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### Rhetorical Analysis: The Problem of Light Pollution

Coming from the city that never sleeps, the night sky is nearly always black. One is more likely to spot an airplane flying by than one of an infinite number of stars in the universe.

However, Kelsey Johnson, astronomer and professor, remembers her childhood night sky as completely filled with glittering stars. In her TED Talk “The problem of light pollution—and 5 ridiculously easy ways to fix it,” she makes clear for numerous reasons that the view of the cosmos is a sight worth seeing for everyone. Kelsey Johnson’s appeal to a wide audience, her purpose made clear by ample reasoning, and her humorous yet serious tone all contribute to her successful advocacy of the night sky.

These days, the night sky is not visible to people in cities and suburban areas because of other lights blocking the view. The brighter lights nearer to the ground are more visible than all the stars in the night sky. Furthermore, it has been widely known that the lack of natural light has been negatively impacting wildlife as light determines if and when they perform certain actions, but that is not to mention that the excess of artificial light also has negative impacts on people. Because of these factors, scientists including Johnson have made efforts to spread awareness about light pollution.

Kelsey Johnson informs her large audience about light pollution in the form of a TED Talk. While there usually is a specific audience at the conference, consisting primarily of educators, presenters know that their videos will be posted online, and can expect thousands of

views from people sharing and rewinding. Therefore, Johnson knows that many people will be learning from her video about how to end light pollution, but to broaden her audience even more, she makes her talk relatable and easy to understand. For example, she begins by speaking about watching the stars as a child, an experience that many have had or, like me, want to have. Additionally, she offers a consolation to those who have yet to see the stars: by telling them what they are missing out on from the beginning, she has her audience hooked until she offers them a solution later on.

This organization of what the audience wants at the beginning to how they can get it at the end has been especially beneficial for Johnson because she is able to build momentum as she bombards viewers with reason after reason for putting an end to light pollution, making her purpose of ending light pollution crystal clear. She starts with a heartfelt story about seeing the stars as a child, but quickly moves on to how artificial lighting affects dogwhelk snails. As if those reasons were not enough, she speaks about the impact on humans of an increasing cancer rate, and then admits that if no one cares about their own lives, there is still more! Keeping lights on when they do not need to be, or keeping them at high brightnesses are a waste of money that only contributes to the problem. By going on and on with the reasons, Johnson creates a suspense for a solution as well as a bigger drive to perform that solution. Additionally, she is able to circle back to humanity's relationship to the cosmos by the end, which neatly wraps her argument in a bow.

Complementing why she is advocating for the sky, how she does it is another great factor to Johnson's successful argument. While the language enables her to speak to a wider audience, her use of humor made her appear trustworthy so that people would want to listen. A humorous side came out more than one time during the conference, such as when Johnson admits that when

she watched the night sky as a child, she not only had to brave the dark but also her “sleeping bag really didn’t smell very good.” Instances such as this one happened close enough in her talk so that the audience is reminded of her humanity and relatability, but far enough so that the speaker still appeared professional. The perfect balance of seriousness and fun is a feat mastered by few, but Johnson can easily call herself one of those few after this talk.

As an ending note, Johnson goes back to her roots and the importance of a connection to the stars—how it makes a person feel so alone and yet so connected. The solutions to light pollution she offers, including turning off lights and buying proper bulbs, are easy to do, but the heart-to-heart she has with her viewers at the end really promises a few more stars in sight. If, for some reason, none of her claims were convincing enough, she ends with one final push: if you have not seen a full night sky of stars, you do not know what you are missing out on, and you do not understand what humanity is losing. A perfect end to a perfect TED Talk, Johnson wants people to know that there are personal reasons to want to see the sky, and they are just as important as all the other public ones. Even for those people that could care less about turning off their lights, she ensures a greater appreciation for the stars among everyone.