Speech Observation Paper:

Analyzing a Speech by Rick Rigsby

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**Introduction**

Earlier in the semester, Professor Wakin showed our Advanced Public Speaking class a YouTube video from last year by Rick Rigsby. At first, I figured it was like most other speeches I had seen in the past, but this was something different. It caught my attention, and kept me interested throughout the entire 10 minutes he was talking. Granted, this was a video that had background music and other visuals, but I believe the people who were live listening to him were moved the same way I was. The speech was about how his fathers teachings got him through tough times in life; this stuck with me because my Dad has taught me a lot over the years as well. He emphasized in the speech how his father was a third-grade dropout, yet still managed to be a great father. He shows a great example of how every speaker should act and perform when in front of an audience.

**Evaluation of Speaker’s Rhetorical Effectiveness**

A good speech has the right message, but there’s more to it. In fact, there are seven things to look for that I will be using to evaluate his overall speech: the speech goal, speech organization, speaker’s role, speaker’s tone, speaker’s techniques, intended audience, and language techniques. Each of these are equally important because if one or two are weak, then the whole speech is not complete. I believe all six of these will be accounted for and show presence in his speech.

First is the entire **speech goal**. This speech is clearly an informative speech about his father. The specific purpose of the speech is to inform the audience the reasons why his father impacted his life. He wants the listeners to hear his story about his family, and try to relate it to them so they can interpret it. Something that I think impacted the crowd was that he said his father was, “He challenged himself to be the best he could be, all the days of his life.” From this he gave examples that showed the type of man his father was. Rigsby said that his father believed it was better to be an hour earlier than a minute late. That is a good life lesson to always strive to arrive at places early, and get a good reputation. “Maybe one of my boys will catch me in the act of excellence,” is what his father was quoted saying about leaving at 3:45 every morning. So the overall goal of the speech was built around life stories like this, to move the audience, as this was an emotional message.

Second is the **speech organization**. In my opinion, the pattern or structure he used is a mixture of topical and narrative. I think it was topical in the sense that he had a main topic, which was his father, and he had some main points to cover as to why he was a good role model. But I also see it as a narrative because he was telling short stories that had a character, setting, plot, and imagery. So I think it could go either way; but he did a great job using both.

In the conclusion he asks the audience a question, “How are you living?” He then brings up his father’s morals which are: not judge, show up early, be kind, do something the right way, and that it’s never wrong to do the right thing, and that how you do anything is how you do anything. The body supports the specific and general purposes because at the start he talks about his father, and in the body he does just that, listing a number of quotes that are moving. The way he organized it was perfect: he had a humor-filled introduction, his body and main talking points were greatly crafted, and the conclusion his call-to-action was for the audience to make an impact.

Third is the **speaker’s role**. Rick Rigsby made his relationship with the audience in the first minute of the speech. He showed that he was just an average person, but portrayed that he was an individual who learned a lot from his father. Rick showed initiative, having explicit power and spoke as an expert on the topic he addressed. His role in the speech influenced the effectiveness because he is someone who was seen as just average when he first walked up to the podium, but then later showed he was someone who is very skilled at storytelling and getting an audience involved into a topic. His father told him to strive to be the best that he can be. That is something that resonates with many listeners because we all have that one person who pushes us to be our best.

Fourth is the **speaker’s tone**. The overall tone or feel of his message is, in one word, powerful. This is the skill I think he excels at the most. His voice is so strong, and it makes you want to continue listening to what he has to say. The introduction is one of the most important areas to focus on because it sets the tone for the rest of the speech. Risby starts with, “The wisest person I’ve ever met was a third grade dropout.” From there he added some humor such as how he is a “black-net redneck.” He then talked about his father’s background and how he taught his son Rick to, “Combine knowledge and wisdom to make an impact on the world.”

His use of supporting material that really made his speech strong and credible. His delivery was exceptional. He used great eye contact and gestures that made him look very comfortable as a public speaker. This established the tone because his professionalism gave the audience confidence that he would say something worth listening to. His volume and pitch were perfect for this topic; he couldn’t be shy and quiet, because he needed to express his emotions.

Fifth are the **speaker’s techniques**. As mentioned before, he established his credibility early in the speech. He emphasized how he was somewhat of an expert on this topic because he had a father that impacted his life on so many levels. He told interesting stories that got us to want to hear more. Rigsby later talked about a girl he met in college named Trina. He talks about how she was out of his league and yet she still married him. Unfortunately, she got breast cancer, and passed away six years later. Death is something that we all have to go through, and talking about it is not fun for anyone. So the fact that he opened up to this audience shows his comfort on the subject, which is important, because he deals with loss the right way.

This is a key technique because this hits us hard and fuels emotion, and it makes us want to hear how it has impacted his life. God and his sons helped him get through the tragedy when he was at rock bottom. The wisdom of his father got him through it. His father’s last lesson was “You keep standing.” In addition, he adds a quote from his wife when she was ill, one of the last thing she said was that it didn’t matter how long she had left to live but what mattered is *how* she lived.

Sixth is the **intended audience**. The audience that he was going for is the people that were present at the speech; also I think it was for his family to hear. Also, he must’ve known it would be recorded by the audience, so the reach is limitless. The speaker connects the needs and interests of the audience because it was about a father. Majority of us have fathers or at least a guardian that shaped us to who we are today. So he makes that connection and shows that we need to cherish our parents and make an impact. We need to “find our broom” as he used in a story about a basketball coach John Wooden who swept his own basketball court. It’s important to have good self-image, but also good to show others what kind of person we are.

Seventh and finally are the **language techniques**. He created imagery in three ways in the speech: when he used humor with jokes, when he described his wife, and when he described his mother and father. Some examples would be that he continued to say “third grade dropout” when talking about his dad. This created a mental image in our minds to think about who that would be. The first thing that came to my mind when he left school to work on the family farm was that he probably wasn’t the most intelligent person. But later he told us that his dad taught himself how to read and right, and he was a great figure in his son’s life, even though he did not have an education. He described his mom in a way that reminded me of my own mother. When talking about his wife he described her looks and some of the activities they did, which made the speech more interesting. Also, he used quotes from Mark Twain, Henry Ford, and a couple others that created some mental pictures in my mind.

**Conclusion**

To wrap things up, I have analyzed the speech given by Rick Rigsby back in 2017 by looking at seven key points that I focused on which were: speech goal, speech organization, speaker’s role, speaker’s tone, speaker’s technique, intended audience, and the language techniques. I was motivated by Mrs. Wakin because she showed us this speech earlier in the semester, and I figured it was a good one to use. Hopefully this speech continues to grow in views on YouTube, because it is an excellent example for other’s to model theirs after.

**Reference**

Goalcast. (2017, October 5). *The Most Inspiring Speech: The Wisdom of a Third Grade Dropout*

*Will Change Your Life | Rick Rigsby.* [Video File] Retrieved from

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bg_Q7KYWG1g>