 Analysing Rowling’s persuasion

J K Rowling’s Harvard Commencement Speech (2012) is what we would term a persuasive speech. The purpose of her speech was to inspire her audience to embrace the benefits of failure and realise the importance of our imagination.

A persuasive speech ‘aims to convince an audience about a particular issue’ (Housden, 2008) and/or alter their perspective on that particular issue. It uses many of the features of other persuasive texts, but has the additional element of the ‘manner’ in which it is presented – something that we don’t get from the transcript.

Using specific quotes from the speech transcript, find examples that show these features:

| **Structure** | **Quote** |
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| An engaging opening, usually achieved by any or all of the following:* Direct address of the audience
* An anecdote or piece of evidence
* A reference/quote of another text
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| Clear and consistent line of argument throughout; topic sentences and examples that build upon one another |  |
| A strong, persuasive conclusion that reiterates the line of argument |  |

| **Language features** | **Quote** |
| --- | --- |
| Formal language used to create a sense of authority |  |
| Use of persuasive and emotive language, appropriate to the audience. |  |
| Use of the second-person pronoun (‘you’) to directly address the audience. |  |
| Use of the first-person plural (‘we’) to create a sense of connection to the audience. |  |
| Repetition used to establish and reinforce line of argument |  |
| Use of anecdotes/examples to reinforce the argument being made |  |
| Close attention paid to punctuation to control the pace of delivery |  |
| Use of exclamation and hypothetical questions for dramatic effect |  |
| Allusions to other texts and historical moments to establish precedence/indicate change |  |
| Sound Devices (alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia and rhyme) used for effect |  |