

Argument Analysis: Anecdotes

An anecdote is a short, personal story about a real event or experience. In persuasive writing, anecdotes are often used to personalise an issue in a way that supports the writer's contention. Anecdotes often provide insight into how an issue has affected someone's life. They give a human face to facts and figures, bringing credibility to an argument by showing the events or experiences that led a writer to form their opinion. In persuasive writing, these short, personal stories can also encourage audiences to see an issue from a unique or different perspective. They can provide a personal insight into an issue. It is through these insights that anecdotes engage readers emotionally and encourage a sense of empathy with a writer's contention. Because so many of the conversations we have with friends and family are anecdotal, anecdotes can make issues more engaging and accessible, almost allowing a writer take on the role of a trusted friend who is sharing information.

Anecdotes in action

Activity: Read the following opinion piece, identify persuasive techniques, including anecdotes, and explain the effect they may have on the intended audience.

On the cusp of climate catastrophe

Caitlin McKenzie, February 21, 2020

1 The air was hot and tainted with smoke as we emerged from the town hall, the horizon smudged black and grey by the fires. The weary, veteran fire fighter who spoke at the meeting confirmed our worst fears: no sign of rain, the CFA were bulldozing new containment lines, but the fire was so large, so furious that it was creating its own weather patterns. Regardless of wind direction, the town could expect ember attacks and lightning strikes. As we drove home, the crackly radio broadcast that we'd been listening to nervously for days urged us to leave.

2 We packed quickly, bundled the dog into the car and went to stay with relatives. The events of that summer are burned into my memory.

While our small town in Gippsland narrowly avoided devastation, seven days later Victoria endured the Black Saturday tragedy, during which 450,000 hectares of bushland was consumed by an uncontrollable and unprecedented inferno that claimed 173 lives.

In the decade since Black Saturday, our temperature has soared and bushfires have become more intense. Known as Black Summer, the bushfires of 2019 and 2020 were the worst the country has ever seen: 18.6 million hectares burned, 5,900 buildings destroyed and 34 lives lost.

Environmentally, the Black Summer bushfires were nothing short of an ecological disaster.

The World Wildlife Fund estimates that close to three billion animals were killed or displaced by the megafires and hundreds of species have been driven to the edge of extinction.

3
4 In the aftermath of this catastrophic tragedy, the Australian government foolishly renewed its commitment to fossil fuels and ignored the advice of twenty-three former fire chiefs who insist that climate change is responsible for the severity of these disasters.

5
6 The science is unambiguous. Australia is hotter and dryer than ever before. According to the Bureau of Meteorology, the average temperature has increased by almost 1.5 degrees Celsius which has led to extreme heat events and prolonged drought. The fire season is longer than ever before and opportunities for hazard reduction burning have greatly diminished. According to fire historian Stephen J Pyne, Australia is one of the first countries to experience a new and dangerous era. The Pyrocene. The Age of Fire.

7 Australia is on the cusp of climate catastrophe. The solution? Break our dangerous dependence on fossil fuel by investing in renewable energy. With our abundance of sunlight and wind, we are well-placed to become a renewable energy powerhouse.

Our children, our future and our country depend on it.

Argument Analysis: On the cusp of climate catastrophe

Read the article 'On the cusp of climate catastrophe'. Identify the issue, contention, audience and tone of the piece. Identify the persuasive techniques in the piece and explain the effect they are intended to have on the audience.

Issue: _____

Contention: _____

Audience: _____

Tone: _____

#	Technique	Effect
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