More please! More! More! – *Save the Whales, Screw the Shrimp* Summary

In Joy Williams’ essay *Save the Whales, Screw the Shrimp*, published in 2001, she emphasizes the idea that today’s society is slowly destroying nature and the only way to reverse this ecological crisis is through fundamental changes in our culture and individual character. “I don’t want to talk about me, of course, but it seems as though far too much attention has been lavished on you lately – that your greed and vanities and quest for self-fulfillment have been catered to far too long” (704). The author uses numerous ethos, logos, and pathos appeals and is having a ‘conversation’ with the reader throughout the essay to personalize the reading experience.

*Save the Whales, Screw the Shrimp* is an essay written by Joy Williams that revolves around the idea that nature is being slowly destroyed by human activity and choices. Topics that are discussed include a ban against dangerous pesticides, the gnawing of irreplaceable land, exhibits that “represent” the purest form of nature, and national groups such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Wildlife Services, and The Forest Service. There are corrupted policies and groups that are connected with the Earth’s environment and there are many people in our society who are aware of but ignore this problem because it is less complicated. This crisis can and will only be solved through a change in personal character and our culture as a whole.

Williams uses facts and anecdotes to establish creditability and emphasis her point of today’s society’s great need for proof of nature pollution. She mentions the Wildlife Services and explains how they protect the public, specifically farmland, through poisoning, shooting, and trapping thousands of animals each year (706). Another
fact that the author mentions is that planting more trees, an obvious solution to air pollution, is not a reliable option nowadays. From Maine to Georgia, forests are struggling to survive against the extreme pollution in the air. Trees, in which humans rely on to help reduce the greenhouse effect, cannot even withstand the pollution (710).

Mentioning and explaining facts and anecdotes throughout her essay shows that Williams is knowledgeable and credible in this subject. The reader is more inclined to respect and trust her as the essay goes on.

She also talks about an experiment in which scientists have intentionally contaminated 46 Canadian lakes, turning them into “huge real-world test tubes” to see the effects of various pollutants. This anecdote supports her purpose by showing how far our culture will go and how much proof our culture needs to take action. The way the anecdote is written can be interpreted as an ad hominem charge. “Now the scientists are slowly reversing the process. But it will take hundreds of years for the lakes to recover. They think” (710). The ending sentence makes a personal attack to the scientists’ intelligence rather than focusing on the actual experiment. In doing some research, it has become known that the lakes have become established as a research center for scientists, graduate students, and their families and many key findings have been discovered through their studies (Luoma). Lunsford, Matsuda, and Tardy explain that this fallacy has the chance of damaging the author’s character and creates a barrier to an honest debate (119). Williams has the possibility of losing some character in the reader’s mind.

The author’s purpose is to persuade the reader to actually take action, instead of just saying they will, by appealing to them emotionally and ethically. Williams uses the
second-person point of view in this essay, which personalizes the reader’s experience. “You’re pretty well off. And you expect to become even better off. You do. What does this mean? More software, more scampi, more square footage, more communication towers to keep you in touch and amused and informed?” (712). Writers use pathos, putting the reader in a desired emotional state, to establish an intimate relationship (Alfano, O’Brien, 49). Williams uses this appeal by writing in the second-person point of view and making the reader feel directly responsible for the environmental problems, invoking emotions and thoughts of morals.

The essay is organized as a long conversation between the author and the author acting as ‘the reader’. The author explains facts and their opinions, ‘the reader’ creates a counter-argument or brings up a new issue, the author responds to the validity of the argument, and the chain continues. In an interview with David Gessner in 2007, Williams explains that she chose this route to avoid rhetorical niceties. “…it hectors a you—that is you—for wrecking the Earth with habits and wants. But the you is me, and the they is us. We’re all pretty much responsible for the mess we’re in, some deliberately so, some just in the process of conducting normal somnambulist routines” (Gessner). One of Williams’ most effective strategies is pointing out the reader’s assumptions and warrants because she consistently rebuttals them with more facts and information. This type of arrangement, problem-solution, fulfills the purpose of the author by leading the reader to respond to the ideas in a logical way.

As a reader, I thought that this essay was effective. At first, William’s accusations were offensive and felt like they were a personal attack but then I realized that that was
her purpose. The second-person point of view hit me hard and called me out on all of the effects of my choices and actions as an individual in our society. Her idea of starting with an individual person’s character will eventually spread to the entirety of a society parallels with my own beliefs. Credibility is an important piece of an argument essay to me because it shows that the author spent time researching the topic and knows what they are talking about. Williams’ essay does force me to take a closer examination of what I take from, as well as give back to, my environment.

Williams did thorough research before she wrote her essay and it can be seen throughout her essay. There is an abundant amount of facts, real-life events, and examples given to support her purpose and reasoning. By using the second-person point of view, Williams forces the reader to reflect upon themselves and their actions that affect their environment. This method is not always going to be the right choice because it depends upon the reader. One reader could be more sensitive than another and take offense to this way of writing. The way Williams organizes the essay, the problem-solution arrangement, shows the reader that she took opposing views into consideration and had an in-depth analysis. Since there are countless essays with the same purpose, the strategies Williams chose made hers stand out. The substance and organization of her essay fulfills her purpose by appealing to the reader emotionally and logically and calling upon them to change for the better in themselves and nature.
Bibliography


