

JOHNNY GOT HIS GUN AND WORKING CLASS STUDENTS:
USING RHETORICAL ANALYSIS TO INTELLECTUALIZE PACIFISM

Ed Dauterich

Over the past several years, I have taught a variety of writing and argument courses at a large, public university in northeastern Ohio. The majority of the people in my classes are first generation college students from a working class background. Many are non-traditional students as well. Given their different majors and areas of interests and my own understanding of writing pedagogy, I look for a common subject that will allow me to teach writing while keeping the students engaged beyond the level of instruction in grammar or style alone. Currently, I have been teaching composition courses that examine violence and what I see as pro-war culture in the United States. At the beginning of these classes, the greatest challenges are getting students to define violence, to see the motives for violence, to examine and begin to construct theories of violence, and to recognise the rhetoric of violence and war that surrounds them in contemporary popular culture. By the conclusion of the course, I hope that their knowledge of violence can lead them to a critically constructive way of addressing both violent acts and violent rhetoric. However, I am not teaching in a sociology department, in a history department, or in a course on conflict resolution. I am an English professor. In light of recent criticism and debate among scholars such as Stanley Fish and Gerald Graff over what the job of a humanities professor entails,¹ it is necessary to put my own pedagogical goals in a context where students can see the practical social value of what they learn without completely divorcing it from applications inside of the classroom or becoming preoccupied with the political concerns of their professor. However, unlike Fish, who in *Save the World on Your Own Time* argues that the real job of the humanities professor is to teach students to perform a historical analysis of a controversy without making a pronouncement about it, I believe it is vital to teach students both analysis and the rhetorical skills necessary to voice their own

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