Student Y

English 1C

Prof. Swigart

An Image Is Worth a Thousand Calls to Arms

It may be tempting to think of arguments as being, well, wordy: lengthy essays or speeches designed to make a point and defend it. However, arguments can be entirely or primarily visual. Virtually every man-made image is meant to communicate *something*, and even things so simple and everyday as magazine advertisements or internet banner ads—things we see so often that we often no longer consciously notice—convey the implied argument that we should buy a product, subscribe to a service, or otherwise do what the advertisement wants us to do. The same is nonetheless true of military recruitment posters and ads, which generally share the same common argument: the viewer should join the Armed Forces.

The author introduces visual arguments as an everyday phenomenon that the reader may often encounter without consciously recognizing as arguments.

This statement narrows the broad topic of visual arguments down to a particular example: military recruitment posters and ads.

The entry of the United States into World War I led to a massive recruitment drive for military service as a nation without a large standing army was drawn into an ongoing conflict and forced to rapidly mobilize the population. Although a draft was issued, making military service for draftees compulsory, there was understandably a vested national interest in recruiting as many volunteers for the armed services as possible. These two recruitment posters below (Figs. 1 and 2), originally printed during World War I and for the United States Army and Navy respectively, use different techniques to appeal to potential recruits' sensibilities and desires.

This paragraph provides historical context for the posters under discussion, focusing the lens on WWI recruitment in the United States.

This is the the essay's real thesis, citing the Army and Navy posters as using different techniques to appeal to readers. Comparing these techniques is the focus of the essay's body paragraphs.

The beginning of this body paragraph introduces the name and source for Figure 1.

The author describes the poster's imagery and typography, what the poster denotes.

The author here shifts into an analysis of what that imagery may mean, or what feelings or ideas it may arouse (what the poster connotes).

The "I Want YOU for U.S. Army" poster, featuring James Montgomery Flagg's iconic illustration of Uncle Sam, is an image so instantly recognizable that it has become part of the American cultural vocabulary (Fig. 1). Uncle Sam, with his red, white, and blue wardrobe and star-spangled hat, draws on the iconography of the American flag to represent something of the American national spirit. Although depicted as an older man, with longish white beard and hair and bushy white eyebrows, he is depicted as active and authoritative, staring and pointing with one finger at the viewer. Even without the text, it is clear from Uncle Sam's posture and gesture that we, the viewer, are the one being addressed. The text makes the poster's appeal explicit: "I Want YOU for U.S. Army," with the "YOU" highlighted in red text for added emphasis. The appeal here is primarily one to trust: this character of the national spirit, drawn as an older and paternalistic figure, calls on the viewer directly to go to the "Nearest Recruiting Station." Given that the average Army recruit is bound to be a younger man, this appeal from an older, paternal figure endows the appeal to enlist with an

almost filial sense of obligation: if obeying one's father is what a good son does, obeying Uncle Sam is what a good citizen does. Uncle Sam's unsmiling expression signals to the recruit that this appeal to join is a matter of grave importance and urgency, and clearly no laughing matter.

The author introduces the name and source of Figure 2, while also emphasizing its contrast with Figure 1.

The naval recruitment poster, featuring Richard Fayerweather Babcock's illustration of a sailor riding a torpedo, employs an entirely different aesthetic and makes a radically different appeal to its audience (Fig. 2). If the Army recruitment poster invokes a sense of solemn duty, the Navy recruitment poster invokes a sense of adventure. Rather than a figure addressing the viewer, we see a sailor riding a torpedo in the manner of a rodeo cowboy riding a bull—even with reins (somewhat inexplicably) in hand. The torpedo, rather than submerged in the water, kicks up spray by the sailor's feet as it skims the water's surface. The sailor's right hand wields a length of rope to act as a crop, showing that he is not a passive passenger on his unlikely steed but in control, whipping it forward, onward. Without context, this image might be confusing as it employs not only an unrealistic depiction of life

Here a different pattern is employed: instead of talking about the imagery or type first, the author first describes the feelings aroused by the poster, contrasting these with Figure 1.

This passage describes Figure 2's imagery and typeography, its content, similar to how the last paragraph described the imagery of Figure 1...

Figure 2

of the average sailor but also one that seems as reckless and suicidal as, well, riding a bomb. However, the poster's text clarifies its appeal and makes it explicit: “Join the Navy, the Service for Fighting Men.” The characterization of the Navy as the “Service for Fighting Men,” combined with the rodeo cowboy imagery, the inherent and obvious danger of riding an (arguably phallic) torpedo qualify the poster's call to wild adventure with a macho, masculine sensibility. Again, given that the average recruit is a young man, these subtle and not-so-subtle appeals to the viewer's masculinity qualify as appeals to the viewer's emotions and self-image. If the Uncle Sam poster gravely calls on dutiful citizens to join the Army, the Navy poster calls on adventurous “Fighting Men.” While this poster may have been effective at reaching the audience of its time, it must be noted that audience of a modern Naval recruitment poster has changed. With the abolition of gender restrictions in the Armed Forces and the re-orientation of recruitment efforts, it's likely that a poster calling on “Fighting Men” to enlist would prove less appealing to a broader audience. Also, the cultural connotation of *riding a bomb* has itself changed, and would today perhaps be sooner associated with *Dr. Strangelove* and catastrophic self-destruction than a call to adventure.

Here the argument shifts again into an analysis of the emotional appeal being made there

Unlike the previous paragraph, there is an additional analysis provided of how the appeal of Figure 2's argument has perhaps not aged as well as that of Figure 1.

The essay returns to the broader subject of visual arguments and how visual elements can enhance, strengthen, or complicate the argument beyond what can be achieved through words alone.

Analysis of visual arguments can be rewarding and surprising. Images can subtly convey a rich and dense amount of information, saying a lot without necessarily *saying* anything at all. In these examples, most of the message is carried in image alone. Text slogans like “I Want You for U.S. Army” and “Join the Navy” would hardly capture a sense of grave patriotic duty or wild,

dangerous adventure without such evocative illustrations to appeal to patriotism and a collective national identity or a wild adventure on the high seas. The effectiveness and appeal of these posters is enough to show how effective a non-verbal argument can be.

Works Cited

Works Cited page uses MLA documentation style appropriate for an English class

Babcock, Richard Fayerweather, Artist. *Join the Navy, the service for fighting men / Babcock*. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/2002699393/

Flagg, James Montgomery, Artist. *I want you for U.S. Army: nearest recruiting station / James Montgomery Flagg*. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/96507165/