

ENGLISH: *LANGUAGE ANALYSIS*

E-books

The recent prevalence of updated technology, specifically e-books, in modern society has sparked fiery debate as to whether this new device is destroying the unique experience of reading a book and even damaging mental and social health. In a speech at a forum on reading and literacy-related activities, “Reading: the future”, retired teacher-librarian Mrs Elliot adopts a seemingly impartial approach that later manifests in a more personal and direct tone to contend that e-books, despite their technological brilliance and convenience to reading enthusiasts, are in fact changing the priorities of societal members and “nothing can stop” it. The initial accompanying slide depicting a young girl leaning against a stack of books and happily using an e-book solidifies Elliot’s initial argument; whereas the second slide of the presentation is a cartoon that satirically and sarcastically suggests that e-books “vanish” unlike textbooks, thus underpinning Elliot’s final argument. As e-books, and technology as a whole, are of great importance in a society that is surviving off these revolutionary advancements, this issue will continue to be addressed, and often hyperbolised, as means of preventing future society damage.

From the outset, Elliot employs a personal and somewhat impartial tone to establish a strong affinity with her audience, specifically targeting the audience of teachers, librarians and senior school students from local schools. There is a sense of informality in the form of her speech which she utilises to ease her audience into her contention. Her consistent use of the first-person language “I” as well as subtle collective inclusive language “we” and “like many of you” attempts to personalise her issue by revealing aspects of herself and her personality that further her contention. Through this, Elliot is able to position herself as an advocate of reading, though not with e-books. Throughout the article, the speaker constructs a clear dichotomy within her argument by reference to both the positive aspects of reading e-books and the ramifications of it in attempt to achieve a balance. Audience members are thus encouraged to self-evaluate the information provided of both sides of the issue, and subsequently support Elliot’s contention that e-books and technology are allowing “important things” to be “swept away”. This balance of argument is successfully achieved in her complementary slides, the first of which a young school girl leaning against a large stack of textbooks dominates the frame. In her hand, she is holding an e-book with a satisfactory grin on her face. The tower of books next to her is utilised to represent the extreme convenience of e-books which are much more portable than carrying books. The bag on her back is seemingly light, suggesting that there is no “terrible burden” of “great big textbooks” to carry home from school. The white background works to accentuate the foreground of the student, and the fact that she has no shoes on insinuates a sense of comfort and security with the e-book. In this sense, Elliot is initially able to expose her audience to the positive aspects of e-books, and then later juxtapose it to her other arguments.

In maintaining her stance, Elliot lists the possible advantages of e-books to suggest that they do have some credibility. She reveals they are “cheaper to own”, “more convenient to carry”, “free of expense” and “effortless”, words tinged with positive connotations that attract her audience. However, as means of questioning these advantages, Elliot employs the rhetorical ultimatum “So what’s to worry about?” to incite her audience to reassess whether e-books are actually all-beneficial. The anecdote of herself watching a child TV advertisement of a child, “all alone”, experiencing “computer-generated images” on a tablet device is designed to provoke feelings of suspiciousness and curiosity as to whether the e-book is hindering the child’s mental development. Her use of the metaphor “as empty and unwholesome as a packet of potato chips”, with the negative implications contained in the words “empty” and “unwholesome”, exhort the audience to understand that these tablet devices are “disturbing” because the images the child sees do not “spring to life in his imagination”. As parents in the audience are likely to want the best for their children, the “endless exposure to screens” that is associated with e-books and technology as a whole will be seen in a negative light, thus encouraging them to accept Elliot’s contention. The speaker continues by firing a series of rhetorical questions directed at parents in the audience in

attempt to appeal to their logical reasoning. Her words “do we really think it will be healthy for our kids to spend hours and hours using e-books?” provokes parents to question whether e-books are beneficial to their children’s mental and physical development.

Elliot continues through an appeal to the hip-pocket nerve of her audience when she informs that e-books can “vanish” “unless you paid every year”. By juxtaposing this to original textbooks that can be kept “permanently”, Elliot suggests that e-books are in fact an inconvenience because “when something went out of e-print, how would you ever find it again?” As the audience are unlikely to want to annually pay for new textbooks, they feel convinced that e-books are non-beneficial to their everyday life. This notion of ‘vanishing’ is satirically played on in the second slide of the presentation which depicts a book store. The cash register’s words “you should have that for good six months before it vanishes” are sarcastic because textbooks cannot actually ‘vanish’. The audience are likely to accept that e-books are not a good alternative to regular textbooks, thus supporting Elliot’s polemic. Accordingly, the speaker uses the dichotomy “between rich and poor” to directly target audience members who are not financially well-off. The adjectives “expensive” and “energy-hungry” are likely to appeal to these people because “knowledge and education are a form of wealth”. The e-book can too produce social effect like people becoming “arrogant”, which audience members will oppose to. In a final bid to convince her audience, Elliot’s collective inclusive language of “we must all do what we can” and her description of the audience as “future leaders” instils a responsibility upon audience members. By looking at technology as an entirety, she admits that these advance devices are sweeping away the “important things”. The audience are thus likely to favour her final argument because of the importance of not changing the true priorities of living.

The crux of Elliot’s contention resides within her use of rhetorical questions and anecdotes to appeal to the audience’s sense of logic and reasoning while simultaneously instil a sense of responsibility within them. The two complementary slides to the presentation offer a unique juxtaposition between the advantages and disadvantages of using e-books. The first slide acts as a contrast to the actual reality of e-books as portrayed in the second slide. These visuals, when placed in tandem with the article, offer an unequivocal stance on the issue of e-books in society, but also extend to the entire revolution of technology. However, as many are oblivious to the actual ramifications of technology, some audience members may feel alienated as they may view Elliot’s speech as hyperbolised.