

Strength Through Creative Comparison

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Margaret Atwood defines the relationship between Canadians and Americans in her article “Canadians: What do They Want?” Although Canadians are addressed in the writing, it is mainly focused towards Americans, as the article was published in a political magazine from the United States. Atwood’s main idea in the paper is that American citizens are not only unaware of the “members of the family” to the north but of the different relations shared. The article is effective in portraying and defending the thesis. In fact, her use of excellent comparisons, melded with logos, pathos and ethos, expose American readers to a new outlook.

The article was published in Mother Jones magazine, a not for profit political magazine from the United States. The main intent of a non-profit magazine is to educate readers, which in this case is the American public. It is not a coincidence that a magazine of this nature would present an article warning of American ignorance. In fact, the magazine serves as an excellent setting for the work to effectively communicate with the targeted audience. Atwood, who has lived in both Canada and the US, carefully expresses her ideas on a potentially explosive topic in a way to evoke emotion, but not to start controversy. Often in the paper, the reader traces a finger over the lines, “We’re in this together,” which could be misinterpreted as her thesis, but it is just a shock-absorber for her main ideas regarding ignorance. Literary tools like that are not the only ones found in the paper; in fact, Atwood’s finest device she wields is her knack for effective comparisons.

The introductory comparison of Canada to a woman who is judging a man, America, on his looks is excellent. Not only does it snag the reader and use carefully chosen description, but builds up into subsequent paragraphs and eventually makes the conclusion very strong. The “snag” in the introduction comes from a devised use of pathos. When alluding to the jackboots, a knee-high boot worn by militants, Atwood associates war and rape. Many men would take offence to this comment, provoking an aggravated persona in male readers. Nonetheless, they continue reading to understand how this lady can back up what she has said. The women, on the other hand, would find this mildly amusing, especially when Atwood includes how a man in her poetry reading class responded. Even though drawn in for different reasons, the reader is interested, which will allow for a more concise message to be delivered from the author.

The comparisons continue at the end of the second paragraph when Atwood is attempting to explain why Canadians have a hard time telling Americans why they are not particularly liked. The comparison adds little to the content, if any at all, but the effect it has on the reader is well worth the handful of words. “The old lifebuoy ads” referred to are ads for soap and center on body odor. Comparing America to the stinky friend and Canada a buddy having a tough time telling him he stinks works well to provide emotional response and to present a Canadian opinion on the neighboring country’s relationship.

The previous paragraphs have demonstrated how Atwood is able to include pathos within her comparisons. The next comparison, however, presents a logical approach to proving a point. In this section, Atwood emphasizes a well-known idea of stepping into someone else’s shoes to gain perspective. She illustrates a situation where America becomes economically controlled by

Mexico and experiences a situation similar to what Canadians face. The key part to the comparison is the end, when Atwood points out a response to a change in economic control to exemplify how Canadians feel. In the 80's when this article was published, America continued its economic prosperity resulting from the Second World War, while Canada was still stuck in a rut. As a result, much of Canadian economy was bought by American investors. Atwood is wise to include this in her writing because it is one of the largest factors for the difficulties in relations between the US and Canada. Her logical approach is effective in educating readers by having them experience a new perspective.

Towards the end of the paper, Atwood herself forms a new perspective not completely felt in the writing to this point. She switches to a view an American may appreciate which enhances her credibility, as she sees multiple sides. In fact, returning to the initial comparison, Atwood completes her writing by expressing a simple way to better the relationships between countries. She ends with a hopeful tone, bringing the reader closure from a comparison--stuffed with ethos, pathos and logos--driven essay.

