

Argument Analysis – VCAA Sample English Exam 2020 ASHA Lectures

Biodiversity, defined as ‘the variety of living things’ on earth, and ‘the interactions between them’, has long been an international concern among scientists and political leaders. Protection of biodiversity has been linked to humanitarian goals- namely ‘poverty alleviation’ for the ‘benefit of all life on earth’- as established in the International Biodiversity Conference of 2000. This commitment is one that Professor Chris Lee challenges the audience at the 2010 conference to uphold, in an impassioned keynote speech; he contends that urgent action is needed to achieve these goals.

Lee’s opening slide establishes the tone and intention of his argument- the digits in a stylised ‘2010’ are connected with images of natural life, and the silhouette of two human figures in the centre. The human figures are linked, hand in hand: most likely a child looking expectantly at a parent. Symbolically, the notion of hope and preservation for the future are thus made apparent in the composition- the central positioning of the figures also hints at the humanitarian focus of Lee’s contention. All elements of the image are connected by lines in some form, a literal picture of unity between humans and nature; the audience is thus made aware of the natural world as an equal partner in preserving biodiversity.

By opening his speech through a direct appeal to the audience’s fears- of loss and failure to achieve their goals- Lee guides them to the conclusion that far more effort is needed to prevent this tragedy. The interconnected nature of this

Commented [A1]: Short sentence to establish context- what is the issue being discussed here?

Commented [A2]: Clearly states the name of the author and text type (not every text will be an opinion piece!)

Commented [A3]: Tone words like ‘impassioned’ are not essential, unless the tone is a significant feature of the piece.

Commented [A4]: Brief summary of the main contention.

Commented [A5]: A description of the key visual elements is needed before analysing it.

Commented [A6]: Analyses the meaning, symbolism, and implications of the visual device. Words like ‘symbolises’ or ‘alludes to’ are good choices here.

Commented [A7]: Discusses the impact of the image on the audience- the final step in analysing a visual device.

Commented [A8]: The paragraphs analyse the original article in chronological order. Even then, it is useful to group paragraphs by main argument or appeal (broader theme).

image is echoed by his opening of 'fellow delegates', an immediate inclusion of a diverse, international audience in the united goal of preserving biodiversity. Lee even calls upon them to 'reflect' upon it, while evoking a visceral emotional response with his description of 'scorched earth' and 'hard, cracked ground' in its absence. This jarring contrast from the image of natural harmony initially presented evokes the audience's fear; a fear enhanced by stating that humanity is 'moving increasingly' to an 'uninhabitable earth'. Subsequently, therefore, the desire to protect an idealised natural environment is heightened. Lee's string of rhetorical questions, ending in asking 'what meaningful projects' have taken place for this end, build on this concern with the implication that human efforts have been found lacking.

Capitalising on this sense of guilt, Lee cites the consequences of biodiversity loss- reflected as having 'lost 35% of mangroves...50% of wetlands' and species 'at a rate...100 times the natural rate', among other extreme consequences 'in the past 100 years'. The immediacy of these events is connected to the loss of rare species, many 'already extinct', ranging from the tiger to the 'human like orangutan'. Not only does this condense the effects of biodiversity loss in a few potent symbols, the specific mention of 'human like' draws attention to the humanitarian purpose of his speech- a reminder that humans society is equally vulnerable to what is ostensibly a purely scientific concern. By noting that this crisis has not been of such a scale 'since the dinosaurs disappeared', Lee emphasises the historical scope and moral weight of biodiversity protection; evoking fear once again with his mention of a 'species extinction'. By alarming the audience with visceral descriptions of their potential fate, Lee seeks to galvanise them to prevent it, and arouse their concern for humanity as a species.

This progresses naturally into a more aggressive tone - Lee attacks the inaction of the audience as a collective, scolding 'wonderful words' and 'glossy brochures' in support of biodiversity. He reminds the audience that they are in the 'comfort of an air conditioned... conference hall', removed from the physical aftereffects of environmental damage. His already impassioned delivery is magnified by his confrontational questioning- asking 'what have WE ACTUALLY done'; the capitalisation reflects an anger at human hypocrisy that he implores

Commented [A9]: Frequent quotation of the original text. Note that all quotes are short- no more than two or three words!

Commented [A10]: Quotations can be combined with paraphrases of the original text to summarise longer sections.

Commented [A11]: Identifies the effect of a given technique/series of techniques on the audience. Words like 'therefore', 'subsequently', 'as a result', etc. are crucial to this step of analysis.

Commented [A12]: Note that a technique can have multiple layers of effects, as is identified here.

Commented [A13]: Good argument analysis will show understanding of the text as a whole; this is achieved by showing how arguments can link to each other.

Commented [A14]: Note that statistics are used here not to establish the credibility of the author, or appeal to the audience's logic, or any of its 'usual' applications. Actively think about the techniques in the text!

Commented [A15]: Focuses on the connotations of specific word choice, another feature of high-scoring essays.

Commented [A16]: Your interpretation of the author's intent is also a valid line of analysis.

Commented [A17]: Tone changes are an effective way to mark out new paragraphs.

Commented [A18]: Strong verbs (i.e. not 'says' or 'shows') are able to convey the connotations of a technique without even describing it.

the audience to share, via his further use of inclusive language. He appeals directly to a subsection of his audience - the 'some who have already suffered' from biodiversity loss; in doing so, he presents his argument as one based on empathy, connected to the suffering of people beyond the first world. 'The poor', he notes, 'are particularly vulnerable' in this front; by directly addressing their issues, Lee recognises the multilateral response necessary to combat environmental issue.

Lee concludes with a resounding call to action, reminding his audience that 'we are the leaders' in biodiversity- particularly poignant, considering that the conference's attendees are experts in the field. Thus, he challenges all audience members to fulfil their role- to 'reinforce [his] message to those in power', but to the 'everyday householder' as well. All audience members are made cognisant of their different yet equally important roles in Lee's campaign, and thus are made more receptive to joining his cause. The closing slide summarises his contention effectively; the globe, a symbol of life, cupped in human hands. Simultaneously emphasising the collective effort needed, and the central role of humanity, it reinforces Lee's message of unity and motivates the audience to partake actively in the protection of life.

Lee's argument- at once a condemnation of human inaction and a message of hope- emphasise the humanitarian core of protecting biodiversity. By uniting the audience, he makes them aware of their role in both an ecological and social sense; demonstrating the continued urgency of the issue today.

Commented [A19]: Presentation of the text is an often-missed, but nonetheless critical part of its overall persuasiveness. Try to identify it and discuss its implications.

Commented [A20]: Very rarely will pieces be aimed at 'the audience'/'the readership'; think about what stakeholders are involved, and whether the author addresses them.

Commented [A21]: Oftentimes having a broader level of contextual knowledge will help you pick out more 'layers' of analysis. For example, recognising that environmentalism is stereotypically considered a first-world issue helps with discussing this section of the text.

Commented [A22]: Further analysis of a visual element.

Commented [A23]: Further reference to previous arguments/quotes made in the text. It is possible that texts will conclude by echoing their opening section; identify these structural elements to secure a higher mark!

Commented [A24]: There is no need to re-list the arguments in the conclusion! A general summary of 1-2 sentences is more than enough.

Commented [A25]: Conclusions often carry a brief note on why the issue is contentious. They should never evaluate the strength of the arguments you have covered.