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Extra Credit: The Value of the Liberal Arts Essay Contest for High School Seniors

 Liberal arts are essential to the effective implementation of democratic principles in a government, most notably in political participation of the populace. Liberal arts are the skills or subjects that were considered, in the classical age, to be essential knowledge for a citizen to take an active part in civil life. Under a democracy, government is “for the people, by the people” and gives every person equal opportunity to participate. A well-educated populace is vital to being able to make good choices not only for themselves, but for the country as a whole. Many citizens today in the United States know little about any of the candidates they choose to vote for, generally based on political image or the political party they align themselves with, and are not taking advantage of their rights as citizens of a democracy.

Many of the liberal arts skills in the classical era were based on debate, grammar, rhetoric, and logic. For citizens to effectively defend their political beliefs they must know how to articulate their beliefs and use logic skills to sift through all of the media’s analysis of politics to discover the truth about a political issue. Politicians also must have the skills to articulate their political ideas to successfully sway voters to support them. So much of democratic politics depends on the image of politicians and how well they can get their message across to their voters (whether it is on a national level of government or a more local level).

 People need to be able to decipher the truth behind political matters to see the issue on hand and from there effectively make a decision on whether to support it or not. Today mass media analyzes political events or issues so heavily that the real story gets hidden behind other people’s opinions. Liberal arts creates independent thinkers, each citizen in a democracy is free to have his own thoughts and opinions and has the free will to show these beliefs through his political participation and how he votes in elections. People in the United States don’t take advantage of being independent thinkers like they should, many people choose their candidates based on who a news source endorses, the candidate a family member says they should vote for, or just based on the political party they generally support. Liberal arts are key to the success of a democratic government, just as liberal arts are in aspects of everyday life, but many people don’t use their liberal arts skills as much as they should with the ability to have such an impact on their country’s government.