**Rhetorical Analysis Prompt**

**Unit 4**

In July 2019, Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), delivered a speech in Washington, D.C. for the AFT annual convention. In this speech, Weingarten discusses connections between democracy and education. Read this excerpt from her speech carefully, and then, in a well-written essay, analyze the rhetorical choices Weingarten makes to argue her position on public education.

America’s public school educators are change agents. You guide young people not only to build skills and knowledge, but to build relationships. You instill appreciation for diversity and respect for differences. You help our country realize its promise and help people have a better life; you are the essence of public education.

Horace Mann, John Dewey and Margaret Haley, a founding mother of the AFT, saw public schooling as central to the well-being of society and the strength of our democracy. So did Martin Luther King Jr., Bayard Rustin and Al Shanker. Al frequently invoked the AFT’s founding motto: Democracy in education, and education for democracy.

Because that is what public education is at its best—a ladder of opportunity, a path out of poverty, a place to develop the muscle of civic participation, where we both embrace America’s diversity and forge a common identity; indeed, the foundation of democracy.

But our country is dangerously divided. Will hope or fear prevail? Aspiration or despair? Humanity or cruelty? This is a moment of reckoning for our collective national character.

Our democracy is under assault. Donald Trump has waged a war on truth and on the press. He has trampled rights and responsibilities enshrined in the Constitution. He has scoffed at the rule of law and stoked America’s divisions in order to exploit them, spurring neighbors to turn on each other; driving wedges between people who actually want the same things, like parents and educators; and inciting people to fear others for absolutely no good reason. […]

Many of you see the impact of this in your classrooms every day. The bullying and hatred that permeate society are on the rise in our schools. Economic stress has you stocking more snacks for your students and taking more money out of your own pocket for school supplies. At this moment when we need more civic participation, not less, subjects like American government and civics are squeezed out because standardized testing still compels schools to fixate on math and language arts.

This is not the first time our democracy has been at risk, but today its survival falls on us. Why?

Because we are part of two institutions that are essential to the American dream—public education and the labor movement. Public schools and labor unions are direct pathways to broad-based prosperity and pluralism. They are how people can achieve a better life. And you—AFT members—are at the nexus of both.

That is why, together, we must play a vital role in moving the country toward our better angels. We must ensure that better days are ahead of us, not behind us. And I know we can.

Think about what we’ve already done. Remember the false narrative about public schools a decade ago—about so-called bad teachers, failing students and a system supposedly so broken that privatization and austerity were the only answers? We’ve busted up those myths, one by one.

For much of the last decade, it felt like we were in a knife fight, outnumbered by a bunch of billionaires and ideologues intent on reducing teachers and students to a test score, dividing parents and teachers, pauperizing our schools, and scapegoating and slandering public school teachers.

Slowly but surely, we have changed the narrative […]

Americans are committed to their public schools, which 90 percent of American children attend. Polls show that parents and the public want greater support for public schools—particularly neighborhood public schools. They want public schools strengthened when they struggle, not shuttered or supplanted by private alternatives. And the teacher strikes have been an amazing inflection point, making clear to America that teachers want what students need. We’ve changed the narrative; now we have to change the politics.

And that takes power—not power for its own sake, but power so we can transform our aspirations into action. So we can make every public school a place where parents want to send their kids, where teachers want to teach and where students feel safe and engaged.

Sure, teachers have always had power: The power to ignite a spark that engages a disaffected student. The power that comes from students wanting to earn your respect. The power that comes from fierce devotion to your students and your craft.

But in our disproportionately female, caring profession, we have not always been comfortable owning our power, much less building it. For example, how many of you have been in conversations questioning why the union is involved in elections?

You know who owns their power? Wall Street. The Koch brothers. Mitch McConnell.

My friends, we need to own our power. And we need to build our power so we can move our agenda—for our students and our families; for safe, welcoming and well-funded public schools; for affordable higher education; for healthcare that is a right, not a privilege; for a living wage; for a decent retirement; for a healthy climate; and a strong democracy. To get those babies and children out of detention centers and back with their families.

History is our guide. When the Dred Scott case upheld slavery, abolitionists did not capitulate: They built their power and ended slavery. When suffragists were arrested for voting and for picketing the White House, they did not meekly submit: They built their power and won the vote. And when child labor laws, a minimum wage and the eight-hour work day were struck down by the Supreme Court, the labor movement did not abjectly surrender: It built its power, and won back those rights and more.

We must build power for democracy in education, and education for democracy.