ARGUMENTATION – HOW TO BE A CITIZEN-ORATOR

Prompt:
Consider the distinct perspectives expressed in the following statements.

If you develop the absolute sense of certainty that powerful beliefs provide, then you can get yourself to accomplish virtually anything, including those things that other people are certain are impossible.
- William Lyon Phelps, American educator, journalist, and professor (1865–1943)

I think we ought always to entertain our opinions with some measure of doubt. I shouldn’t wish people dogmatically to believe any philosophy, not even mine.
- Bertrand Russell, British author, mathematician, and philosopher (1872–1970)

In a well-organized essay, take a position on the relationship between certainty and doubt. Support your argument with appropriate evidence and examples.

Reword the prompt. What is it asking you to argue?

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EVIDENCE ACTIVITY – CHELPS!

CHELPS:
- Current events
- History
- Experience
- Literature
- Pop culture
- Sports/Science

1. Each group will be assigned one of the sources of evidence.
2. You will work together to complete the steps below. Each group member should record responses on his/her paper.
3. Groups report back to the class.
Evidence Category: ________________________________

1. Brainstorm ideas - each member of group should contribute at least one idea. Write down all suggestions (each student completes sheet). Groups should come up with at least four examples of evidence that would fit the prompt.

Evidence #1______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Evidence #2______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Evidence #3______________________________________________________________
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Evidence #4______________________________________________________________
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2. Write down the position you are taking that your evidence will support. Explain your position clearly! Use one of the thesis statement formats we have discussed.

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3. As a group, decide which pieces of evidence would work best. Here, some group members may need to educate the others about the particulars of these "best" pieces of evidence. Each group member should write a thorough explanation of the evidence.

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4. Write a clear but brief explanation of HOW this evidence supports your position.

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Notes on other groups’ evidence:

C

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E

L

P

S
Certainty and Doubt are coupled together by nature, and even more by thinking. Phelps believes that absolute certainty is necessary, while Russell believes that doubt is important to form true opinions. Doubt is truly necessary for Real learning and growth to occur, while believing only in certainty can be a hindrance.

There are many beliefs that some people hold to be certain that are not acceptable. Hitler, for example, believed that people of Jewish descent were horrible, and a disgrace. Many other people would be certain that it is “impossible” to murder six million people, but his certainty lead him to be able to do so. In a similar sense Christian crusaders in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries were certain that Rome had the right to Jerusalem. They killed thousands, and sparked a holy war, that is still not over. Americans were certain that they had the right to the entire North American continent, and that lead to terrible mistreatment and expulsion from lands for Natives. They had the trail of tears, and many countless massacres. In 1860, the Southern states believed beyond reasonable doubt, that slavery was acceptable, which lead to a war, and thousands of Americans being killed and killing each other. It is the certainty that leads to the violence. If Hitler had not been so certain that Jews were evil, then maybe six million more people could be alive today. If, a thousand years ago, the Pope hadn't believed that Christians were entitled to the holy land, then maybe the twin towers would still be standing, and no soldiers would be dead in a second war in Iraq. However, no one can be certain about what has not happened.

Doubt, on the other hand, is a great learning and teaching tool. It is doubtful that Isaac Newton would have discovered the laws of gravity if he had not question what everyone else was certain of. It is hard to know whether or not Galileo and Copernicus could have created the heliocentric picture of the universe if they had not question the Church. If the founding fathers had not doubted the English monarchy, then today America could still have the Queen on its money. Doubt leads to questioning, questioning to testing, and testing to understanding. Without doubt many of the scientific discoveries that are enjoyed today would be lost. People would not be working on a cure for cancer, they would just be certain its deadly. Sometimes self-doubt is the greatest. In “Lord of the Rings” Aragon doubts himself, and yet becomes the greatest king in an age. The American—and many other—militaries are designed to make one doubt themselves and overcome it. The military academies—West Point, Anapolis—thrive on making students doubt themselves, because then they can build them up from the bottom. Doubt is a piece of growth that compels people to know more. The reason Athiests and Agnostics exist is because of doubt. The reason the legal system exists is because of doubting that all people are inherently good. The reason militaries exist is because our doubt in our ability to handle conflicts peacefully. Doubt is the tool that is invaluable to teaching, and more importantly, to learning.

Doubt is what sparks learning, creating, growing, all while certainty just creates a mental stagnancy. The greatest artists, thinkers, scientists of all time have had some deep doubt; where as those with certainty remained trapped in old thinking and old ways. Doubters are those who have shaped the past, the present, and will shape the future.
Sample Essay: 6 (Adequate)

Essays earning a score of 6 adequately develop a position on the relationship between certainty and doubt. The evidence and explanations used are appropriate and sufficient, and the argument is coherent and adequately developed. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but generally the prose is clear.

Certainty and doubt are inevitable parts of life. Some things, such as the sun coming up every morning, are absolutely certain and leave no room for doubt. Other things, like any given NFL team winning the Super Bowl in a specific year, are very uncertain and leave much room for doubt. Most things lie somewhere in between, however, and a mixture of the two is more practical than either by itself in most circumstances.

This necessity for balance between certainty and doubt comes into play very distinctly when a person is trying to achieve a difficult goal, perform a difficult task, or play a difficult game. Too much certainty which in this case translates to overconfidence and arrogance, is detrimental to the achievement of a goal. When someone is overconfident, he does not take the given task seriously enough, thinking it will be easy. This leads to underpreparation which often leads to failure in something that person could have succeeded in with the proper preparation.

Ironically, an overabundance of doubt can lead to the exact same thing: underpreparation. Too much doubt can make a person feel like there is no hope and that trying is useless. The person may give up prematurely. At this point there really is no hope; once one has given up, he can accomplish nothing.

A person must have some certainty but also some doubt in order to obtain optimal results. For me personally, I have the certainty that God has gifted me with the ability to excel in the classroom as a student and on the football field as a quarterback. Doubt, or in this case, the realization of the possibility of failure, is what motivates me to work hard, however. I know that if I do not study for a test, I will not do well on it; and that if I do not train myself during the offseason and watch film to prepare for each opponent, my performance on Friday nights will be subpar. This combination of certainty and doubt motivates me to work hard, which ensures that I perform to the best of my ability in the classroom, on the football field, and in countless other aspects of my life.

In any situation that is not totally certain or unalterably doubted, a blend of the two is best. The isolation of either in almost every situation leads to underpreparation and and mediocre results.