Prompt One

You have 60 minutes to respond to the following prompt. Allow yourself time to read and annotate the passage and to organize your ideas.

Below we have reprinted an opinion piece by Jeffrey Kluger, published on April 2, 2014 in Time Magazine. Read the piece carefully, not to see whether you agree, but to perform a rhetorical analysis. Specifically, discuss the purpose of the piece, the writer’s goal and motivation, and/or the writer’s intended audience. Look for the specific methods the writer uses to accomplish that goal (e.g., word choice, sentence structure, figurative use of language, tone, examples, statistics). In a focused response, explain your findings. Select concrete details from the essay; do not merely summarize it. Remember as well that all quotations need to be properly marked and acknowledged or you will commit plagiarism. This should be a fully-developed essay with purposeful paragraphing. Finally, leave yourself enough time to proof-read; typographical errors will be treated as misspellings.


By Jeffrey Kluger
Published in Time Magazine April 2, 2014

None of the New York parents who are refusing to vaccinate their children today were around the city in the summer of 1916, which is good for them and good for any of the kids they might have had. It was in that summer that 27,000 children nationwide were struck by a polio outbreak, 9,300 of them in New York. Of those 9,300 victims, 2,700 died. The Salk family at 116th St. and Madison Ave. escaped the scourge, meaning that their two-year-old son Jonas was spared. History notes that when he grew up, he had a little score-settling to do with the poliovirus.

That hard experience of a city and its people makes the sublime obtuseness, recklessness and flat-out numbskullery of some of today’s New York parents entirely indefensible. A deeply disturbing investigative piece in New York Magazine reveals that fully 245 of the city’s private schools have vaccination rates that fall below the 95% level needed to ensure herd immunity — the protection that’s provided to the few unvaccinated members of a community because so many others are protected that a pathogen never gets a foothold. Of those schools, 127 fall below 90% and 37 fall below 70%. Nine schools fall in a dismal range of 18.4% to 41.5%. Numbers like that are the leading cause New York is suddenly suffering a measles outbreak, more than 50 years after the first vaccine against the disease was licensed.

The anti-vaxxers all cite the same imaginary problems to support their resistance: Vaccines are linked to autism (they’re not), they cause autoimmune diseases (they don’t), they are “messing with nature,” as one pediatrician in a Marin County, Calif. practice that indulges parents who don’t want to vaccinate their kids or want to administer the shots on their own schedule, told Mother Jones Magazine. Um, OK.

But here’s the thing the anti-vaxxers need to know, for the one billionth time: You’re wrong. Really, it’s that simple. You’re trafficking in junk science, in thoroughly debunked science, in the dizzy stuff of rumor mills and conspiracy theories. And about nature? “Messing with nature” is the whole point of medicine, given that it’s nature that cooked up every disease that ever existed. You want pure nature? OK, die young.
The authorities cited by the warring camps ought to settle the matter all by themselves. On one side we have the likes of Jenny McCarthy and Kristin Cavallari. Nothing wrong with naked models, TV hosts, and fashion designers, but they’re not, you know, scientists. On the other side we have the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, UNICEF, the Gates Foundation, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and virtually every serious medical journal on the planet.

So anti-vaxxers, you lose. Or actually, your kids lose.

Parents who oppose vaccines are not only misinformed, they’re spoiled, having grown up in a world that stands behind the berms built by the scientists and vaccine developers who came before them. If you’ve never seen measles — or polio or whooping cough or mumps — you have the luxury of believing they don’t exist.

“We live in a very healthy community,” said one of the sublimely glib doctors cited in the Mother Jones story. “The incidence of these diseases are very low, not only here but nationwide. And so it’s safe to do a modified vaccine schedule, in my opinion.”

But the incidence of these diseases is very low precisely because most doctors and parents don’t think the way you do and do vaccinate on schedule. “We live in a very dry community,” the doctor might as well have said. “So it’s safe not to maintain the levees and flood walls that have protected us until now, in my opinion.”

And so you drown; and so unvaccinated children get sick. The words “in my opinion” are not themselves some kind of rhetorical vaccine. They can, instead, be the pathogen. Like all pathogens, they can kill.

**Austin Lyles’ Response (Score 6 out of 6)**

Jeffrey Kluger’s opinion piece in *Time Magazine* tackles the issue of a lack of consistently upkeeping vaccinations for the "Anti-Vaxxers" in the year of 2014. Kluger argues that those who do not vaccinate are putting not only people in general at risk, but specifically mentions the young dying or children becoming ill. The position that Kluger takes is very clear and is well-defined as strongly against those who do not maintain vaccinations as often as Kluger may believe is correct. However, whether or not Kluger is correct or if the people that he targets are correct, Kluger creates a decently crafted piece that voices his opinion well. In sensitive and controversial topics like this there are those who cannot keep their personal bias in check and as a result are left with a weak argument fueled with little other than emotions. Kluger does well to cite sources and provide statistics that will make his target audience of "Anti-Vaxxers". The combination of Kluger’s word choice and sources provides a strong foundation for his argument, but there are a few flaws when it comes to creating a completely sound presentation at certain points.

Loaded language is a common tool used for those who want to persuade others; Kluger uses this tool often within his work. For example, when Kluger talks about the repercussions of not vaccinating, there seems to be a constant reminder of the children and the youth. Using lines such as, “your kids lose,” or, “unvaccinated children get sick,” Kluger does not fail to use emotional points in his argument to try and break through to his audience. The phrases chosen are those that are meant to cause emotional distress and potential reassessment of the anti-vaxxers’ positions. Emotions are strong within this piece, as expressed by a constant use of exaggerations.

A fallacy that Kluger does use a bit is hyperboles. When Kluger states, "but here’s the thing that anti-vaxxers need to know, for the billionth time," it is clear that this is an attempt at making his exasperation for the anti-vaxxers clear by exaggerating. Comparing the lack of vaccination to the threat of an incoming flood exaggerates the issue but still illustrates that this is a serious issue in Kluger’s point of view. Another
effect of Kluger’s writing is the bandwagon effect. This is enforced by Kluger writing that the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and so on are all on his side. Therefore, the primary approach of this piece seems to be that Kluger aims to persuade the anti-vaxxers by using many emotional appeals. This is not the only method of Kluger’s ways, as there are some appeals to the logic of his audience, as well.

The inclusion of specific sources provides Kluger with a bit more credibility than simply using his own words alone. Throughout the piece there are several sources referenced, which does add to his argument but also raises another issue of not mentioning which articles or other pieces by specific times or names. The use of data and facts is crucial for Kluger’s credibility, yet leaving them out by not including more specifics as to when these sources were created makes Kluger seem as though he is intentionally leaving this out as this information may invalidate the use of these sources. However, including sources at all does indeed increase any author’s credibility, especially from Kluger’s chosen verified sources of public information such as *New York Magazine* and *Mother Jones Magazine*.

Kluger may have made a few decisions that have somewhat weakened the overall power of his piece, but this is still a piece that is well-spoken. There are some places where Kluger had chosen general effect over form and it is those decisions that are intentionally aimed at the emotional sides of a person. People may be moved by the piece and eventually join Kluger’s side as a result of the emotional appeal used in Kluger’s wording. Although there may be better persuasive tactics if Kluger instead used a more well-rounded approach to appealing for his audience, the piece is well-focused and the goal is very clear: vaccinate to save your life. No matter what side may be considered correct in this debate of whether or not to vaccinate, Kluger does a decent job defending his argument.