

Analyzing an Argument

From "The Smallest Dragonboy"

"Having older candidates makes good sense," L'vel was saying, as Keevan settled down near the table. "Why waste four to five years of a dragon's fighting prime until his rider grows up enough to stand the rigors?" L'vel had Impressed a blue of Ramonth's first clutch. Most of the candidates thought L'vel was marvelous because he spoke up in front of the older riders, who awed them. "That was well enough in the Interval when you didn't need to mount the full weyr complement to fight Thread. But not now. Not with more eligible candidates than ever. Let the babes wait."

"Any boy who is over twelve turns has the right to stand in the Hatching Ground," K'last replied, a slight smile on his face. He never argued or got angry. Keevan wished he were more like his father. And oh, how he wished he were a brown rider! "Only a dragon...each particular dragon...knows what he wants in a rider. We certainly can't tell. Time and again the theorists," and K'last's smile deepened as his eyes swept those at the table, "are surprised by dragon choice. They never seem to make mistakes, however."

"Now, K'last, just look at the roster this Impression. Seventy-two boys and only forty eggs. Drop off the twelve youngest, and there's still a good field for the hatchlings to choose from. Shells! There are a couple of weyrlings unable to see over a wher egg much less a dragon! And years before they can ride Thread."

"True enough, but the weyr is scarcely under fighting strength, and if the youngest Impress, they'll be old enough to fight when the oldest of our current dragons go between from senility."

"Half the weyrbred lads have already been through several Impressions," one of the bronze riders said then. "I'd say drop some of them off this time. Give the untried a chance."

"There's nothing wrong in presenting a clutch with as wide a choice as possible," said the weyrleader, who had joined the table with Lessa, the weyrwoman.

"Has there ever been a case," she said, smiling in her odd way at the riders, "where a hatchling didn't choose?"

Her suggestion was almost heretical and drew astonished gasps from everyone, including the boys.

F'lar laughed. "You say the most outrageous things, Lessa."

"Well, has there ever been a case where a dragon didn't choose?"

"Can't say as I recall one," K'last replied.

"Then we continue in this tradition," Lessa said firmly, as if that ended the matter.

But it didn't. The argument ranged from one table to the other all through dinner, with some favoring a weeding out of the candidates to the most likely, lopping off those who were very young or who had had multiple opportunities to Impress. All the candidates were in a swivet, though such a departure from tradition would be to the advantage of

many. As the evening progressed, more riders were favoring eliminating the youngest and those who'd passed four or more Impressions unchosen. Keevan felt he could bear such a dictum if only Beterli was also eliminated. But this seemed less likely than that Keevan would be tuffed out, since the weyr's need was for fighting dragons and riders.

By the time the evening meal was over, no decision had been reached, although the weyrleader had promised to give the matter due consideration.

1. Read through the excerpt from "The Smallest Dragonboy." Do the dragon riders rely more on logic (logos) or emotion (pathos) in their argument?
2. Fill in the right side of the chart with arguments that refute those on the left. Use quotes from the story.

Argument	Refutation
<p>"Why waste four to five years of a dragon's fighting prime until his rider grows up enough to stand the rigors?"</p> <p>"Now, K'l'ast, just look at the roster this impression. Seventy-two boys and only forty eggs. Drop off the twelve youngest, and there is still a good field for the hatchlings to choose from."</p> <p>"Shells! There are a couple of weyrlings unable to see over a weyr egg much less a dragon! And years before they can ride Thread."</p> <p>"Half the weyrbred lads have already been through several Impressions," one of the bronze riders said then. "I'd say drop some of them off this time."</p>	

3. What question does Lessa ask the dragon riders?
4. What is Lessa's purpose in posing her question?
5. What is the effect of repeating it?

6. Which side of the argument seems to be stronger, or are they equally balanced? Justify your answer.
7. List two reasons Keevan should be allowed to participate in the Impression ceremony.
8. Which position do you agree with? Write a persuasive speech supporting your position. Be prepared to present your speech to the class.
9. How would this story be different if it were told in 1st person.