Olympic Crisis: Sport, Politics and the Moral Order*. New Rochelle NY: A.D. Caratzas, 1986.