Speaking and Listening – Level 9

Sample 1 Group discussion: Persuasive devices in Emma Watson’s speech on feminism

Note: Students have been numbered left to right from 1 to 4.

STUDENT 2 So, after watching that video, what do we think the issue is that was being discussed?

STUDENT 3 I think the issue being discussed was that lots of people think that feminism is all about being anti-men, and that’s not true and that’s why it’s a big issue.

STUDENT 1 Also … (COUGHS) … I also feel like the main point there is that ‘feminism’ isn’t just an ugly word and uncomfortable to use. It’s changed from what it used to be. Like, when she was younger, feminism would mean something totally different to what it would mean in today’s society.

STUDENT 2 Yep.

STUDENT 4 In today’s society, she mentioned that ‘feminism’ has become an ugly word or it’s, like, women decide not to be known as a feminist. So she’s kind of saying that more than ever, the word ‘feminism’ and feminism as a concept needs to come back, because it’s not hating men or anti-men. It’s just equality for both genders.

STUDENT 2 As well as talking about feminism, I feel like she also discusses gender equality as a whole and whether or not men and women should have equalised rights.

She also talks about women being afraid to identify themselves as feminists because of what’s associated with the labels and the stereotypes and how they’re generalised.

So what do we think Emma Watson was contending to do? What was her contention?

STUDENT 4 So, her contention was to kind of tell the world that feminism hasn’t … doesn’t have to be identified by the word ‘feminist’ or ‘feminism’. It needs to make a comeback and it needs to protect women around the world. So her contention was gender equality in general, like, how she wanted to achieve that in the future.

STUDENT 2 Do you have anything to add?

STUDENT 1 Yeah, I feel like her contention was mainly just around feminism and equal rights itself, but she also used, like, examples of how the word has changed and how there isn’t gender equality in her argument itself to link back to her contention to sort of … I feel more like build up on it and support it a lot more than just having a contention.

STUDENT 2 So what persuasive techniques did she use and how did she use them to position the audience and what effect did they have?

STUDENT 3 She used … I think this was at the start of the speech … she used an anecdote …

STUDENT 2 Oh, yep.

STUDENT 3 … so this was talking about her childhood and how her gender determined the way she lived and how other people’s genders around her determined the way they lived, and that positioned the audience to say, ‘Wow, this person really knows what she’s talking about. She really has a connection with this issue,’ which obviously makes this speech and issue more strong for the audience to believe.

STUDENT 4 By her telling her own story, it kind of shows that she is human and she is vulnerable even though she is, like, famous, and even more so vulnerable than normal people because she was shown to the world at a very young age, and like she said, at 14 she started to be sexualised, so, like, it shows that she does care about the topic and she does want to help.

STUDENT 2 Yep.

I also feel like she used a bit of emotive language. When she was talking about how she was seen as a feminist, she used the word ‘isolating’ and, you know, I felt … I felt for her, ’cause it’s just like, you know, she’s human but she felt as if she’s been isolated from the world. And the effect that had on me was that people who, I guess, are labelling what feminists are and, I guess, removing the comfort of being a feminist, like, what it’s doing to people. So if people are feeling isolating, I guess that’s making the audience feel bad for them.

Do you have anything to add?

STUDENT 1 Yeah.

I feel like at that point, when she was starting to describe how her views were seen, she was leaving a very long pause between each adjective, as if to let the audience comprehend what she was saying and think about it for a minute, instead of just immediately dismissing what she was saying, which sort of makes them think again, like, ‘Oh, I see what she's saying. She's not just throwing these words at us, she's actually trying to make us see how her views are seen by us as a society and not just us as a person.’

STUDENT 2 Yeah, and she also questions us, why has this word become such an uncommon one? So I feel like she was getting us to rethink where we stand and whether or not we believe what gender equality and if men and women should have equalised rights and what a feminist truly is.

How did the speaker use their interaction skills? What questions did they ask and how did they interact with the audience?

STUDENT 4 So, she used the word ‘I’, ‘us’ and ‘we’ to create an inclusive environment, to make the audience feel as though they are included in her speech or discussion. And by doing that it kind of creates, like, an honest environment to the audience and by saying … using ‘I’, it kind of shows that she does actually care and this is through her and not through, like, a campaign.

And also when she uses ‘I’, it’s kind of saying that she does want the world to be, like, better when it comes to feminism, and also she’s kind of taking responsibility for what her actions are. So she’s taking responsibility for the good in the world that her campaign’s gonna to do.

STUDENT 2 Yep.

STUDENT 1 I know that she used a lot of thought and creative words like ‘I think’ and ‘I believe’ in her argument, which I feel … It shows that she’s actually put time into her argument and she knows what she’s talking about and that she can have these thoughts and ideas and that she can get them across, but it’s all, like, an idea that she’s been building upon for this moment to convince the audience and show that she’s been thinking about this for a while.

STUDENT 3 I agree with him.

STUDENT 2 Her tone...so what tone did she, I guess, use throughout her speech?

STUDENT 3 I felt like she would raise her tone a lot when she was saying ‘I think’ or ‘We believe’ or ‘us’, and she did that a lot to, I guess, come across to the audience that she really does have a concern for this issue, but she wouldn’t raise her tone as high enough to attack the audience, she just raised it at the end of each sentence to, like, put her point across.

STUDENT 2 Yeah.

STUDENT 4 And she also placed emphasis on words, so when she listed what … that she was among the ranks of women who were aggressive or, like, defined as unattractive, it kind of emphasised the fact that it is a real issue in the world, so it kind of made the audience rethink everything.

STUDENT 2 Yeah.

I also feel like she was a bit critical in what she was saying. Because she was kind of criticising us and how we play in part of … how we play a part of how women feel. So she was kind of, I guess, accusing us of making people feel unsafe, do you know, that we’ve taken away their comfort and we’ve labelised something that they want to be, we’ve generalised what a feminist is. So I feel like she was also being a little critical.

Did we have anything else to add?

STUDENT 1 Yes.

With tone, going back to the area where she was talking about how her views were seen, on each adjective, she was almost quietening her tone towards the end of it to show the emotion in the word, and it built that emotional value that would get reflected onto the audience and they’d feel that emotional value and, like, they’d really feel how she feels just from the way that she was saying the words.

STUDENT 2 Yeah.