

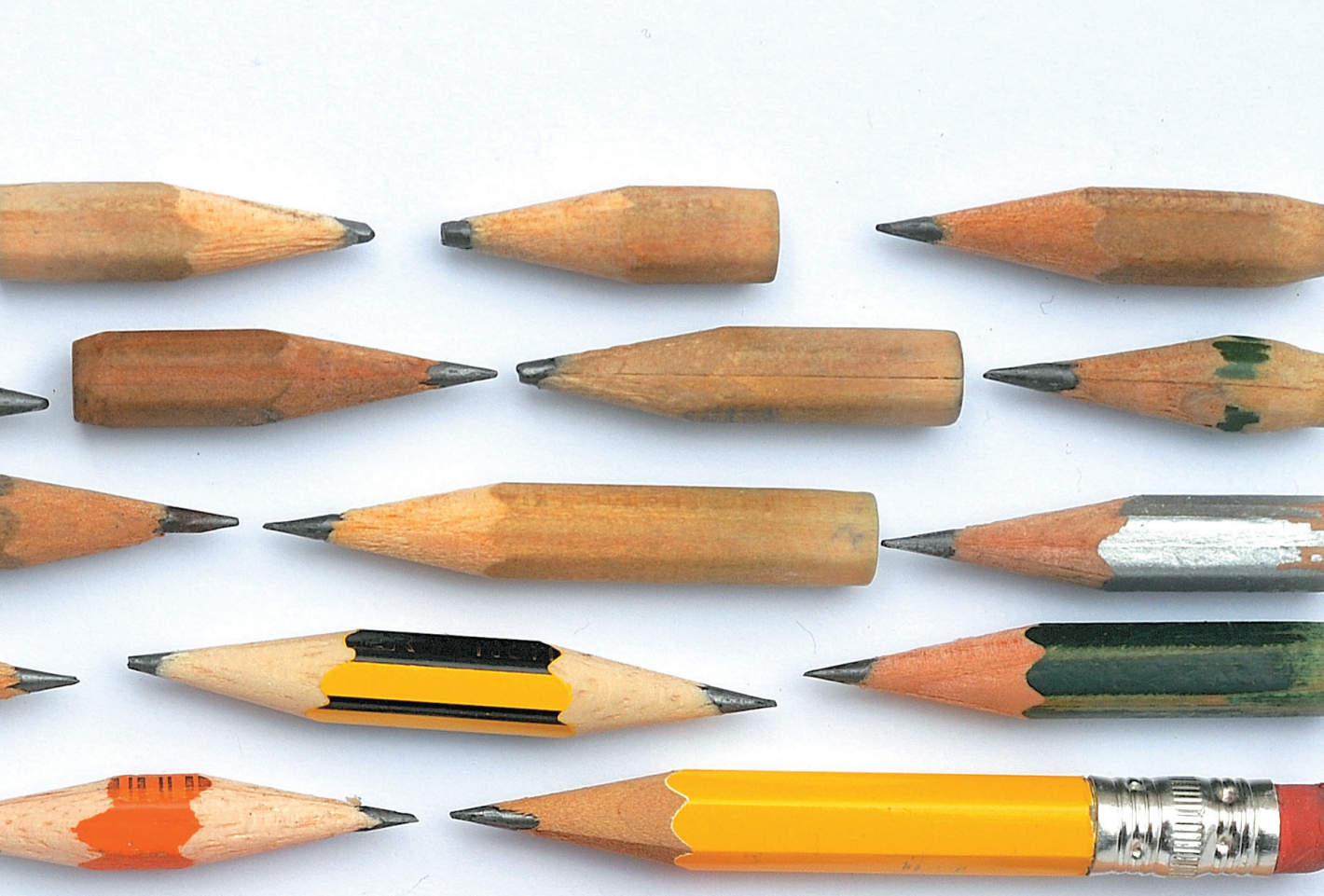


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Education

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**To what extent do our schools serve the goals
of a true education?**

Werner Schnell/Getty Images



Education is a concept as difficult to define as it is essential to our identity. What makes a person educated? Is a skilled artisan with no formal schooling educated? Is a wise grandmother with eighty years of life experience but only a third-grade education educated? Is Bill Gates, who dropped out of Harvard as a junior to found Microsoft, more or less educated than his classmates who stayed in school? When we are seeking education, are we looking for knowledge, wisdom, skills, or all three?



This photo of an eleven-year-old student was taken at a 2015 protest against excessive standardized testing in Colorado schools.

How does the message on this student's jacket frame the debate about standardized testing in American schools? How might proponents of such testing respond to this slogan?



David Zalubowski/AP Images

Describing the purpose of education raises even more questions. Is it to prepare citizens to participate in a democracy? Is it to teach practical skills for the workforce? Or is it to make us more knowledgeable about ourselves and our culture — to know, in the words of the British poet Matthew Arnold, “the best that is known and thought in the world”?

Even Arnold’s focus begs several questions: What is “best”? How do we balance what the American educator John Dewey called “mechanical efficiency” with a deep understanding of “democratic ideals”? Should schools impart values as well as knowledge? Do mainstream ideas take precedence over the concerns of individual groups?

Such philosophical questions are often lost in the practical realities of schooling. While advocates of accountability are prescribing more standardized testing, critics are sounding alarms about its negative effects. We are far from agreement about the best ways to teach and learn, tasks made even more challenging by the demands of exponential technological changes. What information and skills do students need to compete in a global economy?

The selections in this chapter explore many of these issues. They explore the fundamental link between education and freedom and what a liberal education means in the twenty-first century. They ask how choices of required reading affect students and whether the humdrum routine of drill contributes to an education. The writers give us an insider’s view of what it means to feel excluded from mainstream education by attitude, textbooks, economics, or choice. They discuss how schools in the United States compare with those in other countries. And they ask what the future of the American high school is. Together, they lead us to reflect on what education means and whether — and how — our schools embody that vision.

CENTRAL ESSAY

from **In Defense of a Liberal Education**

FAREED ZAKARIA



Fareed Zakaria (b. 1964) is an Indian American journalist who grew up in Mumbai and earned a BA from Yale University in 1986 and a PhD in Government from Harvard University in 1993. In 1992, at the age of 28, Zakaria became the managing editor of *Foreign Affairs*, an influential journal of international politics. He has since worked or written for *Newsweek*, *Time*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New Yorker*, the *New Republic*, and *Slate*. A best-selling author, he also hosts his own show on CNN, *Fareed Zakaria GPS* (Global Public Square), which focuses on international issues and foreign affairs, and writes a weekly column for the *Washington Post*. Zakaria's books include *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (1998), *The American Encounter: The United States and the Making of the Modern World* (1998), which he co-edited, *The Future of Freedom* (2003), and *The Post-American World* (2008). The following excerpt appears in his most recent book, *In Defense of a Liberal Education* (2015).

Jason Andrew/Contour by Getty Images

If you want to live a good life these days, you know what you're supposed to do. Get into college but then drop out. Spend your days learning computer science and your nights coding. Start a technology company and take it public. That's the new American dream. If you're not quite that adventurous, you could major in electrical engineering.

What you are not supposed to do is study the liberal arts. Around the world, the idea of a broad-based "liberal" education is closely tied to the United States and its great universities and colleges. But in America itself, a liberal education is out of favor. In an age defined by technology and globalization, everyone is talking about skills-based learning. Politicians, businesspeople, and even many educators see it as the only way for the nation to stay competitive. They urge students to stop dreaming and start thinking practically about the skills they will need in the workplace. An open-ended exploration of knowledge is seen as a road to nowhere.

A classic liberal education has few defenders. Conservatives fume that it is too, well, liberal (though the term has no partisan meaning). Liberals worry it is too elitist. Students wonder what they would do with a degree in psychology. And parents fear that it will cost them their life savings.

This growing unease is apparent in the numbers. As college enrollment has grown¹ in recent decades, the percentage of students majoring in subjects like English and philosophy has declined sharply. In 1971, for example, 7.6 percent of all bachelor's degrees were awarded in English language and literature. By 2012, that number had fallen to 3.0 percent. During the same period, the percentage of business majors in the undergraduate population rose from 13.7 to 20.5.

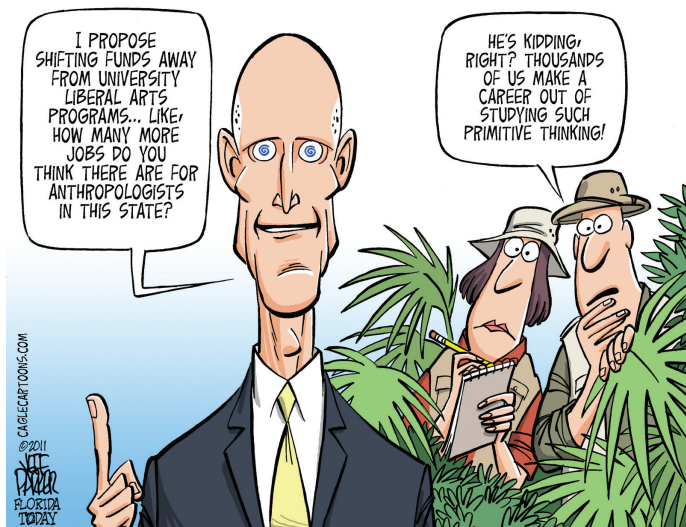
Some believe this pattern makes sense—that new entrants into higher education might simply prefer job training to the liberal arts. Perhaps. But in earlier periods of educational expansion,² this was not the case. In the 1950s and 1960s, for

instance, students saw college as more than a glorified trade school. Newcomers, often from lower-middle-class backgrounds and immigrant families with little education, enthusiastically embraced the liberal arts. They saw it as a gateway to a career, and also as a way to assimilate into American culture. “I have to speak absolutely perfect English,” says Philip Roth’s character Alex Portnoy, the son of immigrants and hero of the novel *Portnoy’s Complaint*.³ Majors like English and history grew in popularity precisely during the decades of mass growth in American higher education.

The great danger facing American higher education is *not* that too many students are studying the liberal arts. Here are the data.⁴ In the 2011–12 academic year, 52 percent of American undergraduates were enrolled in two-year or less-than-two-year colleges, and 48 percent were enrolled in four-year institutions. At two-year colleges, the most popular area of study was health professions and related sciences (23.3 percent). An additional 11.7 percent of students studied business, management, and marketing. At four-year colleges, the pattern was the same. Business led the list of majors, accounting for 18.9 percent of students, and health was

second, accounting for 13.4 percent. Another estimate⁵ found that only a third of all bachelor’s degree recipients study fields that could be classified as the liberal arts. And only about 1.8 percent of all undergraduates attend classic liberal arts colleges like Amherst, Swarthmore, and Pomona.

As you can see, we do not have an oversupply of students studying history, literature, philosophy, or physics and math for that matter. A majority is specializing in fields because they see them as directly related to the job market. It’s true that more Americans need technical training, and all Americans need greater scientific literacy. But the drumbeat of talk about skills and jobs has not lured people into engineering and biology — not everyone has the aptitude for science — so much as it has made them nervously forsake the humanities and take courses in business and communications. Many of these students might well have been better off taking a richer, deeper set of courses in subjects they found fascinating — and supplementing it, as we all should, with some basic knowledge of computers and math. In any event, what is clear is that the gap in technical training is not being caused by the small percentage of students who choose four-year degrees in the liberal arts.



Jeff Parker/Cagle Cartoons, Inc.

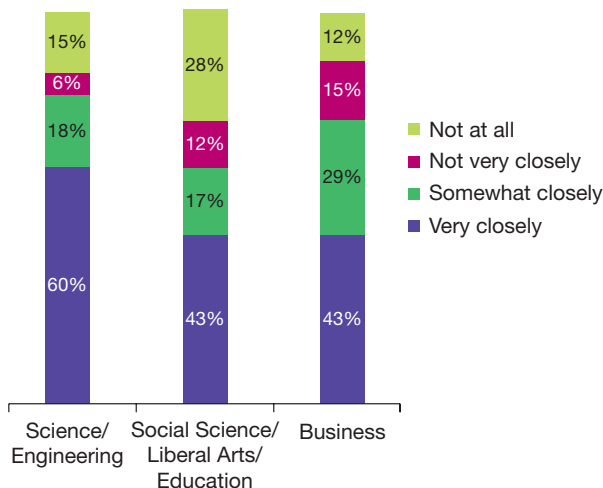


The debate about the value of liberal arts courses — or any courses that are not directly related to a career — has generated satiric responses such as this cartoon lampooning Florida governor Rick Scott.

How does the artist portray Rick Scott's position on the issue?
What is the cartoon's overall message about making this kind of connection between education and job prospects?

Usefulness of Major

Percentage of people in each field of study who say their current job is related to their major in college or graduate school



Data from Pew Research Center.

What questions might Zakaria ask about the data shown in this graph? To what extent does the information in this graph undermine—or bolster—his argument?

Whatever the facts, the assaults continue and have moved from the realm of rhetoric to action. The governors⁶ of Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Wisconsin have announced that they do not intend to keep subsidizing the liberal arts at state-funded universities. “Is it a vital interest of the state to have more anthropologists?” Florida’s Rick Scott^{*} asked. “I don’t think so.” Wisconsin is planning to cut money from subjects that don’t train students for a specific job right out of college. “How many PhDs in philosophy do I need to subsidize?” the radio show host William Bennett asked North Carolina’s Patrick McCrory,^{*} a sentiment with which McCrory enthusiastically agreed. (Ironically, Bennett himself has a PhD in philosophy, which appears to have trained him well for his multiple careers in government, media, nonprofits, and the private sector.)

It isn’t only Republicans on the offensive.⁷ Everyone’s eager to promote the type of education that might lead directly to a job. In a speech in January 2014, President Barack Obama said, “I

promise you, folks can make a lot more, potentially, with skilled manufacturing or the trades than they might with an art history degree.” He later apologized for what he described as a “glib” comment, but Obama has expressed similar sentiments during his presidency. His concern—that in today’s world, college graduates need to focus on the tools that will get them good jobs—is shared by many liberals, as well as conservatives and independents. The irrelevance of a liberal education is an idea that has achieved that rare status in Washington: bipartisan agreement.

The attacks have an effect. There is today a loss of coherence and purpose surrounding the idea of a liberal education. Its proponents are defensive about its virtues, while its opponents are convinced that it is at best an expensive luxury, at worst actively counterproductive. Does it really make sense to study English in the age of apps?

In a sense, the question is un-American. For much of its history, America was distinctive in providing an education to all that was *not* skills based. In their comprehensive study of education,⁸ the Harvard economists Claudia Goldin and Lawrence

^{*}The governor of Florida in 2015, the year this book was first published.—Eds.

^{*}The governor of North Carolina from 2013–2017.—Eds.

Katz note that, historically, Britain, France, and Germany tested children at a young age, educated only a few, and put them through a narrow program designed specifically to impart a set of skills thought to be key to their professions. “The American system,” they write, “can be characterized as open, forgiving, lacking universal standards, and having an academic yet practical curriculum.” America did not embrace the European model of specific training and apprenticeships because Americans moved constantly, to new cities, counties, and territories in search of new opportunities. They were not rooted in geographic locations with long-established trades and guilds that offered the only path forward. They were also part of an economy that was new and dynamic, so that technology kept changing the nature of work and with it the requirements for jobs. Few wanted to lock themselves into a single industry for life. Finally, Goldin and Katz argue, while a general education was more expensive than specialized training, the cost for the former was not paid by students or their parents. The United States was the first country to publicly fund mass, general education, first at the secondary-school level and then in college. Even now, higher education in America is a much broader and richer universe than anywhere else. Today a high school student can go to one of fourteen hundred institutions in the United States that offer a traditional bachelor’s degree, and another fifteen hundred with a more limited course of study.⁹ Goldin and Katz point out that on a per capita basis, Britain has only half as many undergraduate institutions and Germany just one-third. Those who seek to reorient U.S. higher education into something more focused and technical should keep in mind that they would be abandoning what has been historically distinctive, even unique, in the American approach to higher education.

And yet, I get it. I understand America’s current obsession. I grew up in India in the 1960s and 1970s, when a skills-based education was seen as the only path to a good career. Indians in those days had an almost mystical faith in the

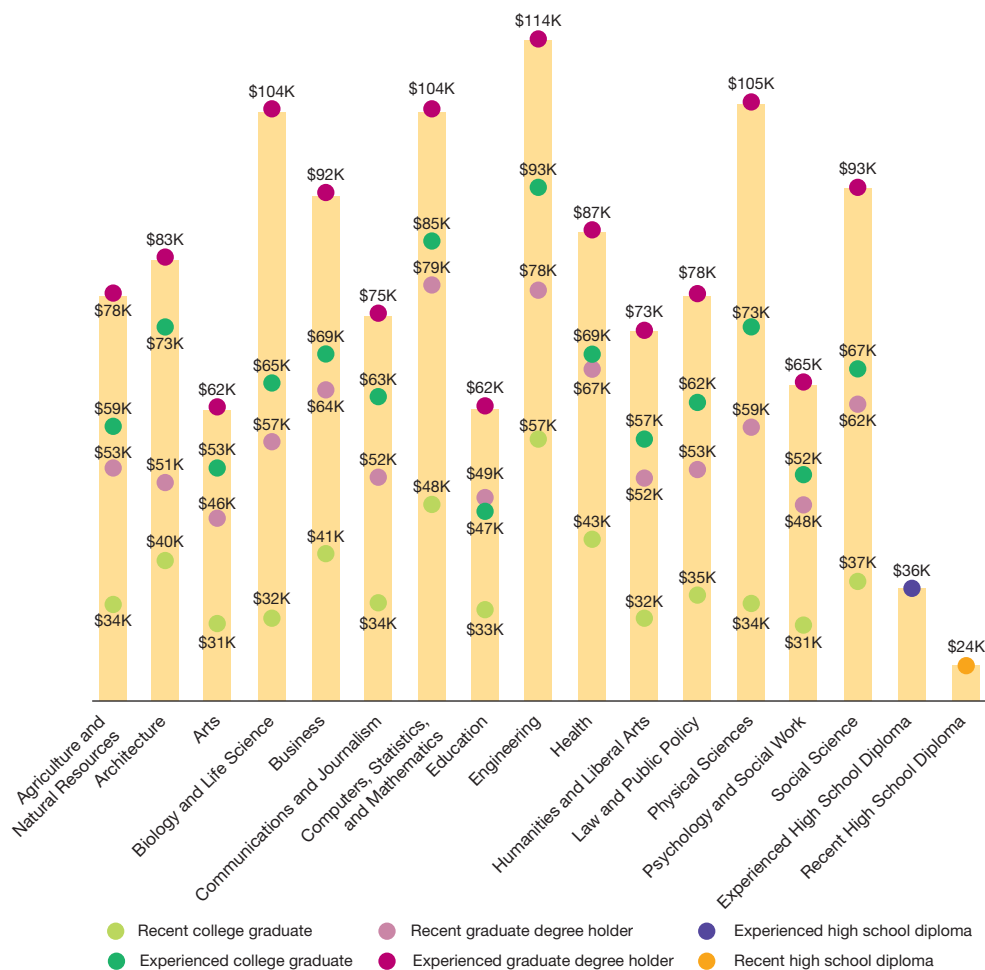
power of technology. It had been embedded in the country’s DNA since it gained independence in 1947. Jawaharlal Nehru,¹⁰ India’s first prime minister, was fervent in his faith in big engineering projects. He believed that India could move out of its economic backwardness only by embracing technology, and he did everything he could during his fourteen years in office to leave that stamp on the nation. A Fabian socialist, Nehru had watched with admiration as the Soviet Union jumpstarted its economy in just a few decades by following such a path. (Lenin once famously remarked, “Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country.”) Nehru described India’s new hydroelectric dams as “temples of the new age.”

I attended a private day school in Bombay (now Mumbai), the Cathedral and John Connon School. When founded by British missionaries in the Victorian era, the school had been imbued with a broad, humanistic approach to education. It still had some of that outlook when I was there, but the country’s mood was feverishly practical. The 1970s was a tough decade everywhere economically, but especially in India. And though it was a private school, the tuition was low, and Cathedral catered to a broad cross section of the middle class. As a result, all my peers and their parents were anxious about job prospects. The assumption made by almost everyone at school was that engineering and medicine were the two best careers. The real question was, which one would you pursue?

At age sixteen, we had to choose one of three academic streams: science, commerce, or the humanities. We all took a set of board exams that year — a remnant of the British educational model — that helped determine our trajectory. In those days, the choices were obvious. The smart kids would go into science, the rich kids would do commerce, and the girls would take the humanities. (Obviously I’m exaggerating, but not by that much.) Without giving the topic much thought, I streamed into the sciences.

Based on data in this graph, what conclusions can you draw about how a liberal arts major can maximize his or her earning potential? How might Zakaria respond to it?

Annual Salary by Undergraduate Major (2011–2012)



Data from U.S. Census Bureau

At the end of twelfth grade, we took another set of exams. These were the big ones. They determined our educational future, as we were reminded again and again. Grades in school, class participation, extracurricular projects, and teachers'

15 recommendations — all were deemed irrelevant compared to the exam scores. Almost all colleges admitted students based solely on these numbers. In fact, engineering colleges asked for scores in only three subjects: physics, chemistry, and mathematics. Similarly,

medical schools would ask for results in just physics, chemistry, and biology. No one cared what you got in English literature. The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) — the most prestigious engineering colleges in the country — narrowed the admissions criteria even further. They administered their own entrance test, choosing applicants entirely on the basis of its results.

The increased emphasis on technology and practicality in the 1970s was in part due to domestic factors: inflation had soared, the economy had slumped, and the private sector was crippled by nationalizations and regulations. Another big shift, however, took place far from India's borders. Until the 1970s, the top British universities offered scholarships to bright Indian students — a legacy of the raj. But as Britain went through its own hellish economic times that decade — placed under formal receivership in 1979 by the International Monetary Fund — money for foreign scholarships dried up. In an earlier era, some of the brightest graduates from India might have gone on to Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of London. Without outside money to pay for that education, they stayed home.

But culture follows power. As Britain's economic decline made its universities less attractive, colleges in the United States were rising in wealth and ambition. At my school, people started to notice that American universities had begun offering generous scholarships to foreign students. And we soon began to hear from early trailblazers about the distinctly American approach to learning. A friend from my neighborhood who had gone to Cornell came back in the summers bursting with enthusiasm about his time there. He told us of the incredible variety of courses that students could take no matter what their major. He also told tales of the richness of college life. I remember listening to him describe a film society at Cornell that held screenings and

discussions of classics by Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini. I had never heard of Bergman or Fellini, but I was amazed that watching movies was considered an integral part of higher education. Could college really be that much fun?

My parents did not push me to specialize. My father had been deeply interested in history and politics ever since he was a young boy. He had been orphaned at a young age but managed to get financial assistance that put him through high school and college. In 1944, he received a scholarship to attend the University of London. He arrived during the worst of the blitzkrieg,* with German V-2 rockets raining down on the city. On the long boat ride to England, the crew told him he was crazy. One member even asked, "Haven't you read the newspapers? People are leaving London by the thousands right now. Why would you go there?" But my father was determined to get an education. History was his passion, and he worked toward a PhD in that subject. But he needed a clearer path to a profession. So, in addition, he obtained a law degree that would allow him to become a barrister* upon his return to Bombay.

Though my mother was raised in better circumstances, she also faced a setback at a young age — her father died when she was eight. She briefly attended a college unusual for India at the time — a liberal arts school in the northern part of the country called the Isabella Thoburn College, founded in 1870 by an American Methodist missionary of that name. Though her education was cut short when she returned home to look after her widowed mother, my mother never forgot the place. She often fondly reminisced about its broad and engaging curriculum.

*A reference to Nazi Germany's bombing of London during World War II. The word means "lightning war" in German. —Eds.

*A lawyer. —Eds.

seeing connections

Following is an excerpt from *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, a 2010 book by philosopher Emily Nussbaum.

Examine each of the points she makes about contemporary education. To what extent do they reflect Fareed Zakaria's stance on a liberal education?

from **Not for Profit**

Why Democracy Needs the Humanities

EMILY NUSSBAUM

If a nation wants to promote a humane, people-sensitive democracy dedicated to promoting opportunities for “life, liberty and the pursuit of the happiness” to each and every person, what abilities will it need to produce in its citizens? At least the following seem crucial:

- The ability to think well about political issues affecting the nation, to examine, reflect, argue, and debate, deferring to neither tradition nor authority
- The ability to recognize fellow citizens as people with equal rights, even though they may be different in race, religion, gender, and sexuality: to look at them with respect, as ends, not just as tools to be manipulated for one's own profit
- The ability to have concern for the lives of others, to grasp what policies of many types mean for the opportunities and experiences of one's fellow citizens, of many types, and for people outside one's own nation
- The ability to imagine well a variety of complex issues affecting the story of a human life as it unfolds: to think about childhood, adolescence, family relationships, illness, death, and much more in a way informed by an understanding of a wide range of human stories, not just by aggregate data
- The ability to judge political leaders critically, but with an informed and realistic sense of the possibilities available to them
- The ability to think about the good of the nation as a whole, not just that of one's own local group
- The ability to see one's own nation, in turn, as a part of a complicated world order in which issues of many kinds require intelligent transnational deliberation for their resolution

My parents' careers were varied and diverse. 20 My father started out as a lawyer before moving into politics and later founding a variety of colleges. He also created a small manufacturing company (to pay the bills) and always wrote books and essays. My mother began as a social worker and then became a journalist, working for newspapers and magazines. (She resigned from her last position in journalism last year, 2014, at the age of seventy-eight.) Neither of them insisted on early specialization. In retrospect,

my parents must have worried about our future prospects — everyone else was worried. But to our good fortune, they did not project that particular anxiety on us.

My brother, Arshad, took the first big step. He was two years older than I and fantastically accomplished academically. (He was also a very good athlete, which made following in his footsteps challenging.) He had the kind of scores on his board exams that would have easily placed him in the top engineering programs in the

country. Or he could have taken the IIT exam, which he certainly would have aced. In fact, he decided not to do any of that and instead applied to American universities. A couple of his friends considered doing the same, but no one quite knew how the process worked. We learned, for example, that applicants had to take something called the Scholastic Aptitude Test, but we didn't know much about it. (Remember, this is 1980 in India. There was no Google. In fact, there was no color television.) We found a pamphlet about the test at the United States Information Service, the cultural branch of the U.S. embassy. It said that because the SAT was an aptitude test, there was no need to study for it. So, my brother didn't. On the day the test was scheduled, he walked into the makeshift exam center in Bombay, an almost empty room in one of the local colleges, and took the test.

It's difficult to convince people today how novel and risky an idea it was at the time to apply to schools in the United States. The system was still foreign and distant. People didn't really know what it meant to get into a good American university or how that would translate into a career in India. The Harvard alumni in Bombay in the 1970s were by no means a "Who's Who" of the influential and wealthy. Rather, they were an eclectic mix of people who either had spent time abroad (because their parents had foreign postings) or had some connection to America. A few friends of ours had ventured to the United States already, but because they hadn't yet graduated or looked for jobs, their experiences were of little guidance.

My brother had no idea if the admissions departments at American colleges would understand the Indian system or know how to interpret his report cards and recommendations. He also had no real Plan B. If he didn't take the slot offered by engineering schools, he wouldn't be able to get back in line the next year. In fact, things were so unclear to us that we didn't even realize American colleges required applications a full year in advance. As a result, he involuntarily

took a gap year between school and college, waiting around to find out whether he got in anywhere.

As it happened, Arshad got in everywhere. He picked the top of the heap — accepting a scholarship offer from Harvard. While we were all thrilled and impressed, many friends remained apprehensive when told the news. It sounded prestigious to say you were going to attend Harvard, but would the education actually translate into a career?

My mother traveled to the United States to drop my brother off in the fall of 1982, an uneasy time in American history. The mood was still more 1970s malaise than 1980s boom. The country was in the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression. Vietnam and Watergate had shattered the nation's confidence. The Soviet Union was seen as ascendant in our minds. Riots, protests, and urban violence had turned American cities into places of genuine danger. Our images of New York came from Charles Bronson* movies and news reports of crack and crime.

All of this was especially alarming to Indians. The country's traditional society had interpreted the 1960s and 1970s as a period of decay in American culture, as young people became morally lax, self-indulgent, permissive, and, perhaps most worrisome, rebellious. The idea that American youth had become disrespectful toward their elders was utterly unnerving to Indian parents. Most believed that any child who traveled to the United States would quickly cast aside family, faith, and tradition for sex, drugs, and rock and roll. If you sent your kids to America, you had to brace yourselves for the prospect that you might "lose" them.

In his first few weeks abroad, Arshad was, probably like all newcomers to Harvard, a bit nervous. My mother, on the other hand, returned

* An American film star best known for his roles in Westerns and crime dramas of the 1960s and 1970s. —Eds.

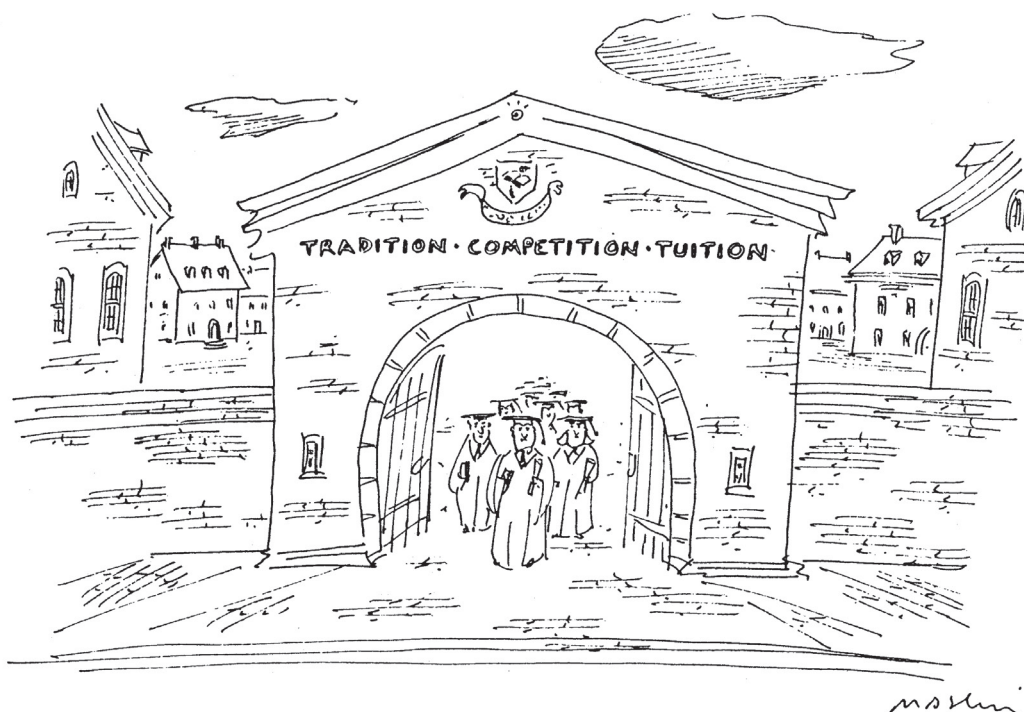
from her trip clear of any anxiety. She was enchanted with the United States, its college campuses, and the undergraduate experience. She turned her observations into an article for the *Times of India* titled “The Other America.”¹¹ In it, she described how concerned she had been before the trip about permissiveness, drugs, and rebellion at American colleges. She then went on to explain how impressed she was after actually spending time on a campus to find that the place focused on education, hard work, and extracurricular activities. The students she met were bright, motivated, and, to her surprise, quite respectful. She met parents who were tearfully

bidding their children good-bye, talking about their next visit, or planning a Thanksgiving reunion. “I feel I am in India,” she wrote. “Could this be the heartless America where family ties have lost their hold?”

Indians had it all wrong about the United States, my mother continued. She tried to explain why they read so much bad news about the country. “America is an open society as no other. So they expose their ‘failings’ too as no other,” she wrote. “[Americans] cheerfully join in the talk of their own decline. But the decline is relative to America’s own previous strength. It remains the world’s largest economy; it still disposes of

Colleges are often known by a motto that captures the institution’s overall philosophy of education and the values it hopes to instill in matriculated students. This cartoon makes light of such mottos.

What would Zakaria likely say about whether those three “values” – tradition, competition, and tuition – prevail in colleges today? How well equipped would graduates of such institutions be to deal with civic responsibilities, the job market, and adult life in general?



Michael Maslin/The New Yorker Collection/Conde Nast

the greatest military might the world has known; refugees from terror still continue to seek shelter in this land of immigrants. It spends millions of dollars in the hope that someone, somewhere may make a valuable contribution to knowledge. America remains the yardstick by which we judge America.” As you can see, she was hooked.

In those years, it was fashionable in elite Indian circles to denounce the United States for its imperialism and hegemony. During the Cold War, the Indian government routinely sided with the Soviet Union. Indira Gandhi, the populist prime minister, would often blame India’s troubles on the “foreign hand,” a reference to the CIA. But my mother has always been stubbornly pro-American. When my father was alive, he would sometimes criticize America for its crimes and blunders, partly to needle my brother and me and partly because, as one who had struggled for India’s independence, he had absorbed the worldview of his closest allies, who were all on the left. Yet my mother remained unmoved,

completely convinced that the United States was a land of amazing vitality and virtue. (I suspect it’s what has helped her accept the fact that her sons chose the country as their home.)

Along with photographs and information brochures from her trip, my mother also brought back Harvard’s course book. For me, it was an astonishing document. Instead of a thin pamphlet containing a dry list of subjects, as one would find at Indian universities, it was a bulging volume overflowing with ideas. It listed hundreds of classes in all kinds of fields. And the course descriptions were written like advertisements — as if the teachers wanted you to join them on an intellectual adventure. I read through the book, amazed that students didn’t have to choose a major in advance and that they could take poetry and physics and history and economics. From eight thousand miles away, with little knowledge and no experience, I was falling in love with the idea of a liberal education.

30

Notes

1. As college enrollment has grown: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, Table 322.10. The *Digest*, published annually by the National Center for Education Statistics, is a highly accessible source for statistics on higher education. The data are updated throughout the year online at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/>.
2. In earlier periods of educational expansion: For more on the post-World War II expansion in higher education and the simultaneous rise in the humanities, see Louis Menand, “The Humanities Revolution,” in *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 63–73; and William M. Chace, “The Decline of the English Department,” *American Scholar*, Autumn 2009. The Humanities Indicators, a project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences available online at www.humanitiesindicators.org, also tracks data on the twentieth-century rise and fall in the study of the humanities.
3. “I have to speak”: Philip Roth, *Portnoy’s Complaint* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 164.

4. Here are the data: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest*, Table 311.60.

5. Another estimate: Measures of the liberal arts vary by source, depending largely on how academic fields are classified. Justin Pope, “Liberal Arts Colleges Forced to Evolve with Market,” Associated Press, Dec. 30, 2012, estimates that between 100,000 and 300,000 of the country’s approximately 17 million undergraduates attend a liberal arts college, that is, a residential college that exists independent of any larger university. The same article estimates that about one-third of bachelor’s degrees in the United States are awarded in the liberal arts.

The *Digest* places the undergraduate population at 18 million as of 2012 (Table 303.60). It also divides degrees into six broad categories: humanities; social and behavioral sciences; natural sciences and mathematics; computer sciences and engineering; education; business; and other fields, a category that includes professional programs such as agriculture and law enforcement. If just the first three are classified as liberal, then about 40 percent of the 1.8 million bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2011–12 were in the liberal arts (Table 318.20).

6. Governors: See Scott Jaschik, "Florida GOP vs. Social Science," *Inside Higher Ed*, Oct. 12, 2011 (Scott quote); Kevin Kiley, "A \$10,000 Platform," *Inside Higher Ed*, Nov. 30, 2012; and Kiley, "Another Liberal Arts Critic," *Inside Higher Ed*, Jan. 30, 2013 (Bennett quote).
7. It isn't only Republicans: Scott Jaschik, "Apology from Obama," *Inside Higher Ed*, Feb. 19, 2014.
8. Their comprehensive study of education: Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz, *The Race between Education and Technology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 28–29.
9. Today a high school student: *Ibid.*, 254.
10. Jawaharlal Nehru: On Nehru's economic views, see Shashi Tharoor, *Nehru: The Invention of India* (New York: Arcade, 2003), 159–193; and Jawaharlal Nehru, "Temples of the New Age," July 8, 1954, available at http://www.nehruinternationalconference2014.com/nehru_speech4.aspx.
11. "The Other America": Fatma Zakaria, "The Other America," *Times of India*, Mar. 28, 1982.

[2015]

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does Fareed Zakaria mean by the "liberal education" he cites in his title? To what extent is it different from a "liberal arts education"?
2. According to Zakaria's analysis, why has a liberal education fallen out of favor in American colleges and universities? Specifically, what are two arguments against it that he cites?
3. A common criticism of liberal education is that it does not have the real-world applicability that courses in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) have, and it does not teach students skills necessary for the jobs that are available in today's economy. How does Zakaria argue against this position? Cite specific passages to support your response.
4. Who are the principal targets of Zakaria's criticism — that is, who is most opposed to a liberal education, as he defines it? Is it educators? Parents? Students themselves? Politicians? The business community? The corporate world? Explain how you know.
5. If, as Zakaria writes, "The great danger facing American higher education is *not* that too many students are studying the liberal arts" (para. 6), then what is the danger? How effectively does Zakaria communicate this position?
6. When Zakaria makes the point that there is in our time "a loss of coherence and purpose surrounding the idea of a liberal education," he asks, "Does it really make sense to study English in the age of apps?" (para. 10). When he asserts, in the next paragraph, that the very question is "un-American," what do you think he means? What does he suggest is "un-American" about questioning the value of studying subjects such as literature, classics, or art history? Do you agree or disagree with his reasoning? Explain your response.
7. What does Zakaria mean when he refers to "the distinctly American approach to learning" (para. 17)? How is this different from what he has experienced in Indian schools, which often follow a British model of education?
8. Zakaria spends the last part of the essay describing his own experience, weaving in details about the education system in India and his own family. He ends by saying that he was "falling in love with the idea of a liberal education" (para. 30). Why was this idea so appealing to him?

QUESTIONS ON RHETORIC AND STYLE

1. Zakaria opens with a deliberately provocative paragraph about the "good life" and "the new American Dream." What was your response when you initially read this paragraph? Did it make you defensive? Or did you nod your head in agreement? Explain whether you think Zakaria risks alienating his audience with his use of rhetoric in this opening.

2. What rhetorical purpose does the mention of *Portnoy's Complaint*, a novel that centers on an immigrant family, serve? How does Zakaria use it to make a point?
3. Early in the essay, Zakaria uses statistical evidence — hard data — to make the case that the problem in education today is “not that too many students are studying the liberal arts” (para. 6). How do quantitative evidence and his analysis of politics in paragraphs 8 and 9 contribute to the development of his argument?
4. What is Zakaria’s purpose in bringing in expert testimony in paragraph 11? To what extent does it serve as effective evidence for his argument?
5. Zakaria opens paragraph 12 with the short statement, “And yet, I get it.” In what ways does this sentence signal a shift in the development of his argument? How effective a rhetorical strategy is it?
6. Zakaria devotes considerable space in this essay to quotations from his mother’s writing about the United States for Indian publications in the 1980s (paras. 25–28). What is his purpose in doing this? How effective is this approach?
7. Reviews of *In Defense of a Liberal Education* were generally positive, including praise for Zakaria’s easily readable style, which one reviewer termed, “breezy journalistic prose.” What specific examples can you identify to support this characterization of Zakaria’s writing? Overall, do you agree or disagree with this opinion of his writing style? Explain your response with specific details from the essay.
8. In this excerpt, which is the opening chapter in his book defending a liberal education, Zakaria makes his case largely through his personal experience. To what extent do you find this a compelling strategy? How successfully does he portray his experience in a broader context so that it does not seem to be exceptional?

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING

1. Zakaria argues that neglecting liberal education is short-sighted and, in fact, short changes both individuals and society at large by emphasizing job preparation and quantifiable skills at the expense of everything else. Write an argument explaining why you agree or disagree with his viewpoint.
2. How would you address the question, “Does it really make sense to study English in the age of apps?” (para. 10)? Write a brief argument stating your position, using both Zakaria’s argument and your own experience as sources.
3. Gather information about one of the colleges you would like to attend. Judging from your sources, what is the school’s attitude toward a liberal education, as Zakaria defines it? Cite specifics to support your assessment. To what extent has reviewing and evaluating these sources changed your perspective on the educational experience the college offers?
4. In 2017, the English Department of Harvard University accepted its first rap album as a senior thesis. Obasi Shaw, an African American student, submitted a ten-track album entitled *Liminal Minds*, a wordplay on the title of the popular television show *Criminal Minds*. The album’s structure is modeled on *Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer’s fourteenth-century classic work, but it presents a multifaceted exploration of black identity in modern-day America, with each track giving the perspective of a different narrator. Write an argument explaining whether you think Harvard’s decision to accept the album reflects a thriving liberal education or a lessening of rigorous academic standards. Is it an example of liberal education alive and well in the twenty-first century, or is it further proof that universities are not helping students develop the skills they need to enter a job market defined by technology and globalization?
5. In May 2017, Fareed Zakaria delivered the commencement address at Bucknell University. Continuing his quest to emphasize the importance of a liberal education in an increasingly polarized world, he pointed out that the word *liberal* does not refer to the current political notion of liberal and conservative but to its Latin root, meaning “pertaining to liberty.” He continued:

There is, we all know, a kind of anti-intellectualism on the right these days — the denial of facts, of reason, of science. But there is also an anti-intellectualism on the left. An attitude of righteousness that says we are so pure, we are so morally superior, we cannot bear to hear an idea that we don't like or disagree with. There is no such idea. There is no idea that is beyond the pale. Everything should be within the arena, and should be worth contesting.

I talk about liberals because campuses are invariably more liberal than conservative. And it is a real problem to have this kind of silencing of conservative voices. . . . We want to celebrate every kind of diversity these days except intellectual diversity.

From what you have observed and read about college campuses and our society in general today, do you agree with Zakaria? Why or why not? Use specific examples to develop your viewpoint.

6. The table below was developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU). Write an essay that provides an example of what each one of the characteristics of a liberal education in the twenty-first century might look like. As you develop examples (or cite ones you know of), you might also want to draw

comparisons to the liberal education of the twentieth century.

7. Choose one of the following quotations and write an essay that develops a position in response to it. Use appropriate, specific evidence to illustrate and develop your position.
- "If then the intellect is so excellent a portion of us, and its cultivation so excellent, it is not only beautiful, perfect, and admirable and noble in itself, but in a true and high sense it must be useful to the possessor and to all around him; not useful in any low, mechanical, mercantile sense, but as diffusing good, or as a blessing, or a gift, or power, or a treasure, first to the owner, then through him to the world. I say then, if a liberal education be good, it must necessarily be useful too."
— John Henry Newman (1801–1890),
The Idea of a University, Discourse VII, 1852
 - "Education can give you a skill, but a liberal education can give you dignity."
— Ellen Key (1849–1926),
Swedish writer and suffragist
 - "Science and everyday life cannot and should not be separated."
— Rosalind Franklin (1920–1958),
British chemist, ca. 1940

The Changing Nature of Liberal Education (See Question 6)

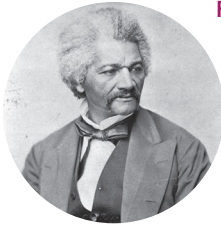
	Liberal Education in the Twentieth Century	Liberal Education in the Twenty-First Century
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> intellectual and personal development an option for the fortunate viewed as non-vocational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> intellectual and personal development a necessity for all students essential for success in a global economy and for informed citizenship
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> through studies in arts and sciences disciplines ("the major") and/or through general education in the initial years of college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> through studies that emphasize the essential learning outcomes across the entire educational continuum — from school through college — at progressively higher levels of achievement (recommended)
Where	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> liberal arts colleges or colleges of arts and sciences in larger institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all schools, community colleges, colleges, and universities, as well as across all fields of study (recommended)

- d. “The only education that prepares us for change is a liberal education. In periods of change, narrow specialization condemns us to inflexibility — precisely what we do not need. We need the flexible intellectual tools to be problem solvers, to be able to continue learning over time.”
- David Kearns,
former CEO of Xerox, 2002
- e. “So what does business need from our educational system? One answer is that it needs more employees who excel in science and engineering. . . . But that is only the beginning; one cannot live by equations alone. The need is increasing for workers with greater foreign language skills and an expanded knowledge of economics, history, and geography. And who wants a technology-driven economy if those who drive it are not grounded in such fields as ethics?”
- Norman Augustine, former chairman and
CEO of the Lockheed Martin Corporation, 2013
- f. “Science literacy is the artery through which the solutions of tomorrow’s problems flow.”
- Neil deGrasse Tyson,
American astrophysicist, 2012

CLASSIC ESSAY

The Blessings of Liberty and Education

FREDERICK DOUGLASS



Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) was an African American writer, abolitionist, orator, and statesman. In 1838, he escaped from slavery in Maryland and soon became a national leader of the abolitionist movement in Massachusetts and New York, gaining fame for his brilliant oratory and persuasive antislavery writings. His widely read autobiographies include the bestselling *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881). Throughout his life, Douglass was also an active campaigner for women's suffrage and argued for the equality of Native Americans and recent immigrants. As a preacher and statesman, he was known for his willingness to work across ideological divides to accomplish his ambitious political objectives. Douglass delivered the following address, entitled "The Blessings of Liberty and Education," at the 1894 dedication of the Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth at Manassas, Virginia. The crowd that assembled to watch Douglass speak included many visitors from other Southern states and from Washington, D.C.

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Ladies, Gentlemen and Friends.

As I am a stranger among you and a sojourner, you will, I hope, allow me a word about myself, by way of introduction. I want to say something about the day upon which we are met. Coincidents are always more or less interesting, and here is one such of a somewhat striking character. This day has for me a special interest. It happens to be the anniversary of my escape from bondage. Fifty-six years ago to-day, it was my good fortune to cease to be a slave, a chattel personal, and to become a man. It was upon the 3d day of September, 1838, that I started upon my little life work in the world. It was a great day for me. With slavery behind me and all the great untried world before me, my heart throbbed with many anxious thoughts as to what the future might have in store for me. I will not attempt here

any description of what were my emotions in this crisis. I leave to imagine the difference between what they were and what they are on this happy occasion. I then found myself in a strange land, unknown, friendless, and pursued as if I were a fugitive from justice. I was a stranger to every one I met in the streets of the great city of New York, for that city was the first place in which I felt at liberty to halt in my flight farther North, New York, at that day was by no means a city of refuge. On the contrary, it was a city in which slave-hunters and slave-catchers delighted to congregate. It was one of the best fields for that sport this side of Africa. The game once started was easily taken. If they had caught me, I should have been elsewhere to assist in founding an Industrial School for colored youth in Virginia. This is all I have to say on this point.



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My first thought german to the occasion, and which must have some interest for us all, very naturally relates to this noted place where we now happen to be assembled. Since the great and terrible battle with which its name is associated, and which has now passed into history as the birth of many battles,¹ no event has occurred here so important in its character and influence and so every way significant, as the event which we have this day met to inaugurate and celebrate. To found an educational institution for any people is worthy of note; but to found a school in which to instruct, improve and develop all that is noblest and best in the souls of a deeply wronged and long neglected people, is especially note worthy. This spot, once the scene of fratricidal war, and the witness of its innumerable and indescribable horrors, is, we hope to be hereafter the scene of brotherly kindness, charity and peace. We are

¹ A reference to the First Battle of Bull Run, the first major land battle of the American Civil War, which took place in Manassas, Virginia, in 1861. —Eds.

to witness here a display of the best elements of advanced civilization and good citizenship. It is to be the place where the children of a once enslaved people may realize the blessings of liberty and education, and learn how to make for themselves and for all others the best of both worlds.

No spot on the soil of Virginia could have been more fitly chosen for planting this school, than this historic battle-field. It has not only the high advantage of forming an instructive contrast and illustrating the compensation possible to mankind, by patiently awaiting the quiet operation of time and events, but suggests the battle to be waged here against ignorance and vice. Thirty years ago, when Federal² and Confederate armies met here in deadly conflict over the question of the perpetual enslavement of the negro, who would or could have dreamed, that, in a single generation, such changes would have wrought in the minds of men that a school

² Union Army. —Eds.

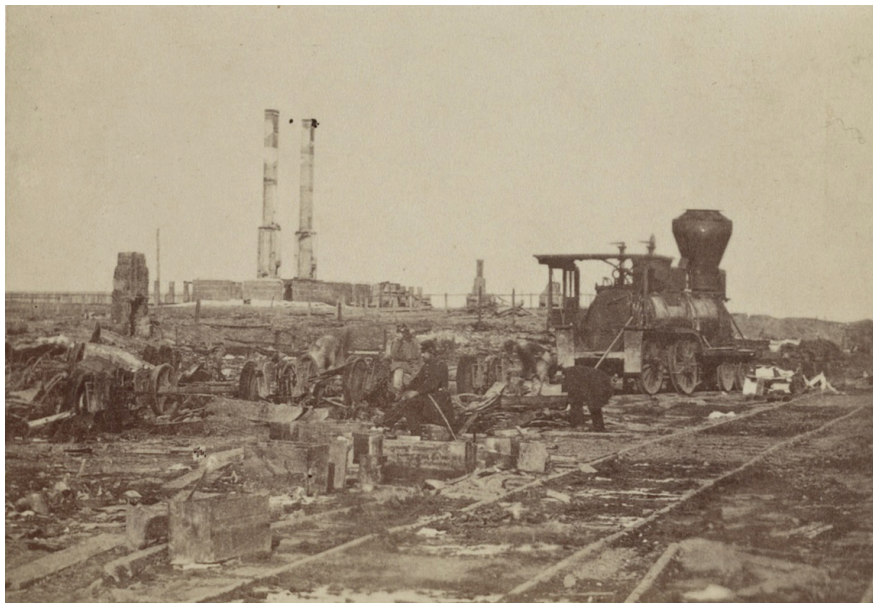
This illustration depicts Frederick Douglass in his office at city hall shortly after President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed him the U.S. Marshal of the District of Columbia in 1877.

What does this sketch suggest about the status Douglass enjoyed in the African American community? To what extent does it match the ethos he establishes at the outset of his dedication speech?

seeing connections

Manassas, Virginia, was the site of two major Confederate victories during the Civil War: The First Battle of Bull Run (1861) and the Second Battle of Bull Run (1862). Read the following account of the consequences of the First Battle of Bull Run and look carefully at the photo, which shows Manassas Junction after the Second Battle of Bull Run.

How do the photograph and Rawley's account add dimension to your understanding of the rhetorical situation of Douglass's speech?



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from Turning Points of the Civil War

JAMES A. RAWLEY

At Bull Run the Union was given its baptism in blood and fire. The battle in its aftermath opened Northern eyes to the magnitude of the work of subduing a vast area in determined revolt. It prompted a reordering of Federal military affairs and it drove Northern opinion toward more extreme views on the Negro. It deepened the new President's sense of responsibility as Commander-in-chief. It caused the Union to turn toward a youthful commander — prematurely

hailed after Philippi as a new Napoleon — who would play a leading role for the next three years. It presented the Confederacy with its first true military hero — Stonewall Jackson — and at the same time lulled the South into a false confidence. "Universal gratulation at our success inspired an overweening confidence," President Jefferson Davis later observed. And not the least result of the first battle of Bull Run was the fall of Union prestige in Europe.

would be founded here, for the mental, moral and industrial education of the children of this same people whose enslavement was sought even by the sword? Who would have imagined that Virginia would, after the agony of war and in a time so short, become so enlightened and so liberal as to be willing and even pleased to welcome here, upon her "sacred soil", a school of the children of her former slaves? Thirty years ago neither poet, priest nor prophet, could have foretold the vast and wonderful changes which have taken place in the opinions of the American people on this subject since the war. The North has changed, and the South has changed, and we have all changed, and all changed for the better. Otherwise, we should not be here to-day engaged in the business of establishing this institution.

The liberality on the part of the people of Virginia, a typical State of the South, which has encouraged and justified the founding the Industrial School, not only within her borders, but here on the very first great battle-field between the two great sections of our Union, is as much a cause of amazement, satisfaction and joy, as is the readiness with which the good people of the North have responded to the call for pecuniary aid and thus made this enterprise successful. Both circumstances are to-day causes of joy and congratulation. They show that the colored man need not despair; that he has friends in both sections of the Republic. In view of this school and the changes in public sentiment which it indicates, we may well exclaim with Milton, "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war!"³

When first invited to speak a few words in celebration of the founding of this industrial school, I was disposed to decline the honor,

in favor of some of my younger and better educated brothers. But I am glad that I did not decline the honor. The duty devolved upon me, but which I then hesitated to assume, is, in every respect, an agreeable duty. I am glad that, at my time of life, the opportunity is afforded me to connect my name with a school so meritorious and which I can reasonably hope will be of so great and permanent service to a people so greatly needing it. It is in line with my relation to the negro. I have pleaded the cause of the oppressed against all comers, during more than fifty years of conflict. Were a period put to my career to-day, I could hardly wish for a time or place, or an occasion, better suited for a desired ending, than here and now. The founding of this and similar schools on the soil of Virginia — a State formerly the breeder, buyer and seller of slaves; a State so averse in the past to the education of colored people, as to make it a crime to teach a negro to read, — is one of the best fruits of the agitation of half a century, and a firm foundation of hope for the future.

The idea at the bottom of this Institution is rapidly gaining ground every where. Industrial education is, with me, however, no new idea. Nearly forty years ago I was its advocate, and at that time I held it to be the chief want of the free colored people of the North. I was then the editor and publisher of the *North Star*, a newspaper printed in Rochester, New York. I saw even then, that the free negro of the North, with every thing great expected of him, but with no means at hand to meet such expectations, could not hope to rise while he was excluded from all profitable employments. He was free by law, but was denied the chief advantages of freedom; he was indeed but nominally free; he was not compelled to call any man his master, and no one could call him slave, but he was still in fact a slave, a slave to society, and could only be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. It was easier at that day to get a black boy into a lawyer's office to study law, or into a doctor's

³ A famous line from "To the Lord General Cromwell," a 1652 sonnet by English poet John Milton (1608–1674). The poem praises Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), an English statesman who was instrumental in overthrowing King Charles I in 1649 and who reigned as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland, from 1653 until his death. —Eds.

office to study medicine, than it was to get him into a carpenter's shop to push a plane, or into a blacksmith's shop to hammer iron.

While I have no sympathy whatever with those who affect to despise labor, even the humblest forms of it, and hold that whatever is needful to be done it is honorable to do, it is, nevertheless, plain that no people, white or black, can, in my country, continue long respected who are confined exclusively to more menial service for which but little intelligence or skill are required, and for which but the smallest wages are paid or received; especially if the laborer does not make an effort to rise above that condition. While the employment as waiters at hotels and on steamboats and railroads, is perfectly proper and entirely honorable, in the circumstances which now surround the colored people, no one variety of the American people can afford to be known only as waiters and domestic servants.

While I say this, I fully believe in the dignity of all needful labor. All honest effort to better human conditions is entitled to respect. I have met at Poland Springs, in the State of Maine, and at the White Mountains in New Hampshire, and at other places, as well as at the late World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago,⁴ many young white ladies and gentlemen, who were truly such, students and teachers in high schools and seminaries, gladly serving as waiters during their vacation, and doing so with no sense of being degraded in any degree, or embarrassed by such service. This would not have been the case with them, if society, by any law or custom, had decided that this service should be, for such persons, their only calling and vocation in life. Daniel Webster⁵ used to say that New Hampshire was a good State to emigrate from. So I say of menial service — it is a good condition to separate from,

just as soon as one can find any other calling, which is more remunerative and more elevating in its tendency. It is not the labor that degrades, but the want of spirit to rise above it.

Exclusive service, or exclusive mastery, is not good for the moral or mental health of any class. Pride and insolence will certainly be developed in the one class, and weakness and servility in the other. The colored people, to be respected, must furnish their due proportion to each class. They must not be all masters, or all servants. They must command, as well as be commanded.

However much I may regret that it was my lot 10 to have been a slave, I shall never regret that I was once a common laborer; a servant, if you please so to term it. But I felt myself as much a man then, as I feel myself a man now; for I had an ambition above my calling, and I was determined then, as I have been ever since, to use every honorable means in my power to rise to a higher plane of service, just as soon and as fast as that should be possible.

My philosophy of work is, that a man is worked upon by that upon which he works. Some work requires more muscle than it does mind. The work which requires the most thought, skill and ingenuity, will receive the highest commendation, and will otherwise do most for the worker. Things which can be done simply with the exertion of muscle, and with little or no exertion of the intellect, will develop the muscle, but dwarf the mind.

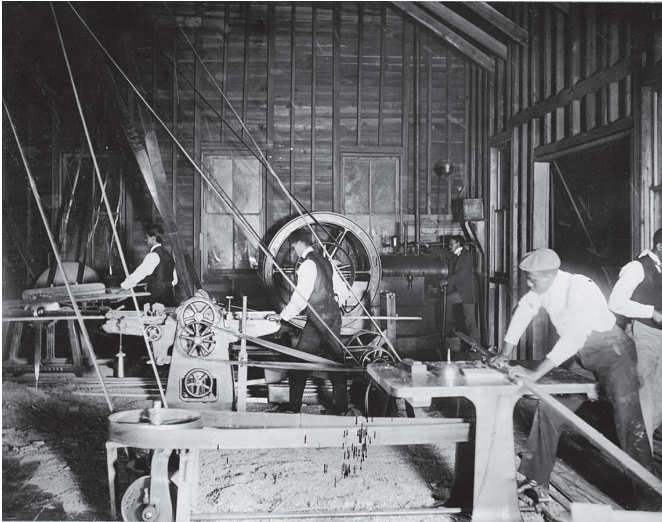
Long ago it was asked, "How can he get wisdom, who holdeth the plow and whose talk is of oxen?"⁶

The school which we are about to establish here, is, If I understand its object, intended to teach the colored youth, who shall avail themselves of its privileges, the use of both mind and body. It is to educate the hand as well as the brain; to teach men to work as well as to think, and to think as well as to work. It is to teach them to join thought to work, and thus to get the very best result of thought and work. There is, in my opinion, no useful thing that

⁴ An 1893 fair held in Chicago, Illinois, to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landing in the New World. —Eds.

⁵ Daniel Webster (1782–1852), a politician from New Hampshire, served in the House of Representatives and the Senate, and was Secretary of State under two different presidents. —Eds.

⁶ A quotation from Ecclesiasticus 38:25, a book included in the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox New Testament but excluded from the Protestant canon. —Eds.



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Although this 1899 photograph is from Claflin University in Orangeburg, South Carolina, it depicts a classroom similar to those at the Manassas Industrial School.

What do the students' attire and body language suggest about the value placed on the skills they are learning and the self-identity the school strives to develop in them? How do those values relate to Frederick Douglass's main argument?

a man can do, that cannot be better done by an educated man than by an uneducated one.

In the old slave times, the colored people were expected to work without thinking. They were commanded to do as they were told. They were to be hands — only hands, not heads. Thought was the prerogative of the master. Obedience was the duty of the slave. I, in my ignorance, once told my master I thought a certain way of doing some work I had in hand was the best way to do it. He promptly demanded, "Who gave you the right to think?" I might have answered in the language of Robert Burns,

"Were I designed yon lordling's slave,
By Nature's law designed,
Why was an independent thought
E'er planted in my mind?"⁷

But I had not then read Robert Burns. Burns had high ideas of the dignity of simple manhood. In respect of the dignity of man we may well exclaim with the great Shakespeare concerning him: "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In apprehension how like a God! The beauty of the world, the

paragon of animals!"⁸ Yet, if man be benighted, this glowing description of his power and dignity is merely a "glittering generality," an empty tumult of words, without any support of facts.

In his natural condition, however, man is only potentially great. As a mere physical being, he does not take high rank, even among the beasts of the field. He is not so fleet as a horse or a hound or so strong as an ox or a mule. His true dignity is not to be sought in his arm, or in his legs, but in his head. Here is the seat and source of all that is of especially great or practical importance in him. There is fire in the flint and steel, but it is friction that causes it to flash, flame and burn, and give light where all else may be darkness. There is music in the violin, but the touch of the master is needed to fill the air and the soul with the concord of sweet sounds. There is power in the human mind, but education is needed for its development.

As man is the highest being on earth, it follows that the vocation of teacher is among the highest known to him. To properly teach is to educe man's potential and latent greatness, to discover and develop the noblest, highest and best that is in him. In view of this fact, no man whose business it is to teach should ever allow himself to feel that

⁷ A quotation from "Man Was Made to Mourn. A Dirge" by Scottish poet Robert Burns (1759–1796). —Eds.

⁸ From *Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2. —Eds.

his mission is mean, inferior, or circumscribed. In my estimation, neither politics nor religion present to us a calling higher than this primary business of unfolding and strengthening the powers of the human soul. It is a permanent vocation. Some know the value of education, by having it. I know its value by not having it. It is a want that begins with the beginning of human existence, and continues through all the journey of life. Of all the creatures that live and move and have their being on this green earth, man, at his birth, is the most helpless and most in need of instruction. He does not know even how to seek his food. His little life is menaced on every hand. The very elements conspire against him. The cattle upon a thousand hills, the wolves and bears in the forest, all come into the world better equipped for life than does man. From first to last, his existence depends upon instruction.

Yet this little helpless weakling, whose life can be put out as we put out the flame of a candle, with a breath, is the lord of creation. Though in his beginning, he is only potentially this lord, with education he is the commander of armies; the builder of cities; the tamer of wild beasts; the navigator of unknown seas; the discoverer of unknown islands, capes and continents, and the founder of great empires, and capable of limitless civilization.

But if man is without education, although with all his latent possibilities attaching to him, he is, as I have said, but a pitiable object; a giant in body, but a pigmy in intellect, and, at best, but half a man. Without education, he lives within the narrow, dark and grimy walls of ignorance. He is a poor prisoner without hope. The little light he gets comes to him as through dark corridors and grated windows. The sights and sounds which reach him, so significant and full of meaning to the well-trained mind, are to him of dim and shadowy and uncertain import. He sees, but does not perceive. He hears, but does not understand. The silent and majestic heavens, fretted with stars, so inspiring and uplifting, so sublime and glorious to the souls of other men, bear no message to him. They suggest to him no idea of the wonderful world in which he lives, or of the harmony of this great universe, and hence impart to him no happiness.

Education, on the other hand, means eman- 20
cipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the light only by which man can be free. To deny education to any people is one of the greatest crimes against human nature. It is to deny them the means of freedom and the rightful



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Taken a few years after Douglass delivered his dedication speech, this photo depicts students in a bacteriology laboratory at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

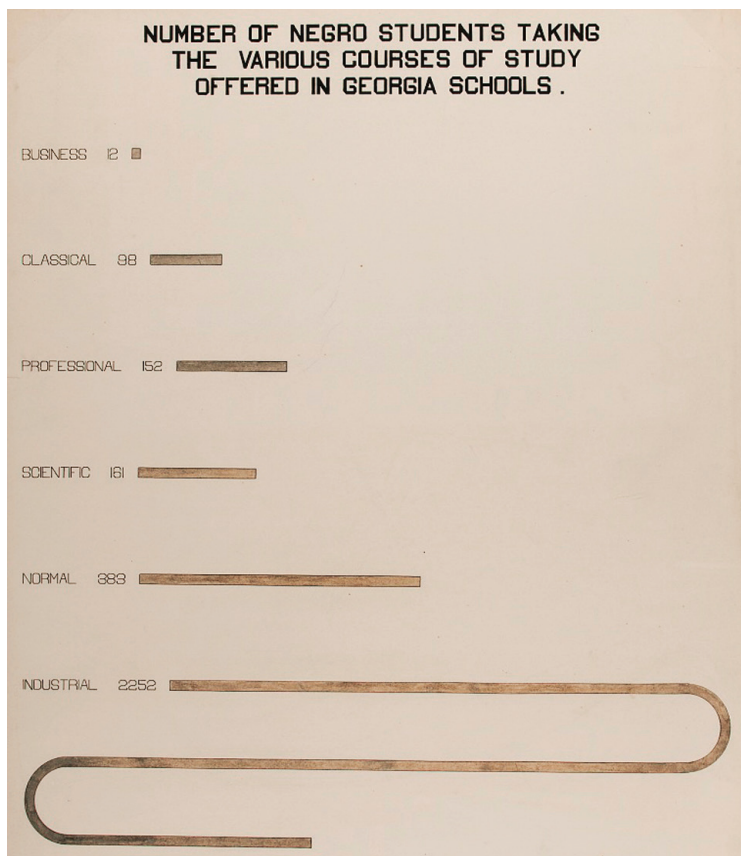
In what ways does this scene embody the values that Douglass extolled in his speech?

pursuit of happiness, and to defeat the very end of their being. They can neither honor themselves nor their creator. Than this, no greater wrong can be inflicted; and on the other hand, no greater benefit can be bestowed upon a long benighted people than giving to them, as we are here this day endeavoring to do, the means of useful education. It is aimed to make them both better and more useful in life and to furnish them with increased means of livelihood; to make of them more skilled workmen, more useful mechanics, and better workers in wood, leather, tin and iron.

It is sometimes said that we have done enough for the negro; that we have given him his liberty and we should now let him do for himself. This sounds well, but that is all. I do not

undervalue freedom from chattel slavery. It was a great and glorious triumph of justice and humanity. It was the first of long years of labor, agitation and sacrifice. But let us look at this emancipation and see where it left the negro, and we shall see how far it falls short of the plainest demands of justice and of what we owe the negro.

To find an adequate measure of compensation for any wrong, we must first ascertain the nature and extent of the wrong itself. The mere act of enslaving the negro was not the only wrong done him, nor were the labors and stripes imposed upon him, though heavy and grievous to bear, the sum of his wrongs. They were, indeed, terrible enough; but deeper down and more terrible still were the mental and moral wrongs



Library of Congress



This graph, created in 1899, shows the enrollment of African American students in various courses of study offered in Georgia public schools at the time.

How does this information add to your understanding of Douglass's beliefs about the value of education as expressed in his dedication speech?

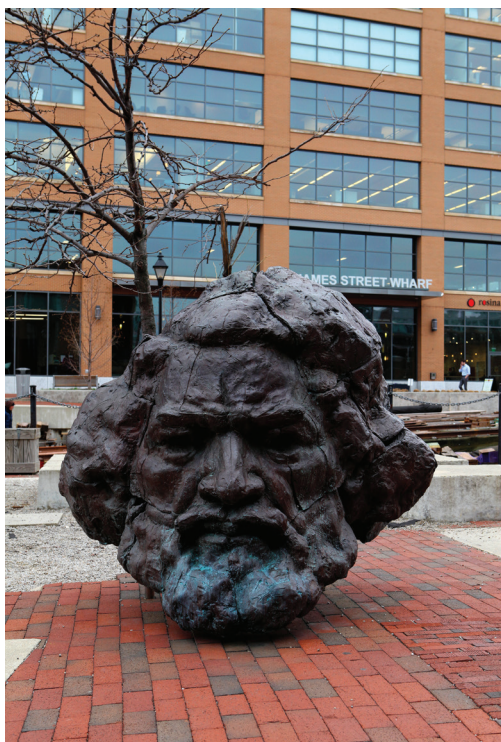
which enter into his claim for a slight measure of compensation. For two hundred and forty years the light of letters was denied him, and the gates of knowledge were closed against him.

He was driven from time to eternity in the darkest ignorance. He was herded with the beasts of the field, was without marriage, without family, without schools and without any moral training, other than that which came by the slave driver's lash. People who live now and talk of doing too much for the negro, think nothing of these things, and those who know them seem to desire to forget them, especially when they are made the basis of a claim for a larger measure of justice to the negro. They forget that for these

terrible wrongs there is no redress and no adequate compensation. The enslaved and battered millions have come, suffered, died and gone with all their moral and physical wounds into eternity. To them no recompense can be made. If the American people could put a school-house in every valley of the South and a church on every hill-top; supply with a teacher and preacher each respectively, and welcome the descendants of the former slaves to all the moral and intellectual benefits of the one and the other, without money and without price, such a sacrifice would not compensate their children for the terrible wrong done to their fathers and mothers by their enslavement and enforced degradation.

The sculpture on the left was installed outside the Frederick Douglass and Isaac Myers Maritime Park Museum in Baltimore, Maryland in 2015. On the right is a Washington, D. C. mural painted by G. Byron Peck in 1995.

What do each of these pieces of art — including their materials and size — suggest about the legacy of Frederick Douglass? What aspects of that legacy do you see reflected in this speech?



Raymond Boyd/Getty Images



Library of Congress

I have another complaint. It is said that the colored people of the South have made but little progress since their emancipation. This complaint is not only groundless, but adds insult to injury. Under the whole heavens there never was a people liberated from bondage under conditions less favorable to the beginning of a new and free mode of life, than were the freedmen of the South. Criminals, guilty of heinous crimes against the State and society, are let go free on more generous conditions than were our slaves. The despotic government of Russia was more liberal and humane to its emancipated slaves than our Republic was to ours. Each head of a family of slaves in Russia was given three acres of land and necessary farming implements with which to begin life, but our slaves were turned loose without any thing — naked to the elements.

As one of the number of the enslaved, I am none the less disposed to observe and note with pleasure and gratitude every effort of our white friends and brothers to remedy the evils wrought by the long years of slavery and its concomitants. And in such wise I rejoice in the effort made here to-day.

I have a word now upon another subject, and what I have to say may be more useful than palatable. That subject is the talk now so generally prevailing about races and race lines. I have no hesitation in telling you that I think the colored people and their friends make a great mistake in saying so much of race and color. I know no such basis for the claims of justice. I know no such motive for efforts at self-improvement. In this race-way they put the emphasis in the wrong place. I do now and always have attached more importance to manhood than to mere kinship or identify with any variety of the human family. RACE, in the popular sense, is narrow; humanity is broad. The one is special; the other is universal. The one is transient; the other permanent. In the essential dignity of man as man, I find all necessary incentives and aspirations to a useful and noble life. Man is broad enough

and high enough as a platform for you and me and all of us. The colored people of the country should advance to the high position of the Constitution of the country. The Constitution makes no distinction on account of race and color, and they should make none.

We hear, since emancipation, much said by our modern colored leaders in commendation of race pride, race love, race effort, race superiority, race men, and the like. One man is praised for being a race man and another is condemned for not being a race man. In all this talk of race, the motive may be good, but the method is bad. It is an effort to cast out Satan by Beelzebub.⁹ The evils which are now crushing the negro to earth have their root and sap, their force and main-spring, in this narrow spirit of race and color, and the negro has no more right to excuse and foster it than have men of any other race. I recognize and adopt no narrow basis for my thoughts, feelings, or modes of action. I would place myself, and I would place you, my young friends, upon grounds vastly higher and broader than any founded upon race or color. Neither law, learning, nor religion, is addressed to any man's color or race. Science, education, the Word of God, and all the virtues known among men, are recommended to us, not as races, but as men. We are not recommended to love or hate any particular variety of the human family more than any other. Not as Ethiopians; not as Caucasians; not as Mongolians; not as Afro-Americans, or Anglo-Americans, are we addressed, but as men. God and nature speak to our manhood, and to our manhood alone. Here all ideas of duty and moral obligation are predicated. We are accountable only as men. In the language of Scripture, we are called upon to "quit ourselves like men."¹⁰ To those who are everlastingly prating about race men, I have to say: Gentlemen, you reflect upon your best friends. It was not the race or the color

⁹ Another name for Satan. —Eds.

¹⁰ A quotation from 1 Samuel 4:9, a book included in the Old Testament of the Bible. —Eds.

of the negro that won for him the battle of liberty. That great battle was won, not because the victim of slavery was a negro, a mulatto, or an Afro-American, but because the victim of slavery was a man and a brother to all other men, a child of God, and could claim with all mankind a common Father, and therefore should be recognized as an accountable being, a subject of government, and entitled to justice, liberty and equality before the law, and every where else. Man saw that he had a right to liberty, to education, and to an equal chance with all other men in the common race of life and to the pursuit of happiness.

You know that, while slavery lasted, we could seldom get ourselves recognised in any form of law or language, as men. Our old masters were remarkably shy of recognising our manhood, even in words written or spoken. They called a man, with a head as white as mine, a boy. The old advertisements were carefully worded: "Run away, my boy Tom, Jim or Harry," never "my man."

Hence, at the risk of being deficient in the quality of love and loyalty to race and color, I confess that in my advocacy of the colored man's cause, whether in the name of education or freedom, I have had more to say of manhood and of what is comprehended in manhood and in womanhood, than of the mere accident of race and color; and, if this [is] disloyalty to race and color, I am guilty. I insist upon it that the lesson which colored people, not less than white people, ought now to learn, is, that there is no moral or intellectual quality in the color of a man's cuticle; that color, in itself, is neither good nor bad; that to be black or white is neither a proper source of pride or of shame. I go further, and declare that no man's devotion to the cause of justice, liberty and humanity, is to be weighed, measured and determined by his color or race. We should never forget that the ablest and most eloquent voices ever raised in behalf of the black man's cause, were the voices of white men. Not for the race; not for color, but for man and manhood alone, they labored, fought and died. Neither Phillips, nor Sumner, nor Garrison, nor John Brown, nor

[Gerrit] Smith¹¹ were black men. They were white men, and yet no black men were ever truer to the black man's cause than were these and other men like them. They saw in the slave, manhood, brotherhood, womanhood outraged, neglected and degraded, and their own noble manhood, not their racehood, revolted at the offence. They placed the emphasis where it belonged; not on the mint, anise and cumin of race and color, but upon manhood and the weightier matters of the law.¹²

Thus compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, I can easily afford to be reproached and denounced for standing, in defence of this principle, against all comers. My position is, that it is better to regard ourselves as a part of the whole than as the whole of a part. It is better to be a member of the great human family, than a member of a particular variety of the human family. In regard to men as in regard to things, the whole is more than a part. Away then with the nonsense that a man must be black to be true to the rights of black men. I put my foot upon the effort to draw lines between the white and the black, or between blacks and so-called Afro-Americans, or to draw race lines any where in the domain of liberty. Whoever in for equal rights, for equal education, for equal opportunities for all men, of whatever race or color, — I hail him as a "countryman, clansman, kinsman, and brother beloved."

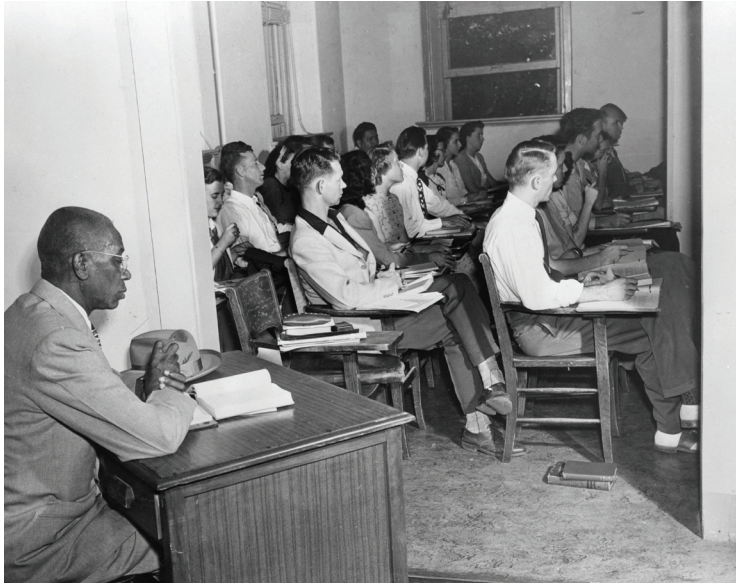
I must not further occupy your time, except to answer briefly the inquiry, "What of the night?" You young people have a right to ask me what the future has in store for you and the people with whom you are classed. I have been a watchman on your walls for more than fifty years, so long that you think I ought to know what the future will bring to pass and to discern for you the signs of the times. You want to know whether the hour is

¹¹ Wendell Phillips (1811–1884), Charles Sumner (1811–1874), William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879), John Brown (1800–1859), and Gerrit Smith (1797–1874) were all prominent white American abolitionists. —Eds.

¹² This reference to Matthew 23:23 contrasts things of lesser value, such as herbs, with things of greater significance, such as justice, mercy, and faith. —Eds.

seeing connections

This 1948 photo shows a segregated classroom at the University of Oklahoma, where an African American student is seated at a single desk, apart from his white classmates.



Bettmann/Getty Images

What do you believe Frederick Douglass would have thought of this situation? Would he have seen it as progress for African Americans to be part of a university classroom, even if they were physically separated from other students? Cite specific examples from his speech to support your response.

one of hope or despair. I have no time to answer this solemn inquiry at length or as it deserves, and will content myself with giving you the assurance of my belief. I think the situation is serious, but it is not hopeless. On the contrary, there are many encouraging signs in the moral skies. I have seen many dark hours and yet have never despaired of the colored man's future. There is no time in our history that I would prefer to the present. Go back to the annexation of Texas,¹³ the Fugitive Slave law times,¹⁴ and the Border War in Kansas.¹⁵ The existence of this Industrial School at Manassas is a triumphant rebuke to the cry of despair now

heard in some quarters. Nor does it stand alone. It is a type of such institution in nearly all the Southern States. Schools and colleges for colored youth are multiplying all over the land. Hampton, Tuskegee, Coppahoosic, are brilliant examples. The light of education is shedding its beams more brightly and more effectively upon the colored people in the South, than it ever did in the cause of any other emancipated people in the world. These efforts cannot fail in the end to bear fruit.

But it is said that we are now being greatly persecuted. I know it. I admit it. I deplore it. I denounce it. Attempts are being made to set aside the amendments of the Constitution; to wrest from us the elective franchise; to exclude us from respectable railroad cars; to draw against us the color line in religious organizations; to exclude us from hotels and to make us a proscribe class. I know it all, and yet I see in it all

¹³ Texas was annexed as an American state in 1845, leading to the Mexican-American War (1846–1848). —Eds.

¹⁴ Laws requiring the governments in states and territories where slavery was abolished to aid in recapturing those slaves who had escaped from slaveholding states and territories. —Eds.

¹⁵ A series of political confrontations between 1854 and 1861 over whether slavery would be allowed in the state of Kansas. —Eds.



Courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, Washington, DC, Photograph Frederick Douglass, FRDO 3886

Taken around 1890, this photograph shows Douglass working in his library, where he wrote his third autobiography and many speeches, including this one.

What quotation from this dedication speech might you use as a caption for it? Explain what you think brings the image and your chosen caption together.

a convincing evidence of our progress and the promise of a brighter future. The resistance that we now meet is the proof of our progress. We are not the only people who have been persecuted.

The resistance is not to the colored man as a slave, a servant or a menial, or as a person. It is aimed at the negro as a gentleman, as a successful man and a scholar. The negro in ignorance and in rags meets no resistance. He is rather liked than otherwise. He is thought to be in his place. It is only when he acquires education, property, popularity and influence; only when he attempts to rise above his ancient level, where he was numbered with the beasts of the field, and aspires to be a man and a man among men, that he invites repression. Even in the laws of the South excluding him from railroad cars and other places, care is taken to allow him to ride as a servant, a valet or a porter. He may make a bed, but must not sleep in it. He may handle bread, but must not eat it. It is not the negro, but the quality of the negro that disturbs popular prejudices. It is his character, not his personality, which makes him an offense or otherwise. In one

quality he is smiled upon as a very serviceable animal; in the other he is scorned as an upstart entirely out of his place, and is made to take a back seat. I am not much disturbed by this, for the same resistance in kind, though not in degree, has to be met by white men and white women who rise from lowly conditions. The successful and opulent esteem them as upstarts. A lady as elegant and splendid as Mrs. Potter Palmer of Chicago,¹⁶ had to submit to the test. She was compelled to hear herself talked about as a “shoddy” upstart; the “wife of a tavern-keeper,” and the like, during the Columbian Exposition. But the upstart of to-day is the elite of to-morrow.

A ship at anchor, with halliards¹⁷ broken, sails mildewed, hull empty, her bottom covered with seaweed and barnacles, meets no resistance. She lies perfectly still; but when she spreads her canvas to the breeze, turns her prow to the open sea, and sets out on her voyage, the higher shall be her speed, the greater shall be her resistance. So it is

¹⁶ A prominent American socialite and philanthropist during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. —Eds.

¹⁷ Lines used to lift a sail or flag on a ship. —Eds.

with the colored man. He meets with resistance now, because he is now, more than ever, fitting himself for a higher life. He is shedding the old rags of slavery and putting on the apparel of freedom.

In conclusion, my dear young friends, be not discouraged. Accept the inspiration to hope.

Imitate the example of the brave mariner, who, amid clouds and darkness, amid hail, rain and storm bolts, battles his way against all that the sea opposes to his progress. You will then reach the goal of your noble ambition in safety.

[1894]

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the “striking character” of the day Frederick Douglass is delivering this speech? What impact does this have on the importance of the speech itself?
2. What is the significance of the physical setting of the school?
3. Douglass asserts that he believes “in the dignity of all needful labor” (para. 8), and he recalls that he “was once a common laborer” (para. 10). Yet he urges his student audience to aim for a higher station in life. For what purpose, then, does Douglass value education as a vocational enterprise?
4. What does Douglass mean by the statement, “My philosophy of work is, that a man is worked upon by that upon which he works” (para. 11)?
5. Throughout this speech, Douglass alludes to several social and political issues relevant to the specific situation at hand, at the same time that he reflects on broader, more philosophical ideas. What philosophical issues does he raise in the section beginning, “In his natural condition, however, man is only potentially great” (para. 16)? How does he relate that claim to the more specific context of the era in which he gave this speech?
6. How does Douglass respond to critics who would say that “we have done enough for the negro” (para. 21)? Include in your response his analysis of the link between compensation and “the nature and extent of the wrong itself” (para. 22).
7. How does Douglass respond to critics who claim that freed slaves of the South “have made but little progress since their emancipation” (para. 24)? Why would he even raise this criticism?
8. Douglass essentially acknowledges he may alienate his audience when he prefaces his advice against “saying so much of race and color” with the statement that “what I have to say may be more useful than palatable” (para. 26). What does he mean by this? Why do you think he raised a point with which his audience would likely disagree?
9. Why, ultimately, does Douglass affirm that he is hopeful about the future at that particular moment in history? What does he mean when he asserts, “The resistance that we now meet is the proof of our progress” (para. 32)?
10. What do you think is the most persuasive line of reasoning Douglass gives to support his belief that the freedom education grants people leads to more than economic empowerment?

QUESTIONS ON RHETORIC AND STYLE

1. Although Douglass was a widely known and celebrated figure by the time he delivered this speech, he goes to considerable length to establish his ethos in the first few paragraphs. What does he emphasize? Pay particular attention to paragraph 5.
2. Paragraph 3, which begins, “No spot on the soil of Virginia could have been more fitly chosen . . .” showcases Douglass’s brilliant skill as an orator. How does he use rhetorical strategies such as repetition, rhetorical questions, and imagery, among others, to achieve his purpose?
3. How does Douglass acknowledge both the financial and political support of “the good people of the North” (para. 4) throughout his speech?
4. What is the effect of Douglass’s inclusion of quotes by literary figures, including poets John Milton, Robert Burns, and playwright William

Shakespeare? What kind of appeal is this, and how does it help him develop his argument?

5. To our contemporary ears, some of Douglass's rhetoric may seem almost hyperbolic, but it is important to consider that he delivered this speech within a rich, nineteenth-century tradition of uplift — that is, inspirational oratory. How does the figurative language in paragraphs 16–18 illustrate this tradition? How does he use these techniques to achieve his purpose?
6. One of the most difficult issues Douglass raises is his position that it is a mistake to frame social progress “in this narrow spirit of race and color” (para. 27). What is the logic of his argument on this point? Note how he develops the argument step-by-step through a series of if-then statements.
7. Identify at least two counterarguments that Douglass raises. How does he concede and refute in ways that strengthen his own argument?
8. While Douglass presents a strong logic-based argument, he develops it with lyrical appeals to pathos. Identify one paragraph that exemplifies this strategy and discuss how he engages his listeners' emotions.
9. How does Douglass weave his own experience into his speech? Consider in particular the impact of his persona as an elder community figure speaking to a youthful audience.
10. Douglass concludes his speech with an extended metaphor. What is this metaphor, and how does it help him achieve his overall purpose in this dedication speech?

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING

1. In paragraph 13, Douglass makes the following claim: “There is, in my opinion, no useful thing that a man can do, that cannot be better done by an educated man than by an uneducated one.” Why do you think this statement would likely provoke controversy in the present day? In a well written essay, develop an argument that supports, challenges, or qualifies Douglass's claim.
2. One of the most famous lines in *The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass* is, “You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man.” In what ways does this speech demonstrate what he means by this assertion, though in a different context? Cite specific passages to support your view.
3. Henry Louis Gates Jr., a prominent African American academic and current Director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University, has called Frederick Douglass “an electrifying speaker and a commanding writer.” What evidence in this speech supports this characterization of Douglass?
4. To what extent does Douglass's argument about the connection between education and liberty hold true today? You need not limit your discussion to race or to the United States; you might expand it to other variables, such as culture and gender.
5. How might Frederick Douglass respond to the Black Lives Matter movement? Write an analysis of aspects of the movement that would appeal to him and of those that he might be more skeptical about. As part of your analysis, include images (e.g., photographs or political cartoons) as examples and evidence.
6. The Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth evolved into part of the network of historically black colleges and universities that now includes Tuskegee University, Spelman College, and Howard University. Most of these institutions were established before 1964 with the intention of primarily serving the African American community, although they are open to all races. Today, there is some controversy about whether such institutions have outlived their purpose. After researching the subject, write an argument explaining your position.
7. In the Introduction to *Picturing Frederick Douglass* (2015), authors John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier explore Frederick Douglass's love of photography, a fairly new technology during his lifetime: “Like slave narratives . . . photographic images bore witness to African Americans' essential humanity, while also countering the racist caricatures that proliferated throughout the North.” Discuss this statement by exploring photographs and illustrations of the late nineteenth century and by researching the history of photography itself through the present day.

OTHER VOICES

from **Education**

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), perhaps best known for his essay “Self-Reliance” (1841), was one of America’s most influential thinkers and writers. After graduating from Harvard Divinity School, he followed nine generations of his family into the ministry but practiced for only a few years. In 1836, he and other like-minded intellectuals, including Henry David Thoreau, founded the Transcendental Club, and that same year he published his influential essay “Nature” (1836). Known as a great orator, Emerson made his living as a popular lecturer on a wide range of topics. From 1821 to 1826, he taught in city and country schools and later served on a number of school boards, including the Concord School Committee and the Board of Overseers of Harvard College. Emerson’s essay “Education,” from which the following excerpt is taken, was put together posthumously from his writings published in the *American Scholar* and from his commencement addresses.

I believe that our own experience instructs us that the secret of Education lies in respecting the pupil. It is not for you to choose what he shall know, what he shall do. It is chosen and fore-ordained, and he only holds the key to his own secret. By your tampering and thwarting and too much governing he may be hindered from his end and kept out of his own. Respect the child. Wait and see the new product of Nature. Nature loves analogies, but not repetitions. Respect the child. Be not too much his parent. Trespass not on his solitude.

But I hear the outcry which replies to this suggestion — Would you verily throw up the reins of public and private discipline; would you leave the young child to the mad career of his own passions and whimsies, and call this anarchy a respect for the child’s nature? I answer — Respect the child, respect him to the end, but also respect yourself. Be the companion of his thought, the friend of his friendship, the lover of his virtue — but no kinsman of his sin. Let him find you so true to yourself that you are the irreconcilable

hater of his vice and the imperturbable sligher of his trifling.

The two points in a boy’s training are, to keep his *naturel* and train off all but that — to keep his *naturel*, but stop off his uproar, fooling, and horseplay — keep his nature and arm it with knowledge in the very direction to which it points. Here are the two capital facts, Genius and Drill. This first is the inspiration in the well-born healthy child, the new perception he has of nature. Somewhat he sees in forms or hears in music or apprehends in mathematics, or believes practicable in mechanics or possible in political society, which no one else sees or hears or believes. This is the perpetual romance of new life, the invasion of God into the old dead world, when he sends into quiet houses a young soul with a thought which is not met, looking for something which is not there, but which ought to be there: the thought is dim but it is sure, and he casts about restless for means and masters to verify it; he makes wild attempts to explain himself and invoke the aid and consent of the

by-standers. Baffled for want of language and methods to convey his meaning, not yet clear to himself, he conceives that thought not in this house or town, yet in some other house or town is the wise master who can put him in possession of the rules and instruments to execute his will. Happy this child with a bias, with a thought which entrances him, leads him, now into deserts now into cities, the fool of an idea. Let him follow it in good and in evil report, in good or bad company; it will justify itself; it will lead him at last into the illustrious society of the lovers of truth.

In London, in a private company, I became acquainted with a gentleman, Sir Charles Fellowes, who, being at Xanthos, in the Aegean Sea, had seen a Turk point with his staff to some carved work on the corner of a stone almost buried in the soil. Fellowes scraped away the dirt, was struck with the beauty of the sculptured ornaments, and, looking about him, observed more blocks and fragments like this. He returned to the spot, procured laborers and uncovered many blocks. He went back to England, bought a Greek grammar and learned the language; he read history and studied ancient art to explain his stones; he interested Gibson the sculptor; he invoked the assistance of the English Government; he called in the succor of Sir Humphry Davy to analyze the pigments; of experts in coins, of scholars and connoisseurs; and at last in his third visit brought home to England such statues and marble reliefs and such careful plans that he was able to reconstruct, in the British Museum where it now stands, the perfect model of the Ionic trophy-monument, fifty years older than the Parthenon of Athens, and which had been destroyed by earthquakes, then by iconoclast Christians, then by savage Turks. But mark that in the task he had achieved an excellent education, and become associated with distinguished scholars whom he had interested in his pursuit; in short, had formed a college for himself; the enthusiast had found the master, the masters, whom he sought. Always

genius seeks genius, desires nothing so much as to be a pupil and to find those who can lend it aid to perfect itself.

Nor are the two elements, enthusiasm and drill, incompatible. Accuracy is essential to beauty. The very definition of the intellect is Aristotle's: "that by which we know terms or boundaries." Give a boy accurate perceptions. Teach him the difference between the similar and the same. Make him call things by their right names. Pardon in him no blunder. Then he will give you solid satisfaction as long as he lives. It is better to teach the child arithmetic and Latin grammar than rhetoric or moral philosophy, because they require exactitude of performance; it is made certain that the lesson is mastered, and that power of performance is worth more than the knowledge. He can learn anything which is important to him now that the power to learn is secured: as mechanics say, when one has learned the use of tools, it is easy to work at a new craft.

Letter by letter, syllable by syllable, the child learns to read, and in good time can convey to all the domestic circle the sense of Shakespeare. By many steps each just as short, the stammering boy and the hesitating collegian, in the school debates, in college clubs, in mock court, comes at last to full, secure, triumphant unfolding of his thought in the popular assembly, with a fullness of power that makes all the steps forgotten.

But this function of opening and feeding the human mind is not to be fulfilled by any mechanical or military method; is not to be trusted to any skill less large than Nature itself. You must not neglect the form, but you must secure the essentials. It is curious how perverse and intermeddling we are, and what vast pains and cost we incur to do wrong. Whilst we all know in our own experience and apply natural methods in our own business — in education our common sense fails us, and we are continually trying costly machinery against nature, in patent schools and academies and in great colleges and universities.

5

The natural method forever confutes our experiments, and we must still come back to it. The whole theory of the school is on the nurse's or mother's knee. The child is as hot to learn as the mother is to impart. There is mutual delight. The joy of our childhood in hearing beautiful stories from some skillful aunt who loves to tell them, must be repeated in youth. The boy wishes to learn to skate, to coast, to catch a fish in the brook, to hit a mark with a snowball or a stone; and a boy a little older is just as well pleased to teach him these sciences. Not less delightful is the mutual pleasure of teaching and learning the secret of algebra, or of chemistry, or of good reading and good recitation of poetry or of prose, or of chosen facts in history or in biography.

Nature provided for the communication of thought by planting with it in the receiving mind a fury to impart it. 'Tis so in every art, in every science. One burns to tell the new fact, the other burns to hear it. See how far a young doctor will ride or walk to witness a new surgical operation. I have seen a carriage-maker's shop emptied of all its workmen into the street, to scrutinize a new pattern from New York. So in literature, the young man who has taste for poetry, for fine images, for noble thoughts, is insatiable for this nourishment, and forgets all the world for the more learned friend — who finds equal joy in dealing out his treasures.

Happy the natural college thus self-instituted around every natural teacher; the young men of Athens around Socrates; of Alexander around Plotinus; of Paris around Abelard; of Germany around Fichte, or Niebuhr, or Goethe: in short the natural sphere of every leading mind. But the moment this is organized, difficulties begin. The college was to be the nurse and home of genius; but, though every young man is born with some determination in his nature, and is a potential genius;

is at last to be one; it is, in the most, obstructed and delayed, and, whatever they may hereafter be, their senses are now opened in advance of their minds. They are more sensual than intellectual. Appetite and indolence they have, but no enthusiasm. These come in numbers to the college: few geniuses: and the teaching comes to be arranged for these many, and not for those few. Hence the instruction seems to require skillful tutors, of accurate and systematic mind, rather than ardent and inventive masters. Besides, the youth of genius are eccentric, won't drill, are irritable, uncertain, explosive, solitary, not men of the world, not good for every-day association. You have to work for large classes instead of individuals; you must lower your flag and reef your sails to wait for the dull sailors; you grow departmental, routine, military almost with your discipline and college police. But what doth such a school to form a great and heroic character? What abiding Hope can it inspire? What Reformer will it nurse? What poet will it breed to sing to the human race? What discoverer of Nature's laws will it prompt to enrich us by disclosing in the mind the statute which all matter must obey? What fiery soul will it send out to warm a nation with his charity? What tranquil mind will it have fortified to walk with meekness in private and obscure duties, to wait and to suffer? Is it not manifest that our academic institutions should have a wider scope; that they should not be timid and keep the ruts of the last generation, but that wise men thinking for themselves and heartily seeking the good of mankind, and counting the cost of innovation, should dare to arouse the young to a just and heroic life; that the moral nature should be addressed in the school-room, and children should be treated as the high-born candidates of truth and virtue?

[1878]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. In this excerpt, Ralph Waldo Emerson describes his view of an ideal education. What are its defining characteristics?
2. What does Emerson mean when he says, “Nature loves analogies, but not repetitions” (para. 1)?
3. Why is the relationship between “Genius and Drill” paradoxical, as Emerson explains in paragraph 3?
4. Paragraph 4 is taken up almost entirely by an extended example. What is Emerson’s purpose in developing this long explanation?
5. Why does Emerson believe “[i]t is better to teach the child arithmetic and Latin grammar than rhetoric or moral philosophy” (para. 5)?
6. What exactly is the “natural method” to which Emerson refers in paragraph 8?
7. Why does Emerson criticize schools as bureaucratic institutions in paragraph 10?
8. Examine Emerson’s appeals to pathos through highly emotional and evocative diction.
9. Emerson refers to educating “a boy” and “a man” and uses masculine pronouns when referring to students. As a reader, does this gender bias affect how receptive you are to Emerson’s ideas? Are his ideas equally applicable to women? If you do not think so, then how would they need to be changed to be applicable to both men and women, boys and girls?
10. Explain why you agree or disagree with Emerson’s assertion that “every young man [and woman] is born with some determination in his [or her] nature, and is a potential genius” (para. 10).
11. How does your own schooling measure up to the criteria presented in paragraph 10?
12. If you were responsible for the education of a child, which of Emerson’s assertions about education would you choose as your guiding principle? Write an essay explaining why you would choose that principle over another of Emerson’s beliefs.

A Talk to Teachers

JAMES BALDWIN

James Baldwin (1924–1987) was one of the most influential figures in American literature during the latter half of the twentieth century. His novels include *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974), and *Just Above My Head* (1979). A sharp social critic of race relations and sexual identity, Baldwin wrote numerous essays that were collected in *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *The Fire Next Time* (1963), and *The Devil Finds Work* (1976). He also wrote poetry and plays. By the late 1940s, Baldwin had moved to Europe. He lived in France and Turkey for most of the rest of his life, but he returned at times to the United States to lecture and participate in the civil rights movement. He delivered the following speech to a group of New York City schoolteachers in 1963, the height of the movement for equality for African Americans.

Let’s begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time. Everyone in this room is in one way or another aware of that. We are in a revolutionary situation, no matter how unpopular that word has become in this country. The society in which we live is desperately menaced, not by [Nikita]

Khrushchev,¹ but from within. So any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible — and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people — must be prepared to “go for broke.”

¹ Premier of the Soviet Union, 1958–1964. —Eds.

Or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won't happen.

Since I am talking to schoolteachers and I am not a teacher myself, and in some ways am fairly easily intimidated, I beg you to let me leave that and go back to what I think to be the entire purpose of education in the first place. It would seem to me that when a child is born, if I'm the child's parent, it is my obligation and my high duty to civilize that child. Man is a social animal. He cannot exist without a society. A society, in turn, depends on certain things which everyone within that society takes for granted. Now, the crucial paradox which confronts us here is that the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society. Thus, for example, the boys and girls who were born during the era of the Third Reich,² when educated to the purposes of the Third Reich, became barbarians. The paradox of education is precisely this — that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it — at no matter what

risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.

Now, if what I have tried to sketch has any validity, it becomes thoroughly clear, at least to me, that any Negro who is born in this country and undergoes the American educational system runs the risk of becoming schizophrenic. On the one hand he is born in the shadow of the stars and stripes and he is assured it represents a nation which has never lost a war. He pledges allegiance to that flag which guarantees "liberty and justice for all." He is part of a country in which anyone can become president, and so forth. But on the other hand he is also assured by his country and his countrymen that he has never contributed anything to civilization — that his past is nothing more than a record of humiliations gladly endured. He is assumed by the republic that he, his father, his mother, and his ancestors were happy, shiftless, watermelon-eating darkies who loved Mr. Charlie and Miss Ann,³ that the value he has as a black man is proven by one thing only — his devotion to white people. If you think I am exaggerating, examine the myths which proliferate in this country about Negroes.

All this enters the child's consciousness much sooner than we as adults would like to think it does. As adults, we are easily fooled because we are so anxious to be fooled. But children are very different. Children, not yet aware that it is dangerous to look too deeply at anything, look at everything, look at each other, and draw their own conclusions. They don't have the vocabulary to express what they see, and we, their elders, know how to intimidate them very easily and very soon. But a black child, looking at the world around him, though he cannot know quite what to make of it, is aware that there is a reason why his mother works so hard, why his father is always on edge. He is aware that there is some reason why, if he sits down in the front of the bus, his father or mother slaps him and drags him to the back of the bus. He is aware that

² Nazi Germany under Adolph Hitler from 1933 until 1945. —Eds.

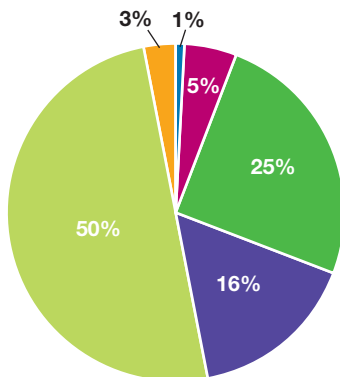
³ Figurative characters invented by African slaves to represent male and female slave masters, respectively. —Eds.

seeing connections

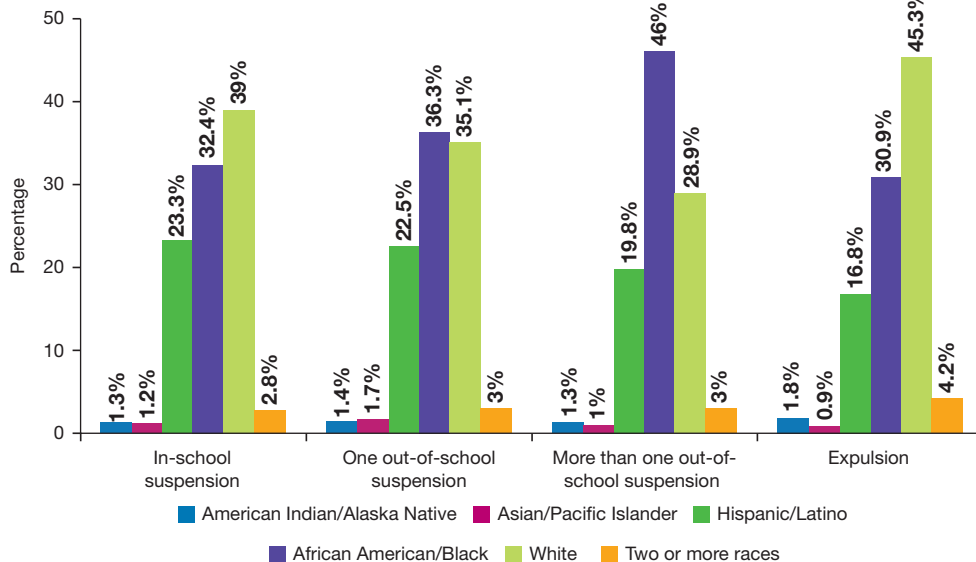
These graphs show the correlation between race and school suspension in K-12 schools during the 2013–2014 school year.

Identify at least two assertions Baldwin makes that these graphs would support.

American Public School Demographics (2013–2014)



Demographics of American Public School Students Suspended and Expelled (2013–2014)



Data from U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights.

there is some terrible weight on his parents' shoulders which menaces him. And it isn't long — in fact it begins when he is in school — before he discovers the shape of his oppression.

Let us say that the child is seven years old and I am his father, and I decide to take him to the zoo, or to Madison Square Garden, or to the U.N. Building, or to any of the tremendous monuments we find all over New York. We get into a bus and we go from where I live on 131st Street and Seventh Avenue downtown through the park and we get into New York City, which is not Harlem. Now, where the boy lives — even if it is a housing project — is in an undesirable neighborhood. If he lives in one of those housing projects of which everyone in New York is so proud, he has at the front door, if not closer, the pimps, the whores, the junkies — in a word, the danger of life in the ghetto. And the child knows this, though he doesn't know why.

I still remember my first sight of New York. It was really another city when I was born — where I was born. We looked down over the Park Avenue street-car tracks. It was Park Avenue, but I didn't know what Park Avenue meant *downtown*. The Park Avenue I grew up on, which is still standing, is dark and dirty. No one would dream of opening a Tiffany's on that Park Avenue, and when you go downtown you discover that you are literally in the white world. It is rich — or at least it looks rich. It is clean — because they collect garbage downtown. There are doormen. People walk about as though they owned where they are — and indeed they do. And it's a great shock. It's very hard to relate yourself to this. You don't know what it means. You know — you know instinctively — that none of this is for you. You know this before you are told. And who is it for and who is paying for it? And why isn't it for you?

Later on when you become a grocery boy or messenger and you try to enter one of those buildings a man says, "Go to the back door." Still later, if you happen by some odd chance to have a friend in one of those buildings, the man says, "Where's your package?" Now this by no means is the core of the matter. What I'm trying to get at is that by this time

the Negro child has had, effectively, almost all the doors of opportunity slammed in his face, and there are very few things he can do about it. He can more or less accept it with an absolutely inarticulate and dangerous rage inside — all the more dangerous because it is never expressed. It is precisely those silent people whom white people see every day of their lives — I mean your porter and your maid, who never say anything more than "Yes, Sir" and "No, Ma'am." They will tell you it's raining if that is what you want to hear, and they will tell you the sun is shining if *that* is what you want to hear. They really hate you — really hate you because in their eyes (and they're right) you stand between them and life. I want to come back to that in a moment. It is the most sinister of the facts, I think, which we now face.



There is something else the Negro child can do, too. Every street boy — and I was a street boy, so I know — looking at the society which has produced him, looking at the standards of that society which are not honored by anybody, looking at your churches and the government and the politicians, understands that this structure is operated for someone else's benefit — not for his. And there's no reason in it for him. If he is really cunning, really ruthless, really strong — and many of us are — he becomes a kind of criminal. He becomes a kind of criminal because that's the only way he can live. Harlem and every ghetto in this city — every ghetto in this country — is full of people who live outside the law. They wouldn't dream of calling a policeman. They wouldn't, for a moment, listen to any of those professions of which we are so proud on the Fourth of July. They have turned away from this country forever and totally. They live by their wits and really long to see the day when the entire structure comes down.

The point of all this is that black men were brought here as a source of cheap labor. They were indispensable to the economy. In order to justify the fact that men were treated as though they were

animals, the white republic had to brainwash itself into believing that they were, indeed, animals and *deserved* to be treated like animals. Therefore it is almost impossible for any Negro child to discover anything about his actual history. The reason is that this “animal,” once he suspects his own worth, once he starts believing that he is a man, has begun to attack the entire power structure. This is why America has spent such a long time keeping the Negro in his place. What I am trying to suggest to you is that it was not an accident, it was not an act of God, it was not done by well-meaning people muddling into something which they didn’t understand. It was a deliberate policy hammered into place in order to make money from black flesh. And now, in 1963, because we have never faced this fact, we are in intolerable trouble.

The Reconstruction, as I read the evidence, 10 was a bargain between the North and South to this effect: “We’ve liberated them from the land — and delivered them to the bosses.” When we left Mississippi to come North we did not come to freedom. We came to the bottom of the labor market, and we are still there. Even the Depression of the 1930s failed to make a dent in Negroes’ relationship to white workers in the labor unions. Even today, so brainwashed is this republic that people seriously ask in what they suppose to be good faith, “What does the Negro want?” I’ve heard a great many asinine questions in my life, but that is perhaps the most asinine and perhaps the most insulting. But the point here is that people who ask that question, thinking that they ask it in good faith, are really the victims of this conspiracy to make Negroes believe they are less than human.

In order for me to live, I decided very early that some mistake had been made somewhere. I was not a “nigger” even though you called me one. But if I was a “nigger” in your eyes, there was something about *you* — there was something *you* needed. I had to realize when I was very young that I was none of those things I was told I was. I was not, for example, happy. I never touched a watermelon for all kinds of reasons that had been invented by white

people, and I knew enough about life by this time to understand that whatever you invent, whatever you project, is you! So where we are now is that a whole country of people believe I’m a “nigger,” and I *don’t*, and the battle’s on! Because if I am not what I’ve been told I am, then it means that *you’re* not what you thought *you* were *either*! And that is the crisis.

It is not really a “Negro revolution” that is upsetting the country. What is upsetting the country is a sense of its own identity. If, for example, one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes, you’d be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history. And the reason is that if you are compelled to lie about one aspect of anybody’s history, you must lie about it all. If you have to lie about my real role here, if you have to pretend that I hoed all that cotton just because I loved you, then you have done something to yourself. You are mad.

Now let’s go back a minute. I talked earlier about those silent people — the porter and the maid — who, as I said, don’t look up at the sky if you ask them if it is raining, but look into your face. My ancestors and I were very well trained. We understood very early that this was not a Christian nation. It didn’t matter what you said or how often you went to church. My father and my mother and my grandfather and my grandmother knew that Christians didn’t act this way. It was as simple as that. And if that was so there was no point in dealing with white people in terms of their own moral professions, for they were not going to honor them. What one did was to turn away, smiling all the time, and tell white people what they wanted to hear. But people always accuse you of reckless talk when you say this.

All this means that there are in this country tremendous reservoirs of bitterness which have never been able to find an outlet, but may find an outlet soon. It means that well-meaning white liberals place themselves in great danger when they try to deal with Negroes as though they were

missionaries. It means, in brief, that a great price is demanded to liberate all those silent people so that they can breathe for the first time and *tell* you what they think of you. And a price is demanded to liberate all those white children — some of them near forty — who have never grown up, and who never will grow up, because they have no sense of their identity.

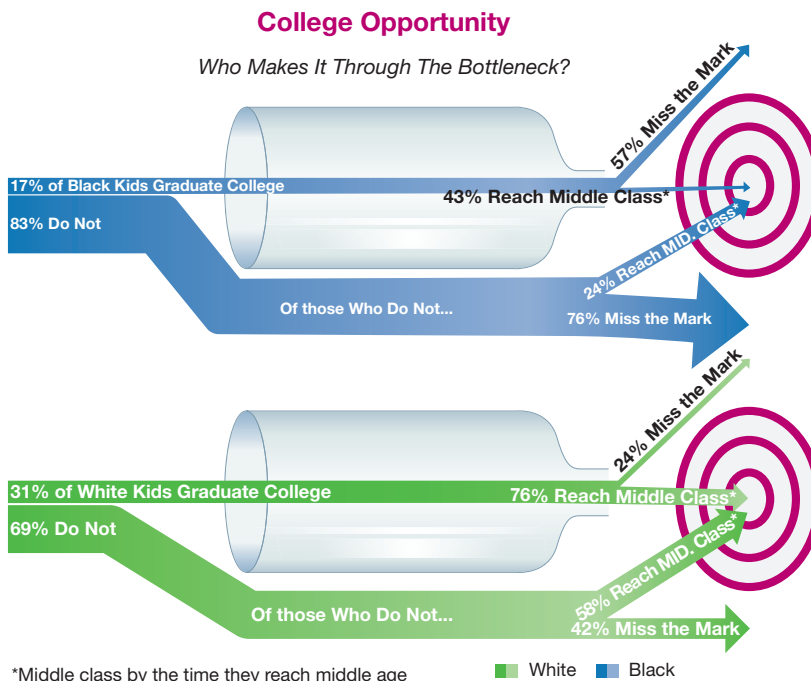


What passes for identity in America is a series of myths about one's heroic ancestors. It's astounding to me, for example, that so many people really appear to believe that the country was founded by a band of heroes who wanted to be free. That happens not to be true. What happened was that some people left Europe because they couldn't stay there any longer and had to go someplace else to make it. That's all. They were hungry, they were poor, they were convicts. Those who were making it in England, for example, did not get on the *Mayflower*. That's how the country was settled. Not

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by Gary Cooper. Yet we have a whole race of people, a whole republic, who believe the myths to the point where even today they select political representatives, as far as I can tell, by how closely they resemble Gary Cooper. Now this is dangerously infantile, and it shows in every level of national life. When I was living in Europe, for example, one of the worst revelations to me was the way Americans walked around Europe buying this and buying that and insulting everybody — not even out of malice, just because they didn't know any better. Well, that is the way they have always treated me. They weren't cruel, they just didn't know you were alive. They didn't know you had any feelings.

What I am trying to suggest here is that in the doing of all this for 100 years or more, it is the American white man who has long since lost his grip on reality. In some peculiar way, having created this myth about Negroes, and the myth about his own history, he created myths about the world so that, for example, he was astounded that some people could prefer [Fidel] Castro, astounded that



With permission from the Brookings Institute.

What argument about the relationship between race and education does this infographic make? To what extent does it support — or challenge — Baldwin's assertion that "It is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person" (para. 19)?

there are people in the world who don't go into hiding when they hear the word "Communism," astounded that Communism is one of the realities of the twentieth century which we will not overcome by pretending that it does not exist. The political level in this country now, on the part of people who should know better, is abysmal.

The Bible says somewhere that where there is no vision the people perish. I don't think anyone can doubt that in this country today we are menaced — intolerably menaced — by a lack of vision.

It is inconceivable that a sovereign people should continue, as we do so abjectly, to say, "I can't do anything about it. It's the government." The government is the creation of the people. It is responsible to the people. And the people are responsible for it. No American has the right to allow the present government to say, when Negro children are being bombed and hosed and shot and beaten all over the Deep South, that there is nothing we can do about it. There must have been a day in this country's life when the bombing of the children in Sunday School would have created a public uproar and endangered the life of a Governor [George] Wallace. It happened here and there was no public uproar.

I began by saying that one of the paradoxes of education was that precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience, you must find yourself at war with your society. It is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person. And on the basis of the evidence — the moral and political evidence — one is compelled to say that this is a backward society. Now if I were a teacher in this school, or any Negro school, and I was dealing with Negro children, who were in my care only a few hours of every day and would then return to their homes and to the streets, children who have an apprehension of their future which with every hour grows grimmer and darker, I would try to teach them — I would try to make them know — that those streets, those houses, those dangers, those agonies by which they are surrounded, are criminal. I would try to

make each child know that these things are the result of a criminal conspiracy to destroy him. I would teach him that if he intends to get to be a man, he must at once decide that he is stronger than this conspiracy and that he must never make his peace with it. And that one of his weapons for refusing to make his peace with it and for destroying it depends on what he decides he is worth. I would teach him that there are currently very few standards in this country which are worth a man's respect. That it is up to him to begin to change these standards for the sake of the life and the health of the country. I would suggest to him that the popular culture — as represented, for example, on television and in comic books and in movies — is based on fantasies created by very ill people, and he must be aware that these are fantasies that have nothing to do with reality. I would teach him that the press he reads is not as free as it says it is — and that he can do something about that, too. I would try to make him know that just as American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it, so is the world larger, more daring, more beautiful and more terrible, but principally larger — and that it belongs to him. I would teach him that he doesn't have to be bound by the expediences of any given administration, any given policy, any given morality; that he has the right and the necessity to examine everything. I would try to show him that one has not learned anything about Castro when one says, "He is a Communist." This is a way of his learning something about Castro, something about Cuba, something, in time, about the world. I would suggest to him that he is living, at the moment, in an enormous province. America is not the world and if America is going to become a nation, she must find a way — and this child must help her to find a way to use the tremendous potential and tremendous energy which this child represents. If this country does not find a way to use that energy, it will be destroyed by that energy.

[1963]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. What relationship does James Baldwin establish with his audience in the opening two paragraphs? How does he establish his ethos?
2. What is the “crucial paradox which confronts us here” (para. 2)?
3. Identify four appeals to pathos in paragraphs 3–5.
4. What is the effect of Baldwin’s emphasizing his personal experience when he begins paragraph 6 with “I still remember my first sight of New York”?
5. Analyze Baldwin’s use of pronouns in paragraphs 8 and 9. What is his purpose in alternating among first, second, and third person?
6. How would you describe Baldwin’s perspective on history? What is the effect of using historical events to support his argument?
7. Why, in paragraph 11, does Baldwin use the term *nigger*? What effect would have been lost — or gained — had he used a less provocative term?
8. What does Baldwin mean when he writes, “What passes for identity in America is a series of myths about one’s heroic ancestors” (para. 15)?
9. What is the effect of the short two-sentence paragraph 17?
10. Identify examples of parallelism and repetition in the long final paragraph. Discuss how Baldwin uses these strategies to achieve his purpose.
11. Where in this speech does Baldwin appeal to logos?
12. How would you describe Baldwin’s overall tone? Cite specific passages to support your description.

Walking the Path between Worlds

LORI ARVISO ALVORD

The first Navajo woman surgeon, Lori Arviso Alvord (b. 1958) received her BA from Dartmouth College and her MD from Stanford University. At the start of her career, she served as a general surgeon in the Indian Health Service in her native New Mexico. She went on to serve as a dean of student affairs and a professor of surgery and psychiatry at Dartmouth Medical School, an associate dean at Central Michigan University College of Medicine, as the associate dean of student affairs and admissions at the University of Arizona College of Medicine, and she is currently an associate faculty member at the Center for American Indian Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Alvord has been honored with numerous awards, including the Governor’s Award for Outstanding Women from the State of New Mexico (1992) and the Outstanding Women in Medicine Award from the University of Missouri–Kansas City School of Medicine (2001). Her autobiography, *The Scalpel and the Silver Bear* (1999), describes her efforts to combine Navajo healing practices with Western medicine. The following passage from that book focuses on her journey from the reservation to Dartmouth.

Today Navajo children are still standing on the playgrounds where I stood, facing the critical decision I would face after I graduated from high school: to leave the rez, or to stay and cleave to traditional ways. To let the desert live inside them, or to try to wash it away. They too hear the voice of the wind and the desert, smell the strong smells of our people, and feel the ways we came from. “*Decide,*” the world whispers to them, “*you must choose.*”

I chose to leave and get an education, following the path of the books I loved so much. But leaving Dineta was a frightening prospect. Navajo people believe we are safe within the four sacred mountains that bound the Navajo reservation — Mount Taylor, San Francisco Peak, Blanca Peak, and the La Plata Range. In our creation stories it is the place of our origins, of our emergence to the surface of the earth from other

worlds below, the place where Changing Woman and First Man, Coyote, the Twins, and the monsters in our legends roamed. These mountains are central to everything in our lives. To leave this place is to invite imbalance, to break our precious link with the tribe, to leave the Walk of Beauty, and to court danger. It was a dangerous step, that into the unknown, unguarded world.

In our song called the Mountain Chant, each of the sacred mountains is honored. The words describe each mountain and its special qualities.

The mountain to the east is Sisna'jin
It is standing out.
The strong White Bead is standing out
A living mountain is standing out . . .
The mountain to the south is Tsoodzil
It is standing out.
The strong turquoise is standing out
A living mountain is standing out . . .
The mountain to the west is Dook'o'osliíd.
It is standing out.
The strong white shell is standing out.
A living mountain is standing out . . .
The mountain to the north is Dibé Ntsaa.
It is standing out.
The strong jet is standing out.
A living mountain is standing out . . .¹

If I left, I would leave the enclosed and sacred world within the strong mountains, standing out.

I made good grades in high school, but I had received a very marginal education. I had a few good teachers, but teachers were difficult to recruit to our schools and they often didn't stay long. Funding was often inadequate. I spent many hours in classrooms where, I now see, very little was being taught. Nevertheless my parents always assumed, quite optimistically, that all their children would go to college. I don't remember any lectures from my father on the importance of higher education — just the quiet assurance that he and my mother and Grandmother all believed in us.

My college plans were modest; I assumed 5
I would attend a nearby state school. But then I

happened to meet another Navajo student who was attending Princeton. I had heard of Princeton but had no idea where it was. I asked him how many Indians were there. He replied, "Five." I couldn't even imagine a place with only five Indians, since our town was 98 percent Indian. Then he mentioned Dartmouth, which had about fifty Indians on campus, and I felt a little better. *Ivy League* was a term I had heard, but I had no concept of its meaning. No one from my high school had ever attended an Ivy League college.

At my request, my high school counselor gave me the applications for all the Ivy League schools, but I only completed Dartmouth's because I knew there were fifty Indians there.

I waited anxiously, and one day the letter came. I was accepted, early decision. I was only sixteen years old. As I was only half Navajo in blood, I wondered if this meant it would be only half as dangerous to me to leave Dinétah, the place between the sacred mountains. Half of me belonged in Dinétah, but the other half of me belonged in that other world too, I figured. Still, in my heart I was all Navajo, and I instinctively felt afraid of the move. I had seen those who went away and came back: the Vietnam veterans, broken and lost, who aimlessly wandered the streets of Gallup, the others who came back but had forgotten Navajo ways.

My memories of my arrival in Hanover, New Hampshire, are mostly of the color green. Green cloaked the hillsides, crawled up the ivied walls, and was reflected in the river where the Dartmouth crew students sculled. For a girl who had never been far from Crownpoint, New Mexico, the green felt incredibly juicy, lush, beautiful, and threatening. Crownpoint had had vast acreage of sky and sand, but aside from the pastel scrub brush, mesquite, and chamiso, practically the only growing things there were the tiny stunted pines called piñon trees. Yet it is beautiful; you can see the edges and contours of red earth stretching all the way to the box-shaped faraway cliffs and the horizon. No horizon was in sight in Hanover, only trees. I felt claustrophobic.

¹ Aileen O'Bryan, *Navajo Indian Myths* (New York: Dover, 1994).

If the physical contrasts were striking, the cultural ones were even more so. Although I felt lucky to be there, I was in complete culture shock. I thought people talked too much, laughed too loud, asked too many personal questions, and had no respect for privacy. They seemed overly competitive and put a higher value on material wealth than I was used to. Navajos placed much more emphasis on a person's relations to family, clan, tribe, and the other inhabitants of the earth, both human and nonhuman, than on possessions. Everyone at home followed unwritten codes for behavior. We were taught to be humble and not to draw attention to ourselves, to favor cooperation over competition (so as not to make ourselves "look better" at another's expense or hurt someone's feelings), to value silence over words, to respect our elders, and to reserve our opinions until they were asked for.

Understanding the culture of Dartmouth was like taking a course in itself. I didn't know the meaning of fraternities or the class system (divided into the haves and the have-nots) which were so important there at first. Had the parents of my fellow students taught them survival skills through camping, tracking, and hunting? Did I have any interest in making four-story-high sculptures out of ice for Winter Carnival? Did they respect their elders, their parents? Did I know which fork to use at a formal dinner? What sort of ceremonies did their "tribes" practice? While they pondered such burning questions as the opening day of ski season, I was struggling just to stay warm during the frozen New Hampshire winter and not slip on the ice!

Indian reservations and pueblos could almost be seen as tiny Third World countries, lacking as they did electricity, indoor plumbing, and paved roads. When the Native American students arrived at Dartmouth, one of the first things we were told was that we could attend high tea at Sanborn Hall at four o'clock daily. I walked around the campus in awe, like a peasant visiting the castle of a great king.

The very stately, beautiful, and affluent campus could be intimidating and alienating. The

college's unofficial mascot was the "Dartmouth Indian," a tomahawk-wielding red man whose presence was everywhere on the campus, in spite of the Native community's protests. He was like those TV Indians we had watched when we were little and thought so alien. Imagine young Native students seeing white students wearing loin-cloths and paint on their faces, jumping around with toy tomahawks. Like the rest of the Native community, I was shocked by this caricature.

I remember, distinctly, feeling alienated while walking around Dartmouth's campus that first year. By my sophomore year I understood what it meant to be invisible. People looked right through me—I moved around the campus as unseen as the air. Outside of my freshman roommate, Anne, I never made a close non-Indian friend. I wonder if other students of color felt the same way.

I was very homesick, wishing I didn't have to miss so many familiar events: the Navajo tribal fairs, the Zuni Shalako, the Laguna feast days, the Santa Fe Indian market, the Gallup ceremonial. Everyone at home was having a great time eating wonderful food—roasted corn from the Shiprock market, posole, red chile stew, venison jerky—and I was stuck in a library far away. I missed watching the Apache Devil Dancers and the Pueblo Buffalo Dancers. I missed the sight of Navajo traditional clothing, emblazoned with silver and turquoise, and the pink-and-purple-splashed sunsets of New Mexico. I missed that smell—that smell we had tried to wash away at our laundromat so long ago—the smell of wildness, the desert, and the Navajo world.

Sometimes I wondered: If I'd had a *kinaaldá* ceremony, could I have been stronger, more independent, better able to face this loneliness and alienation, less unassured. The *kinaaldá* is part of the Blessing Way set of ceremonies performed for girls when they reach puberty. Blessing Way tells the story of Changing Woman (a central Navajo deity), and the *kinaaldá* celebrates her coming into womanhood. The family and community gather around her, she is sung to, and her female relatives massage her from head to toe, giving her the power

and strength of womanhood. A large corn cake is baked underground in a corn husk-lined pit, and the girl sprinkles cornmeal over the top. Each day for four days, she runs for a mile toward the new sun, toward her new life. It gives a young woman strength and power, confidence and security, as she goes through menses for the first time. She takes that strength and those “good thoughts” with her into the world. I could have used that assurance. Because my family was less traditional, my sisters and I did not have *kinaaldá* ceremonies, although we attended those of our cousins. Nevertheless, since the Navajo culture is matriarchal, I think I was better prepared as a woman in a “man’s world” than many white women I met.

A few things at Dartmouth, however, were comforting and did make me feel at home. For one thing, dogs roamed the campus freely. They didn’t belong to anybody in particular but to everybody and were fed and cared for by the entire campus. Muttlike, wily, always after something to eat, they reminded me naturally of rez dogs. And everywhere I looked playful squirrels ran around, reminding me of the prairie dogs who run around their prairie dog cities on the mesas and sit up on their hind legs to watch the cars drive by.

Academically, due to my strong reading background, I held my own in classes like literature and social sciences, but I was totally unprepared for the physical and life sciences. After receiving the only D of my entire life in calculus, I retreated from the sciences altogether. The high school at Crownpoint had not prepared me adequately to compete with the Ivy Leaguers. Furthermore, I had an additional problem. As I mentioned earlier, Navajos are taught from the youngest age never to draw attention to ourselves. So Navajo children do not raise their hands in class. At a school like Dartmouth, the lack of participation was seen as a sign not of humility but lack of interest and a disengaged attitude. My Navajo humility was combined with a deep feeling of academic inferiority; it was hard to compete with students who had taken calculus and read Chaucer in high

school. I sat in the back and tried not to reveal my ignorance.

This sense of being torn between worlds was reflected even in my studies: I chose a double major, psychology and sociology, modified with Native American studies. I received honors in my freshman seminar as well as in two Native American studies courses that stressed writing. As a result, I found myself thinking of teaching Native American studies as a career, and perhaps also becoming a writer.

In fact, I loved Dartmouth’s Native American program. It had the tough job of recruiting students like us, who were very high risk. We frequently had had only marginal high school preparation; many were reluctant to come to school so far from home; and like skittish wild horses, some would turn tail and run home at the least provocation. We found great comfort in one another, for although we came from many different tribes, our experiences at Dartmouth were similar: We all felt disconnected from the mainstream student body. For the women, it was even worse. At the time I arrived on the scene, Dartmouth had only recently changed from an all-male to a coed student body, and many of the men resented the presence of women on campus. Referred to as cohogs instead of coeds, women were shunned for dates; instead girls were bused in from nearby women’s colleges on weekends. Social life was dominated by the fraternities, and, if we went to their parties at all, we were often ignored.

For all these reasons, the few Native American students at Dartmouth coalesced into a solid community who did almost everything together. Our group was made up of Paiutes, Sioux, Cherokees, Chippewas, Navajos, Pueblos, and many other tribes. We were friends, lovers, rivals, enemies. I have been a part of many other groups since then, but nothing compared in intensity to the experience of being a member of that Native American student group.

Though we often felt as though we didn’t belong at Dartmouth, the ironic truth is that we did belong, or rather, we were entitled to be there. Eleazar Wheelock, the Connecticut minister who founded Dartmouth College in 1769, did so with funds that

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This painting, completed in 1961 by James Wayne Yazzie, a self-taught Navajo artist, is entitled *Navajo Dance*.

How does it convey Alvord's assertion that a tribe "provides a feeling of inclusion in something larger, or having a set place in the universe where one always belongs" and "provides connectedness and a blueprint for how to live" (para. 23)?

came from King George II, who wished to establish a place to "educate the savages." The college flourished, but for literally hundreds of years its original founding purpose was not honored. "Educating savages" was not on the real agenda; it had simply been a way to get land and money. Before the 1960s fewer than twenty Native students graduated from Dartmouth. Then in the 1970s the Native American studies program was developed by college president John Kemeny and writer Michael Dorris, and Dartmouth began to take its mission in earnest.

We Indian students all knew why we were there. Without the vision of Kemeny and Dorris, we would never have had an opportunity to set foot on the grounds of such an institution, let alone actually enroll. We were there because of the generous scholarships the college had given us, and the money from our tribes.

Some years later, reflecting back on my college experiences, I realized something else. The outside, non-Indian world is tribeless, full of wandering singular souls, seeking connection through societies, clubs, and other groups. White people know what it is to be a family, but to be a tribe is something of an altogether different sort. It provides a feeling of inclusion in something larger, of having a set place in the universe where one always belongs. It provides connectedness and a blueprint for how to live.

At Dartmouth the fraternities and sororities seemed to be attempts to claim or create tribes. Their wild and crazy parties that often involved drugs and sex seemed to me to be unconscious re-creations of rituals and initiation ceremonies. But the fraternities emphasized exclusion as much as inclusion, and their rituals involved alcohol and hazing initiations. Although they developed from a natural urge for community, they lacked much that a real tribe has.

I began to honor and cherish my tribal membership, and in the years that followed I came to understand that such membership is central to mental health, to spiritual health, to physical health. A tribe is a community of people connected by blood or heart, by geography and tradition, who help one another and share a belief system. Community and tribe not only reduce the alienation people feel but in doing so stave off illness. In a sense they are a form of preventive medicine. Most Americans have lost their tribal identities, although at one time, most likely, everyone belonged to a tribe. One way to remedy this is to find and establish groups of people who can nurture and support one another. The Native American students at Dartmouth had become such a group.

Our new "tribe" had its ceremonies. Each year, in a primitive outdoor amphitheater called the Bema where concerts and plays were sometimes

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put on, we held a campus powwow. Feathered fancy dancers and women in “jingle dresses” or in beaded and brightly colored fabric would spin and step to the drums of Plains Indians or to songs from an invited singer from a pueblo. The women would whirl, their shawls swirling and twisting into corkscrew shapes around them. They’d dance to two big hide-stretched drums, encircled by the men, who struck the drums rhythmically and sang. Their voices wove and resonated, rose and fell above the steady heartbeat of the drums. This ceremony was a chance for the Native and non-Native communities to come together as one. I felt then, briefly, that I belonged.

In the evening after the powwow the singing and drumming would continue at a party called a

“49” — but here the ancient rhythms were mixed with modern English lyrics. The songs we sang could be romantic, funny, or political; they could be about reservation life and pickup trucks or the Bureau of Indian Affairs. They always sounded the same though, with a blend of voices rising around a drumbeat, and a melody that pulled out our memories of childhood songs.

Dartmouth was good for me. Singing with the other students melted some of my historical grief and anger into a larger powerful force, a force I would take with me into the world. I gained a new kind of family and tribe, with new songs that held us together. Once again, songs had the power to heal.

[1999]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. Lori Arviso Alvord writes that she “chose to leave [the reservation] and get an education” (para. 2). In what ways is this a more momentous decision for her than simply choosing which college to attend?
2. What culture shocks did Alvord experience as she moved from her home in New Mexico to college at Dartmouth? What was she most afraid of as she moved outside of her comfort zone?
3. Why do you think Alvord includes the Mountain Chant in this piece? What effect does it have on you as a reader? How would the tone of the essay be different without it?
4. What impact does the physical landscape in Hanover have on Alvord? Why does she describe the landscape of both Hanover and New Mexico in such vivid detail?
5. Which details of life on the reservation does Alvord recall in paragraph 15? Cite specific ones and explain their importance. Why is the *kinaaldá* ceremony especially significant?
6. Describe Alvord’s tone in the two paragraphs on the history of Dartmouth and its Native American studies program (paras. 21–22). Cite specific language and examples to support your response.
7. Alvord observes, “White people know what it is to be a family, but to be a tribe is something of an altogether different sort” (para. 23). What does she mean? In her view, is tribe necessarily exclusively determined by blood kinship?
8. What does Alvord mean in the concluding paragraph by “my historical grief and anger” (para. 28)? How does it “melt” into “a larger powerful force”? To what extent is her education responsible for this transformation?
9. Ultimately, what is Alvord’s attitude toward Dartmouth and her choice to attend? Cite specific passages to support your response.
10. Once at Dartmouth, Alvord faces another significant choice: to assimilate into the dominant culture of that institution, to hold herself apart from it, or something in between. What does she choose and why?
11. What do you think Alvord believes is the most important part of the “education” she received at Dartmouth? Cite specific details from the essay in your response.
12. In what ways is Alvord’s experience typical of first-generation college students? Research this topic by interviewing someone, perhaps in your own family, who was the first of their family to earn a college degree. If you will be the first generation in your family to go to college, how do the choices and concerns Alvord describes compare to your own?

I Know Why the Caged Bird Cannot Read

How American High School Students Learn to Loathe Literature

FRANCINE PROSE

Francine Prose (b. 1947) is a reporter, essayist, critic, editor, and author of more than twenty books, including poetry, fiction, and children's literature. Her novel *Blue Angel* (2000) was a finalist for the National Book Award, and her nonfiction works *The Lives of the Muses: Nine Women and the Artists They Inspired* (2002) and *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them* (2006) were both national best-sellers. She has received numerous grants and awards, including Guggenheim and Fulbright fellowships. She is most recently the author of the satiric novel *Mister Monkey* (2016). Her book reviews have appeared in numerous magazines and periodicals, including the *New York Times Book Review* and *O*. The following essay, published in *Harper's* in September 1999, is a critique of the quality of required reading in American high schools.

Books discussed in this essay include:

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou. Random House, 1969.

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. Lippincott, 1960.

Teaching Values through Teaching Literature by Margaret Dodson. Eric/Edinfo Press, 1993.

Teaching the Novel by Becky Alano. Eric/Edinfo Press, 1989.

Teaching Literature by Women Authors by Carolyn Smith McGowen. Eric/Edinfo Press, 1993.

Like most parents who have, against all odds, preserved a lively and still evolving passion for good books, I find myself, each September, increasingly appalled by the dismal lists of texts that my sons are doomed to waste a school year reading. What I get as compensation is a measure of insight into why our society has come to admire Montel Williams and Ricki Lake so much more than Dante and Homer. Given the dreariness with which literature is taught in many American classrooms, it seems miraculous that any sentient teenager would view reading as a source of pleasure. Traditionally, the love of reading has been born and nurtured in high school English class—the last time many students will find themselves in a roomful of people who have all read the same text and are, in theory, prepared to discuss it. High school—even more than college—is where literary tastes and allegiances are formed: what we read in adolescence is imprinted on our brains as the dreary notions of childhood crystallize into hard data.

The intense loyalty adults harbor for books first encountered in youth is one probable reason for the otherwise baffling longevity of vintage mediocre novels, books that teachers may themselves have read in adolescence; it is also the most plausible explanation for the peculiar [1998] Modern Library list of the “100 Best Novels of the 20th Century,” a roster dominated by robust survivors from the tenth-grade syllabus. *Darkness at Noon*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Brave New World*, and *The Studs Lonigan Trilogy* all speak, in various ways, to the vestigial teenage psyches of men of a certain age. The parallel list drawn up by students (younger, more of them female) in the Radcliffe Publishing Course reflects the equally romantic and tacky tastes (*Gone with the Wind*, *The Fountainhead*) of a later generation of adolescent girls.

Given the fact that these early encounters with literature leave such indelible impressions, it would seem doubly important to make sure

Cameron Harvey/The New Yorker Collection/Conde Nast



"Do you have any books on the white-male experience?"

This cartoon appeared in the *New Yorker* in 2015.

What point does the cartoonist make through humor? How might this cartoon be read as a response to Francine Prose's assertion that "much has been made of the lemminglike fervor with which our universities have rushed to sacrifice complexity for diversity" (para. 4)?

that high school students are actually reading literature. Yet every opportunity to instill adolescents with a lifelong affinity for narrative, for the ways in which the vision of an artist can percolate through an idiosyncratic use of language, and for the supple gymnastics of a mind that exercises the mind of the reader is being squandered on regimens of trash and semi-trash, taught for reasons that have nothing to do with how well a book is written. In fact, less and less attention is being paid to what has been written, let alone how; it's become a rarity for a teacher to suggest that a book might be a work of art composed of words and sentences, or that the choice of these words and sentences can inform and delight us. We hear that more books are being bought and sold than ever before, yet no one, as far as I know, is arguing that we are producing and becoming a nation of avid readers of serious literature.

Much has been made of the lemminglike fervor with which our universities have rushed to sacrifice complexity for diversity; for decades now, critics have decried our plummeting scholastic standards

and mourned the death of cultural literacy without having done one appreciable thing to raise the educational bar or revive our moribund culture. Meanwhile, scant notice has been paid, except by exasperated parents, to the missed opportunities and misinformation that form the true curriculum of so many high school English classes.

My own two sons, now twenty-one and seventeen, have read (in public and private schools) Shakespeare, Hawthorne, and Melville. But they've also slogged repeatedly through the manipulative melodramas of Alice Walker and Maya Angelou, through sentimental, middlebrow favorites (*To Kill a Mockingbird* and *A Separate Peace*), the weaker novels of John Steinbeck, the fantasies of Ray Bradbury. My older son spent the first several weeks of sophomore English discussing the class's summer assignment, *Ordinary People*, a weeper and former bestseller by Judith Guest about a "dysfunctional" family recovering from a teenage son's suicide attempt.

Neither has heard a teacher suggest that he read Kafka, though one might suppose

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that teenagers might enjoy the transformative science-fiction aspects of *The Metamorphosis*, a story about a young man so alienated from his “dys-functional” family that he turns — embarrassingly for them — into a giant beetle. No instructor has ever asked my sons to read Alice Munro, who writes so lucidly and beautifully about the hypersensitivity that makes adolescence a hell.



In the hope of finding out that my children and my friends’ children were exceptionally unfortunate, I recently collected eighty or so reading lists from high schools throughout the country. Because of how overworked teachers are, how hard to reach during the school day, as well as the odd, paranoid defensiveness that pervades so many schools, obtaining these documents seemed to require more time and dogged perseverance than obtaining one’s FBI surveillance files — and what I came away with may not be a scientifically accurate survey. Such surveys have been done by the National Council of Teachers of English (published in the 1993 NCTE research report, *Literature in the Secondary Schools*), with results that both underline and fail to reflect what I found.

What emerges from these photocopied pages distributed in public, private, and Catholic schools as well as in military academies, in Manhattan and Denver, in rural Oregon and urban Missouri, is a numbing sameness, unaffected by geography, region, or community size. Nearly every list contains at least one of Shakespeare’s plays. Indeed, in the NCTE report, Shakespeare (followed closely by John Steinbeck) tops the rosters of “Ten Most Frequently Required Authors of Book-Length Works, Grades 9–12.”

Yet in other genres — fiction and memoir — the news is far more upsetting. On the lists sampled, Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* are among the titles that appear most often, a grisly fact that in itself should inspire us to

examine the works that dominate our children’s literary education.

First published in 1970, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is what we have since learned to recognize as a “survivor” memoir, a first-person narrative of victimization and recovery. Angelou transports us to her childhood in segregated Arkansas, where she was raised by her grandmother and was mostly content, despite the unpleasantness of her white neighbors, until, after a move to St. Louis, eight-year-old Maya was raped by her mother’s boyfriend.

One can see why this memoir might appeal to the lazy or uninspired teacher, who can conduct the class as if the students were the studio audience for Angelou’s guest appearance on *Oprah*. The author’s frequently vented distrust of white society might rouse even the most sluggish or understandably disaffected ninth-graders to join a discussion of racism; her victory over poverty and abuse can be used to address what one fan, in a customer book review on Amazon.com, celebrated as “transcending that pain, drawing from it deeper levels of meaning about being truly human and truly alive.” Many chapters end with sententious epigrams virtually begging to serve as texts for sophomoric rumination on such questions as: What does Angelou mean when she writes, “If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is rust on the razor that threatens the throat”?

But much more terrifying than the prospect of Angelou’s pieties being dissected for their deeper meaning is the notion of her language being used as a model of “poetic” prose style. Many of the terrible mysteries that confront teachers of college freshman composition can be solved simply by looking at Angelou’s writing. Who told students to combine a dozen mixed metaphors in one paragraph? Consider a typical passage from Angelou’s opaque prose: “Weekdays revolved on a sameness wheel. They turned into themselves so steadily and inevitably that each seemed to be the original of yesterday’s

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rough draft. Saturdays, however, always broke the mold and dared to be different.” Where do students learn to write stale, inaccurate similes? “The man’s dead words fell like bricks around the auditorium and too many settled in my belly.” Who seriously believes that murky, turgid, convoluted language of this sort constitutes good writing? “Youth and social approval allied themselves with me and we trammelled memories of slights and insults. The wind of our swift passage remodeled my features. Lost tears were pounded to mud and then to dust. Years of withdrawal were brushed aside and left behind, as hanging ropes of parasitic moss.”

To hold up this book as a paradigm of memoir, of thought — of literature — is akin to inviting doctors convicted of malpractice to instruct our medical students. If we want to use Angelou’s work to educate our kids, let’s invite them to parse her language, sentence by sentence; ask them precisely what it means and ask why one would bother obscuring ideas that could be expressed so much more simply and felicitously.

Narrated affably enough by a nine-year-old girl named Scout, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the perennially beloved and treacly account of growing up in a small Southern town during the Depression. Its hero is Scout’s father, the saintly Atticus Finch, a lawyer who represents everything we cherish about justice and democracy and the American Way, and who defends a black man falsely accused of rape by a poor white woman. The novel has a shadow hero, too, the descriptively named Boo Radley, a gooney recluse who becomes the occasion for yet another lesson in tolerance and compassion.

Such summary reduces the book, but not by 15 all that much. To read the novel is, for most, an exercise in wish-fulfillment and self-congratulation, a chance to consider thorny issues of race and prejudice from a safe distance and with the comfortable certainty that the reader would *never* harbor the racist attitudes espoused by the lowlifes in the novel. We (the readers) are

Scout, her childhood is our childhood, and Atticus Finch is our brave, infinitely patient American Daddy. And that creepy big guy living alone in the scary house turns out to have been watching over us with protective benevolent attention.

Maya Angelou and Harper Lee are not the only authors on the lists. The other most popular books are *The Great Gatsby*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Catcher in the Rye*. John Steinbeck (*The Pearl*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Red Pony*, *The Grapes of Wrath*) and Toni Morrison (*Song of Solomon*, *Sula*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*) are the writers — after Shakespeare — represented by the largest number of titles. Also widely studied are the novels of more dubious literary merit: John Knowles’s *A Separate Peace*, William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, and Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, *Dandelion Wine*, *The October Country*, and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Trailing behind these favorites, Orwell (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*) is still being read, as are the Brontës (*Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*).

How astonishing then that students exposed to such a wide array of masterpieces and competent middlebrow entertainments are not mobbing their libraries and bookstores, demanding heady diets of serious or semi-serious fiction! And how puzzling that I should so often find myself teaching bright, eager college undergraduate and graduate students, would-be writers handicapped not merely by how little literature they have read but by their utter inability to read it; many are nearly incapable of doing the close line-by-line reading necessary to disclose the most basic information in a story by Henry James or a seemingly more straightforward one by Katherine Mansfield or Paul Bowles.

The explanation, it turns out, lies in how these books, even the best of them, are being presented in the classroom. My dogged search for

reading lists flushed out, in addition to the lists themselves, course descriptions, teaching guides, and anecdotes that reveal how English literature is being taught to high school students. Only rarely do teachers propose that writing might be worth reading closely. Instead, students are informed that literature is principally a vehicle for the soporific moral blather they suffer daily from their parents. The present vogue for teaching “values” through literature uses the novel as a springboard for the sort of discussion formerly conducted in civics or ethics classes — areas of study that, in theory, have been phased out of the curriculum but that, in fact, have been retained and cleverly substituted for what we used to call English. English — and everything about it that is inventive, imaginative, or pleasurable — is beside the point in classrooms, as is everything that constitutes style and that distinguishes writers, one from another, as precisely as fingerprints or DNA mapping.

The question is no longer what the writer has written but rather who the writer is — specifically, what ethnic group or gender identity an author represents. A motion passed by the San Francisco Board of Education in March 1998 mandates that “works of literature read in class in grades nine to eleven by each high school student must include works by writers of color which reflect the diversity of culture, race, and class of the students of the San Francisco Unified School District. . . . The writers who are known to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, shall be appropriately identified in the curriculum.” Meanwhile, aesthetic beauty — felicitous or accurate language, images, rhythm, wit, the satisfaction of recognizing something in fiction that seems fresh and true — is simply too frivolous, suspect, and elitist even to mention.

Thus the fragile *To Kill a Mockingbird* is freighted with tons of sociopolitical ballast. A “Collaborative Program Planning Record of Learning Experience,” which I obtained from the Internet, outlines the “overall goal” of teaching

the book (“To understand problems relating to discrimination and prejudice that exist in our present-day society. To understand and apply these principles to our own lives”) and suggests topics for student discussion: “What type of people make up your community? Is there any group of people . . . a person (NO NAMES PLEASE) or type of person in your community that you feel uncomfortable around?”

A description of “The Family in Literature,” an elective offered by the Princeton Day School — a course including works by Sophocles and Eugene O’Neill — begins: “Bruce Springsteen once tried to make us believe that ‘No one can break the ties that bind / You can’t for say-yay-yay-yay-yay-yake the ties that bind.’ He has since divorced his wife and married his back-up singer. So what are these ties and just how strong are they, after all?” With its chilling echoes of New Age psychobabble, Margaret Dodson’s *Teaching Values through Teaching Literature*, a sourcebook for high school English teachers, informs us that the point of Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* is “to show how progress has been made in the treatment of the mentally disadvantaged, and that more and better roles in society are being devised for them [and to] establish that mentally retarded people are human beings with the same needs and feelings that everyone else experiences.”

An eighth-grader studying Elie Wiesel’s overwrought *Night* in a class taught by a passionate gay-rights advocate came home with the following notes: “Many Jews killed during the Holocaust, but many *many* homosexuals murdered by Nazis. Pink triangle — Silence equals death.”

It’s cheering that so many lists include *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* — but not when we discover that this moving, funny novel is being taught not as a work of art but as a piece of damning evidence against that bigot, Mark Twain. A friend’s daughter’s English teacher informed a group of parents that the only reason to study *Huckleberry Finn* was to decide

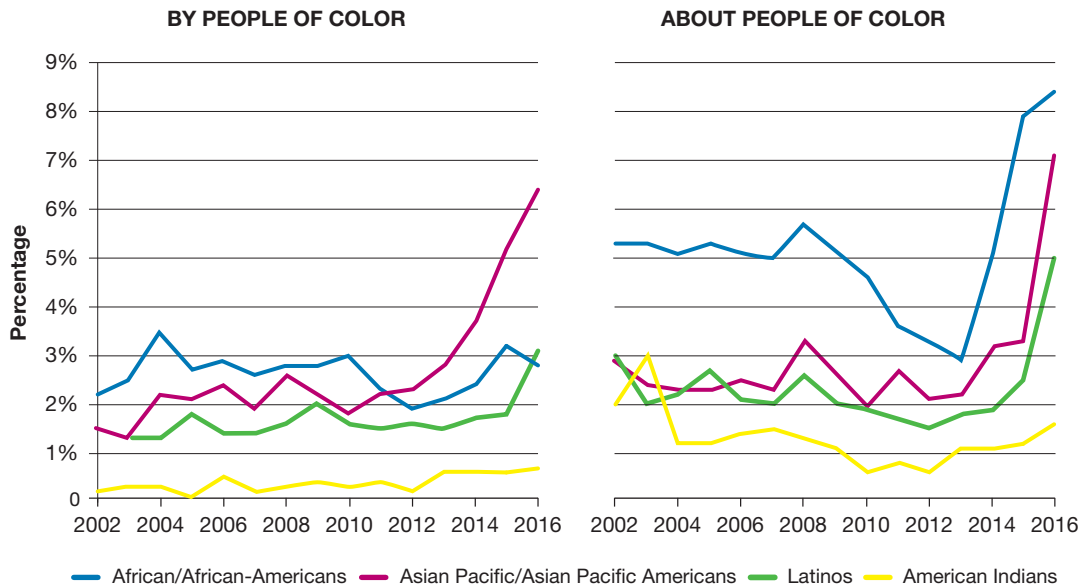
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seeing connections

These graphs show the percentage of children's books by and about people of color from 2002 through 2016.

To what extent does this data challenge the claims Prose makes in paragraph 19?

Children's Books By and About People of Color, 2002–2016



Data from Cooperative Children's Book Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison

whether it was a racist text. Instructors consulting *Teaching Values through Teaching Literature* will have resolved this debate long before they walk into the classroom to supervise “a close reading of *Huckleberry Finn* that will reveal the various ways in which Twain undercuts Jim’s humanity: in the minstrel routines with Huck as the ‘straight man’; in generalities about Blacks as unreliable, primitive and slow-witted. . . .”

Luckily for the teacher and students required to confront this fictional equivalent of a minstrel show, Mark Twain can be rehabilitated—that is to say, revised. In classes that sound like test

screenings used to position unreleased Hollywood films, focus groups in which viewers are invited to choose among variant endings, students are polled for possible alternatives to Huck’s and Tom Sawyer’s actions—should Tom have carried out his plan to “free” Jim?—and asked to speculate on what the fictional characters might have or should have done to become better people and atone for the sins of their creators.

In the most unintentionally hilarious of these lesson plans, a chapter entitled “*Ethan Frome: An Avoidable Tragedy*,” Dodson warns teachers to expect resistance to their efforts to reform Wharton’s

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characters and thus improve her novel's outcome: "Students intensely dislike the mere suggestion that Ethan should have honored his commitment to Zeena and encouraged Mattie to date Dennie Eady, yet this would surely have demonstrated greater love than the suicide attempt."

Thus another puzzle confronting college and even graduate school instructors — Why do students so despise dead writers? — is partly explained by the adversarial stance that these sourcebooks adopt toward authors of classic texts. Teachers are counseled "to help students rise above Emerson's style of stating an idea bluntly, announcing reservations, and sometimes even negating the original idea" and to present "a method of contrasting the drab, utilitarian prose of *Nineteen Eighty-four* with a lyric poem 'To a Darkling Thrush,' by Thomas Hardy." Why not mention that such works have been read for years — for a reason! — and urge students to figure out what that reason is? Doesn't it seem less *valuable* to read Emily Dickinson's work as the brain-damaged mumblings of a demented agoraphobic than to approach the subject of Dickinson, as Richard Sewell suggests in his biography of her, on our knees? No one's suggesting that canonical writers should be immune to criticism. Dickens's anti-Semitism, Tolstoy's overly romantic ideas about the peasantry, Kipling's racism, are all problematic, and merit discussion. But to treat the geniuses of the past as naughty children, amenable to reeducation by the children of the present, evokes the educational theory of the Chinese Revolution.

No wonder students are rarely asked to consider what was actually written by these hopeless racists and sociopaths. Instead, they're told to write around the books, or, better yet, write their own books. Becky Alano's depressing *Teaching the Novel* advises readers of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* to construct a therapeutic evaluation of its suicidal heroine ("Do you think she is ready to go home? What is your prognosis for her future?")

and lists documents to be written as supplements to *Macbeth* (a script of the TV evening news announcing the murders; a psychiatrist's report on Lady Macbeth, or her suicide note to her husband; Macbeth's entry in *Who's Who*, or his obituary).

How should prospective readers of Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* prepare? Carolyn Smith McGowen's *Teaching Literature by Women Authors* suggests: "Give each student a paper grocery bag. Explain that to avoid being sent to a concentration camp, many people went into hiding. Often they could take with them only what they could carry. . . . Ask your students to choose the items they would take into hiding. These items must fit into the grocery bag." A class attempting to interpret an Emily Dickinson poem can be divided into three groups, each group interpreting the poem based on one of Freud's levels of consciousness; thus the little ids, egos, and superegos can respond to the Dickinson poem according to the category of awareness to which their group has been assigned.

Those who might have supposed that one purpose of fiction was to deploy the powers of language to connect us, directly and intimately, with the hearts and souls of others, will be disappointed to learn that the whole point is to make us examine ourselves. According to Alano, *The Catcher in the Rye* will doubtless suggest an incident "in which you felt yourself to be an 'outsider' like Holden. Why did you feel outside? What finally changed your situation?" Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* should make us compare our anxieties ("Describe an event that you anticipated with fear. . . . Was the actual event worth the dread?") with those of its Civil War hero. And what does *The Great Gatsby* lead us to consider? "Did you ever pursue a goal with single-minded devotion? . . . Would you have gained your end in any other way?" Are we to believe that the average eleventh-grader has had an experience comparable to that of

Jay Gatsby — or F. Scott Fitzgerald? And is it any wonder that teenagers should complete these exercises with little but contempt for the writer who so pointlessly complicated and obfuscated a personal true story that sixteen-year-olds could have told so much more interestingly themselves?



I remember when it dawned on me that I might, someday, grow old. I was in the eleventh grade. Our marvelous and unusual English teacher had assigned us to read *King Lear* — that is, to read every line of *King Lear*. (As I recall, we were asked to circle every word or metaphor having to do with eyes and vision, a tedious process we grumbled about but that succeeded in focusing our attention.) Although I knew I would never ever resemble the decrepit adults around me, Shakespeare's genius, his poetry, his profound, encyclopedic understanding of personality, managed to persuade me that I could *be* that mythical king — an imaginative identification very different from whatever result I might have obtained by persuading myself that my own experience was the *same* as Lear's. I recall the hallucinatory sense of having left my warm bedroom, of finding myself — old, enraged, alone, despised — on that heath, in that dangerous storm. And I remember realizing, after the storm subsided, that language, that mere words on the page, had raised that howling tempest.

Lear is still the Shakespeare play I like best. I reread it periodically, increasingly moved now that age is no longer a theoretical possibility, and now that its portrayal of Lear's behavior so often seems like reportage. A friend whose elderly boss is ruining his company with irrational tests of fealty and refusals to cede power needs only six words to describe the situation at work: *King Lear*, Act One, Scene One.

Another high school favorite was the King James Version of the Book of Revelation. I don't

think I'd ever heard of Armageddon, nor did I believe that when the seals of a book were opened horses would fly out. What delighted me was the language, the cadences and the rhythms, and the power of the images: the four horsemen, the beast, the woman clothed with the sun.

But rather than exposing students to works of literature that expand their capacities and vocabularies, sharpen their comprehension, and deepen the level at which they think and feel, we either offer them "easy" (Steinbeck, Knowles, Angelou, Lee) books that "anyone" can understand, or we serve up the tougher works predigested. We no longer believe that books were written one word at a time, and deserve to be read that way. We've forgotten the difference between a student who has never read a nineteenth-century novel and an idiot incapable of reading one. When my son was assigned *Wuthering Heights* in tenth-grade English, the complex sentences, archaisms, multiple narrators, and interwoven stories seemed, at first, like a foreign language. But soon enough, he caught on and reported being moved almost to tears by the cruelty of Heathcliff's treatment of Isabella.

In fact, it's not difficult to find fiction that combines clear, beautiful, accessible, idiosyncratic language with a narrative that conveys a complex worldview. But to use such literature might require teachers and school boards to make fresh choices, selections uncontaminated by trends, clichés, and received ideas. If educators continue to assume that teenagers are interested exclusively in books about teenagers, there *is* engaging, truthful fiction about childhood and adolescence, written in ways that remind us why someone might like to read. There is, for example, Charles Baxter's precise and evocative "Gryphon." And there are the carefully chosen details, the complex sentences, and the down-to-earth diction in Stuart Dybek's great Chicago story, "Hot Ice."

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If English class is the only forum in which students can talk about racism and ethnic identity, why not teach Hilton Als's *The Women*, Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge," or any of the stories in James Alan McPherson's *Hue and Cry*, all of which eloquently and directly address the subtle, powerful ways in which race affects every tiny decision and gesture? Why not introduce our kids to the clarity and power of James Baldwin's great story "Sonny's Blues"?

My suspicion is that the reason such texts are not used as often as *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is precisely the reason why they *should* be taught — that is, because they're

35 complicated. Baldwin, Als, and McPherson reject obvious "lessons" and familiar arcs of abuse, self-realization, and recovery; they actively refute simplistic prescriptions about how to live.

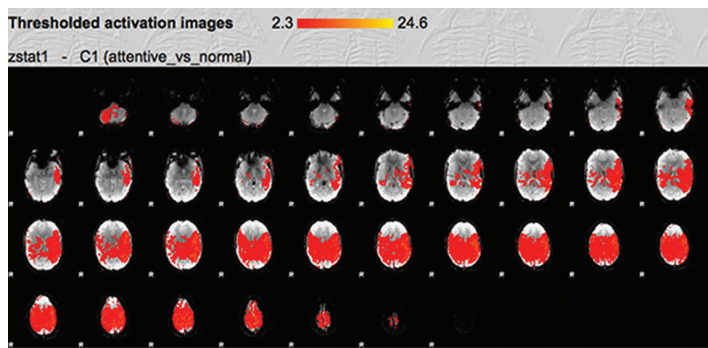
Great novels can help us master the all-too-rare skill of tolerating — of being able to hold in mind — ambiguity and contradiction. Jay Gatsby has a shady past, but he's also sympathetic. Huck Finn is a liar, but we come to love him. A friend's student once wrote that Alice Munro's characters weren't people he'd choose to hang out with but that reading her work always made him feel "a little less petty and judgmental." Such benefits are denied to

seeing connections

In 2012, Dr. Natalie Phillips, an associate professor of English and the Director of the Digital Humanities & Literary Cognition Lab at Michigan State University, conducted a study on the benefits of close reading classic works of literature. Subjects were instructed to carefully read from books by nineteenth-century writer Jane Austen as an MRI measured their brain flow. "What took us by surprise," Phillips noted, "is how much the whole brain transformed in shifting from pleasure to close reading, and in regions far beyond those associated with attention and executive functions."

Look closely at this early data image from researchers at the Digital Humanities & Literary Cognition Lab, in which a participant demonstrates widespread activity across brain regions for close reading, visualized in horizontal slices from the top of the brain to its base. Regions in red represent areas of increased blood flow for all paragraphs of close reading, on average, compared to paragraphs of pleasure reading.

How might Prose use this scientific study to support her argument? How might a reader use it to challenge her argument?



Natalie Phillips

the young reader exposed only to books with banal, simple-minded moral equations as well as to the student encouraged to come up with reductive, wrong-headed readings of multilayered texts.

The narrator of *Caged Bird* is good, her rapist is bad; Scout and Atticus Finch are good, their bigoted neighbors are bad. But the characters in James Alan McPherson's "Gold Coast" are a good deal more lifelike. The cantankerous, bigoted, elderly white janitor and the young African American student, his temporary assistant, who puts up with the janitor's bullshit and is simultaneously cheered and saddened by the knowledge that he's headed for greater success than the janitor will ever achieve, both embody mixtures of admirable and more dubious qualities. In other words, they're more like humans. It's hard to imagine the lesson plans telling students exactly how to feel about these two complex plausible characters.



No one's suggesting that every existing syllabus be shredded; many books on the current lists are great works of art. But why not *tell* the students that, instead of suggesting that Mark Twain be posthumously reprimanded? Why not point out how convincingly he captured the workings of Huck's mind, the inner voice of a kid trying desperately to sew a crazy quilt of self together from the ragged scraps around him? Why not celebrate the accuracy and vigor with which he translated the rhythms of American speech into written language?

In simplifying what a book is allowed to tell us — Twain's novel is wholly about racism and not at all about what it's like to *be* Huck Finn — teachers pretend to spark discussion but actually prevent it. They claim to relate the world of the book to the world of experience, but by concentrating on the student's own history they narrow the world of experience down to the personal and deny students *other* sorts of

experience — the experience of what's in the book, for starters. One reason we read writers from other times or cultures is to confront alternatives — of feeling and sensibility, of history and psyche, of information and ideas. To experience the heartbreaking matter-of-factness with which Anne Frank described her situation seems more useful than packing a paper bag with Game Boys, cigarettes, and CDs so that we can go into hiding and avoid being sent to the camps.

The pleasure of surrender to the world of a book is only one of the pleasures that this new way of reading — and teaching — denies. In blurring the line between reality and fiction (What happened to you that was exactly like what happened to Hester Prynne?), it reduces our respect for imagination, beauty, art, thought, and for the way that the human spirit expresses itself in words.

Writers have no choice but to believe that literature will survive, that it's worth some effort to preserve the most beautiful, meaningful lyrics or narratives, the record of who we were, and are. And if we want our children to begin an extended love affair with reading and with what great writing can do, we *want* them to get an early start — or any start, at all. Teaching students to value literary masterpieces is our best hope of awakening them to the infinite capacities and complexities of human experience, of helping them acknowledge and accept complexity and ambiguity, and of making them love and respect the language that allows us to smuggle out, and send one another, our urgent, eloquent dispatches from the prison of the self.

That may be what writers — and readers — desire. But if it's not occurring, perhaps that's because our culture wants it less urgently than we do. Education, after all, is a process intended to produce a product. So we have to ask ourselves: What sort of product is being produced by the current system? How does it change when certain factors are added to, or removed from, our literature curriculum? And is it really in the best

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Christopher Weyant/The New Yorker Collection/Conde Nast

In paragraph 44, Prose states that “books are among the few remaining forms of entertainment not sustained by, and meant to further, the interests of advertising. Television, newspapers, and magazines are busily instilling us with new desires and previously unsuspected needs, while books sell only themselves.”

To what extent does this cartoon support — or challenge — this claim?

interests of our consumer economy to create a well-educated, smart, highly literate society of fervent readers? Doesn't our epidemic dumbing-down have undeniable advantages for those institutions (the media, the advertising industry, the government) whose interests are better served by a population not trained to read too closely or ask too many questions?

On the most obvious level, it's worth noting that books are among the few remaining forms of entertainment not sustained by, and meant to further, the interests of advertising. Television, newspapers, and magazines are busily instilling us with new desires and previously unsuspected needs, while books sell only themselves. Moreover, the time we spend reading is time spent away from media that have a greater chance of alchemically transmuting attention into money.

But of course what's happening is more complex and subtle than that, more closely connected to how we conceive of the relation

between intellect and spirit. The new-model English-class graduate — the one who has been force-fed the gross oversimplifications proffered by these lesson plans and teaching manuals — values empathy and imagination less than the ability to make quick and irreversible judgments, to entertain and maintain simplistic immovable opinions about guilt and innocence, about the possibilities and limitations of human nature. Less comfortable with the gray areas than with sharply delineated black and white, he or she can work in groups and operate by consensus, and has a resultant, residual distrust for the eccentric, the idiosyncratic, the annoyingly . . . individual.

What I've described is a salable product, tailored to the needs of the economic and political moment. What results from these educational methods is a mode of thinking (or, more accurately, of *not* thinking) that equips our kids for the future: Future McDonald's employees. Future corporate

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Danny Lawson – PA Images/Getty Images

This photograph captures the excitement of Harry Potter readers who are trying to break the Guinness World Record for the Largest Gathering of People Dressed as Harry.

Does evidence of such enthusiasm for the wildly popular series of books support or challenge Prose's main argument? Explain.

board members. Future special prosecutors. Future makers of 100-best-books lists who fondly recall what they first read in high school — and who may not have read anything since. And so the roster of literary masterpieces we pass along to future generations

will continue its downward shift, and those lightweight, mediocre high school favorites will continue to rise, unburdened by gravity, to the top of the list.

[1999]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. Francine Prose states, “Traditionally, the love of reading has been born and nurtured in high school English class” (para. 1). Do you think this is generally the case? Describe your experience on this subject.
2. Prose’s opening paragraph includes such words as *appalled*, *dismal*, and *dreariness* — all with negative connotations. Why does she start out with such strong language? Does she risk putting off readers who do not share her views? Why or why not? What other examples of strongly emotional language do you find in the essay?
3. According to Prose, “To hold up [*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*] as a paradigm of memoir, of thought — of literature — is akin to inviting doctors convicted of malpractice to instruct our medical students” (para. 13). Do you agree with this analogy? Explain your answer. What other examples of figurative language can you find in this essay?
4. Toward the end of the essay (paras. 35, 39, and 43), Prose uses a series of rhetorical questions. What is her purpose in asking one rhetorical question after another?
5. What does Prose mean when she writes, “[B]y concentrating on the student’s own history [teachers] narrow the world of experience down to the personal and deny students *other* sorts of experience — the experience of what’s in the book, for starters” (para. 40)? Do you agree with Prose’s statement? Why or why not?
6. What is Prose implying in the following statement about what she calls the “new-model English-class graduate”: “But of course what’s happening is more complex and subtle than [seeing books as unconnected to advertising], more closely

connected to how we conceive of the relation between intellect and spirit" (para. 45)?

7. According to Prose, why are American high school students learning to loathe literature? Cite at least four or five reasons.
8. What different roles, or personae, does Prose use to establish her ethos in this essay? How would you describe that ethos?
9. Prose makes several key assumptions about the role and impact of reading literary works in high school. What are they?
10. Does Prose propose a solution or recommendations to change this situation? If she does not offer a solution, is her argument weakened? Explain your answer.
11. Prose is highly critical of the quality of both *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. If you have read either book, evaluate her criticism of one or both. Pay particular attention to the quotations she selects; is she setting up a straw man — that is, an argument that can be easily refuted?
12. Prose writes, "Great novels can help us master the all-too-rare skill of tolerating — of being able to hold in mind — ambiguity and contradiction" (para. 37). Select a novel you know well, and explain the "ambiguity and contradiction" at its heart.
13. This essay was written in 1999. Do you think Prose would or could make the same argument today? Why or why not?

Me Talk Pretty One Day

DAVID SEDARIS

David Sedaris (b. 1956) is a Grammy-nominated humorist, essayist, playwright, and frequent contributor to National Public Radio. Six of his essay collections have been best-sellers, including *Naked* (1997), *Holidays on Ice* (1997), *Me Talk Pretty One Day* (2000), *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* (2004), *When You Are Engulfed in Flames* (2008), and *Let's Explore Diabetes with Owls* (2013). He has also published a collection of humorous short stories, *Squirrel Seeks Chipmunk: A Modest Bestiary* (2010), and has been nominated for three Grammy Awards for Best Spoken Word and Best Comedy Album. Sedaris's writing frequently relies on autobiography, satire, and self-effacement to poke fun at the foolishness and foibles of the human condition.

At the age of forty-one, I am returning to school and have to think of myself as what my French textbook calls "a true debutant." After paying my tuition, I was issued a student ID, which allows me a discounted entry fee at movie theaters, puppet shows, and Festyland, a far-flung amusement park that advertises with billboards picturing a cartoon stegosaurus sitting in a canoe and eating what appears to be a ham sandwich.

I've moved to Paris with the hopes of learning the language. My school is an easy ten-minute walk from my apartment, and on the first day of class I arrived early, watching as the returning students greeted one another in the school

lobby. Vacations were recounted, and questions were raised concerning mutual friends with names like Kang and Vlatnya. Regardless of their nationalities, everyone spoke in what sounded to me like excellent French. Some accents were better than others, but the students exhibited an ease and confidence I found intimidating. As an added discomfort, they were all young, attractive, and well dressed, causing me to feel not unlike Pa Kettle¹ trapped backstage after a fashion show.

The first day of class was nerve-racking because I knew I'd be expected to perform. That's the way they do it here — it's everybody into the language pool, sink or swim. The teacher

marched in, deeply tanned from a recent vacation, and proceeded to rattle off a series of administrative announcements. I've spent quite a few summers in Normandy, and I took a month-long French class before leaving New York. I'm not completely in the dark, yet I understood only half of what this woman was saying.

"If you have not *meimslsxp* or *lgpdmurct* by this time, then you should not be in this room. Has everyone *apzkiubjxow*? Everyone? Good, we shall begin." She spread out her lesson plan and sighed, saying, "All right, then, who knows the alphabet?"

It was startling because (a) I hadn't been asked that question in a while and (b) I realized, while laughing, that I myself did *not* know the alphabet. They're the same letters, but in France they're pronounced differently. I know the shape of the alphabet but had no idea what it actually sounded like.

"Ahh." The teacher went to the board and sketched the letter *a*. "Do we have anyone in the room whose first name commences with an *ahh*?"

Two Polish Annas raised their hands, and the teacher instructed them to present themselves by stating their names, nationalities, occupations, and a brief list of things they liked and disliked in this world. The first Anna hailed from an industrial town outside of Warsaw and had front teeth the size of tombstones. She worked as a seamstress, enjoyed quiet times with friends, and hated the mosquito.

"Oh, really," the teacher said. "How very interesting. I thought that everyone loved the mosquito, but here, in front of all the world, you claim to detest him. How is it that we've been blessed with someone as unique and original as you? Tell us, please?"

The seamstress did not understand what was being said but knew that this was an occasion for shame. Her rabbit mouth huffed for breath, and she stared down at her lap as though the

appropriate comeback were stitched somewhere alongside the zipper of her slacks.

The second Anna learned from the first and claimed to love sunshine and detest lies. It sounded like a translation of one of those Playmate of the Month data sheets, the answers always written in the same loopy handwriting: "Turn-ons: Mom's famous five-alarm chili! Turnoffs: insecurity and guys who come on too strong!!!"

The two Polish Annas surely had clear notions of what they loved and hated, but like the rest of us, they were limited in terms of vocabulary, and this made them appear less than sophisticated. The teacher forged on, and we learned that Carlos, the Argentine bandonion player, loved wine, music, and, in his words, "making sex with the womens of the world." Next came a beautiful young Yugoslav who identified herself as an optimist, saying that she loved everything that life had to offer.

The teacher licked her lips, revealing a hint of the saucebox we would later come to know. She crouched low for her attack, placed her hands on the young woman's desk, and leaned close, saying, "Oh yeah? And do you love your little war?"

While the optimist struggled to defend herself, I scrambled to think of an answer to what had obviously become a trick question. How often is one asked what he loves in this world? More to the point, how often is one asked and then publicly ridiculed for his answer? I recalled my mother, flushed with wine, pounding the tabletop late one night, saying, "Love? I love a good steak cooked rare. I love my cat, and I love . . ." My sisters and I leaned forward, waiting to hear our names. "Tums," our mother said. "I love Tums."

The teacher killed some time accusing the Yugoslavian girl of masterminding a program of genocide, and I jotted frantic notes in the margins of my pad. While I can honestly say that I love leafing through medical textbooks devoted to severe dermatological conditions, the hobby is beyond the reach of my French vocabulary, and acting it out would only have invited controversy.

¹ Ma and Pa Kettle were comic film characters from the 1940s to 1950s. They were caricatures of unsophisticated country folk. —Eds.

When called upon, I delivered an effortless list¹⁵ of things that I detest: blood sausage, intestinal pâtés, brain pudding. I'd learned these words the hard way. Having given it some thought, I then declared my love for IBM typewriters, the French word for *bruise*, and my electric floor waxer. It was a short list, but still I managed to mispronounce *IBM* and assign the wrong gender to both the floor waxer and the typewriter. The teacher's reaction led me to believe that these mistakes were capital crimes in the country of France.

"Were you always this *palicmkrexis*?" she asked. "Even a *fiuscrzsa ticiwelmun* knows that a typewriter is feminine."

I absorbed as much of her abuse as I could understand, thinking — but not saying — that I find it ridiculous to assign a gender to an inanimate object incapable of disrobing and making an occasional fool of itself. Why refer to Lady Crack Pipe or Good Sir Dishrag when these things could never live up to all that their sex implied?

The teacher proceeded to belittle everyone from German Eva, who hated laziness, to Japanese Yukari, who loved paintbrushes and soap. Italian, Thai, Dutch, Korean, and Chinese — we all left class foolishly believing that the worst was over. She'd shaken us up a little, but surely that was just an act designed to weed out the deadweight. We didn't know it then, but the coming months would teach us what it was like to spend time in the presence of a wild animal, something completely unpredictable. Her temperament was not based on a series of good and bad days, but, rather, good and bad moments. We soon learned to dodge chalk and protect our heads and stomachs whenever she approached us with a question. She hadn't yet punched anyone, but it seemed wise to protect ourselves against the inevitable.

Though we were forbidden to speak anything but French, the teacher would occasionally use us to practice any of her five fluent languages.

"I hate you," she said to me one afternoon.²⁰ Her English was flawless. "I really, really hate

you." Call me sensitive, but I couldn't help but take it personally.

After being singled out as a lazy *kfdtinvm*, I took to spending four hours a night on my homework, putting in even more time whenever we were assigned an essay. I suppose I could have gotten by with less, but I was determined to create some sort of identity for myself: David the hard worker, David the cut-up. We'd have one of those "complete this sentence" exercises, and I'd fool with the thing for hours, invariably settling on something like "A quick run around the lake? I'd love to! Just give me a moment while I strap on my wooden leg." The teacher, through word and action, conveyed the message that if this was my idea of an identity, she wanted nothing to do with it.

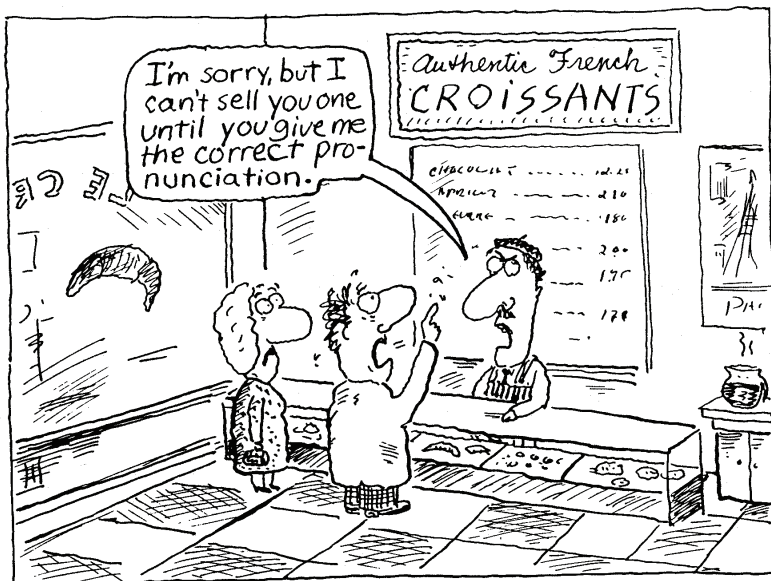
My fear and discomfort crept beyond the borders of the classroom and accompanied me out onto the wide boulevards. Stopping for coffee, asking directions, depositing money in my bank account: these things were out of the question, as they involved having to speak. Before beginning school, there'd been no shutting me up, but now I was convinced that everything I said was wrong. When the phone rang, I ignored it. If someone asked me a question, I pretended to be deaf. I knew my fear was getting the best of me when I started wondering why they don't sell cuts of meat in vending machines.

My only comfort was the knowledge that I was not alone. Huddled in the hallways and making the most of our pathetic French, my fellow students and I engaged in the sort of conversation commonly overheard in refugee camps.

"Sometime me cry alone at night."

"That be common for I, also, but be more²⁵ strong, you. Much work and someday you talk pretty. People start love you soon. Maybe tomorrow, okay."

Unlike the French class I had taken in New York, here there was no sense of competition. When the teacher poked a shy Korean in the eyelid with a freshly sharpened pencil, we took no comfort in the fact that, unlike Hyeyoon Cho, we all knew the irregular past tense of the verb *to*



David Sipress/The New Yorker Collection/Conde Nast

SIPRESS

How has this cartoonist captured the humor that Dave Sedaris uses in “Me Talk Pretty One Day”?

defeat. In all fairness, the teacher hadn’t meant to stab the girl, but neither did she spend much time apologizing, saying only, “Well, you should have been *vkkyo* more *kdeynfulh*.”

Over time it became impossible to believe that any of us would ever improve. Fall arrived and it rained every day, meaning we would now be scolded for the water dripping from our coats and umbrellas. It was mid-October when the teacher singled me out, saying, “Every day spent with you is like having a cesarean section.” And it struck me that, for the first time since arriving in France, I could understand every word that someone was saying.

Understanding doesn’t mean that you can suddenly speak the language. Far from it. It’s a small step, nothing more, yet its rewards are intoxicating and deceptive. The teacher continued her diatribe and I settled back, bathing in the subtle beauty of each new curse and insult.

“You exhaust me with your foolishness and reward my efforts with nothing but pain, do you understand me?”

The world opened up, and it was with great joy that I responded, “I know the thing that you speak exact now. Talk me more, you, plus, please, plus.”

[2000]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. How does David Sedaris establish a humorous tone in the first two paragraphs? What details contribute to this tone?
2. How does Sedaris manage to make us laugh at the other students without seeming to mock or make fun of them? What effect does he achieve by including actual dialogue?
3. How does Sedaris characterize the teacher? Is she intentionally cruel, an effective teacher, an overly strict disciplinarian? Is she portrayed as a stereotype? Refer to specific details and passages from the essay to explain your response.
4. What does Sedaris mean when he writes that “understanding” another language is “a small step,

nothing more, yet its rewards are intoxicating and deceptive” (para. 28)?

5. Sedaris uses both understatement and hyperbole in this essay. Identify two examples of each and explain the effect.
6. Like most humorists, Sedaris makes a serious point through laughter and comedy. What is his point in this essay? Try stating it in one or two sentences.
7. Sedaris describes what for most of us would be a very unusual class — that is, a class in a foreign country with students from all over the world. Yet, for this essay to be funny, it must resonate with us

to some extent. What aspect of the experience of being a student does Sedaris count on as common ground between himself and his readers?

8. In *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, philosopher Henri Bergson writes, “Several have defined man as ‘an animal which laughs.’ They might equally as well have defined him as an animal which is laughed at; for if any other animal, or some lifeless object, produces the same effect, it is always because of some resemblance to man, or the stamp he gives it or the use he puts it to.” Does “Me Talk Pretty One Day” more effectively present people as creatures who laugh or are laughed at?

Why Virtual Classes Can Be Better Than Real Ones

BARBARA OAKLEY

Barbara Oakley (b. 1955) is an educator, writer, and engineer. Originally from Lodi, California, Oakley enlisted in the U.S. Army after high school. The Army sent Oakley to the University of Washington where she completed a BA in Slavic languages and literature. Oakley then rose to the rank of Captain as Signal Officer in Germany. After the Army, she completed a BS in electrical engineering before spending a season as a radio operator at the South Pole Station in Antarctica. In 1998 she received her PhD in systems engineering at Oakland University, where she is now a professor. Oakley’s writing and research covers STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and online learning. Some of her books include *Evil Genes: Why Rome Fell, Hitler Rose, Enron Failed, and My Sister Stole My Mother’s Boyfriend* (2007); *A Mind for Numbers* (2014), which was a New York Times best-selling science book; and most recently, *Mindshift: Break Through Obstacles to Learning and Discover Your Hidden Potential* (2017). Oakley co-created and teaches “Learning How to Learn,” an online course offered through Coursera that has attracted over 1.2 million students. The following essay was published in 2015 in *Nautilus*, a magazine dedicated to exploring the myriad ways in which science connects to everyday life.

I teach one of the world’s most popular MOOCs (massive online open courses), “Learning How to Learn,” with neuroscientist Terrence J. Sejnowski, the Francis Crick Professor at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies. The course draws on neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and education to explain how our brains absorb and process information, so we can all be better students. Since it launched on the website Coursera in August of 2014, nearly 1 million students from over 200 countries have enrolled

in our class. We’ve had cardiologists, engineers, lawyers, linguists, 12-year-olds, and war refugees in Sudan take the course. We get emails like this one that recently arrived: “I’ll keep it short. I’ve recently completed your MOOC and it has already changed my life in ways you cannot imagine. I just turned 29, am in the middle of a career change to computer science, and I’ve never been more excited to learn.”

It’s a wonderful feeling to receive notes like this, as teachers around the world know. As

gratifying as the note is personally, it also speaks for the impact of MOOCs. We all know about the importance of an education system, and how much society could gain if education, particularly for the disadvantaged, were improved. Online courses allow us to scale up those opportunities — a better education at lower cost. Already the numbers are impressive. More than 500 colleges and universities and 200 organizations and institutions offer MOOCs, with a total of 30 million users.

At the same time that “Learning How to Learn” has been one of the most satisfying experiences of my 20 years as a teacher — I am currently a professor of engineering at Oakland University in Michigan — I confess to feeling a little defensive. The success and tremendous educational potential for MOOCs has been dinged by some high-profile articles in the past couple of years. In an article called “Trapped in the Virtual Classroom” in the *New York Review of Books*, David Bromwich, the Sterling Professor of English at Yale University, claimed that the “MOOC movement cooperates with the tendency of mechanization” and “discourages more complex thinking about the content and aims of education.” Some research papers have reported the dropout rate in MOOCs is above 90 percent. And Robert Zemsky, Chair of the Learning Alliance for Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, has written that MOOCs, facing diminishing prospects, “were neither pedagogically nor technically interesting.”

I would venture to say most MOOC deniers have little experience with creating and teaching online courses. The reality is MOOCs can be artistically and technically fascinating and can have terrific pedagogical advantages. This is particularly true in the fraught area of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), where difficult explanations often cry out for a student to replay a portion of a lecture, or simply to take a pause while comprehension works its way to consciousness. As for those dropout rates, Keith Devlin, a mathematician

at Stanford University, has pointed out that some widely cited papers on MOOC attrition have depended on traditional metrics of higher education that are “entirely misleading.” People sign up for MOOCs for different reasons than they do for traditional college classes. “A great many never intend to complete the course,” Devlin writes. They “come looking for an education. Pure and simple.”

With the best MOOCs, students are getting an education that does indeed encourage complex thinking about the goals of education. Online courses can hold students’ attentions, at times better than teachers can. Creating “Learning How to Learn” provided an opportunity to do a “meta” on teaching and learning. Terry and I could use the online medium to help overcome some of the challenges that students experience when facing traditional methods of teaching, and give them insight into the learning process itself.



Chilean recluse spiders are believed to be among the most dangerous recluse spiders. One bite can kill you. Those suckers are big — up to an inch and a half across. They’re also very fast. Imagine you spot a Chilean recluse spider 20 feet in front of you on the floor. Look again — suddenly, it’s two feet in front of you. *That* gets your attention, doesn’t it?

We’re beginning to tease out the neurocircuitry behind why motion — especially looming motion like that of a spider — attracts attention. When looming objects are detected, neurons send a cascade of information to the brain’s amygdala, a processing center of emotions and motivation. Looming is a big deal, phylogenetically speaking — creatures as different as insects, reptiles, birds, and people respond to looming motion.¹

Human brains have evolved with a flitting, fleeting ability to maintain focus on any one thing. Those who kept too fixed a gaze on the wildebeest they were stalking could end up being killed by the lions stalking them. So it shouldn’t

be a surprise to learn that humans may not have been meant to sit boxed up for prolonged periods, focused on a teacher in a classroom. No matter how much we might like or be interested in the material, a lecture is out of tune with how our brains work.

This is a problem for teaching. It sounds heretical to even ask whether teachers help us learn. Our intuition tells us they should. And in fact they do help us learn — the best teachers seem to get inside our heads to intuit just what we need to get that *ah ha!* of initial understanding. They can charm, bedevil, and inspire us to learn well, even when the mountaintop of mastery seems insurmountably high. Clear explanations, inspiration, humor, personal focus on individual pressure points of conceptual misunderstanding — they all help us want to keep moving forward in the sometimes difficult task of learning.

But counterintuitive research has shown that 10 teachers don't seem to help us learn very well. A 1985 paper, "The initial knowledge state of college physics students," by physics professors Ibrahim Abou Halloun and David Hestenes, revealed that when we put physics students in front of a traditional "talk-and-chalk" instructor, those students claw their understanding of physics forward by only a tiny amount — even when the teacher is an award-winner.²

The Halloun and Hestenes paper produced an upheaval in science education. How could it be that traditional methods did such a poor job of educating? As researchers grappled with the implications, they began to test out new and better methods for teaching. Seminal research by physicist Richard Hake and others revealed that interactive engagement in a classroom, including big classrooms with over 100 students, resulted in a marked improvement of knowledge gained in a semester, compared to more traditional "sage on the stage" approaches.³ Maintaining students' attention can be improved, it seems, by allowing them to talk and work interactively with one another.

Many college classrooms have shifted to this approach. A meta-analysis by Scott Freeman and his colleagues in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* revealed that "active" learning produces such an improvement in science, engineering, and math classrooms that it is almost pedagogical malpractice not to use it.⁴ But learning can't all be interaction. Sometimes the more the interaction, the slower the progress. Usually, proponents of active learning (I'm one of them; I coauthored a 2004 paper on the subject) suggest that a good approach to teaching provides a balance of explanation time by the instructor coupled with "active" time, where students are able to grapple with the material themselves, often while interacting with teammates.⁵

The resolution to the paradox about the value of teachers lies, it seems, in the context of the researchers' studies. Private tutoring can naturally hold a student's attention by not only giving clear explanations, but by switching things up, asking questions, and taking short breaks as needed. In the traditional talk-and-chalk larger classrooms that Halloun and Hestenes were investigating, even the best teachers couldn't help but become boring as a lengthy college class among a herd of other students dragged on.

These findings point toward the flitting nature of our brains — driven much more than we might like to admit by elusive, unconscious factors. Our inability to maintain focus for lengthy periods of time, coupled with our need to try things out for ourselves and talk things out with others, reduces our ability to make the best use of teachers who teach in traditional sage-on-the-stage form.

With the advent of the Internet, an even newer 15 approach to teaching has been the "flipped" classroom. In this approach, professors are recorded on video so they can be viewed at home, helping to synthesize and bring key ideas to life. Class time is then taken up with answering questions

and with collaborative interactions: solving problems, discussing issues and concepts in teams, and working out the misunderstandings that have arisen during the preliminary solitary study. These types of personal interactions are where the teacher, and other students, are both invaluable.

The development of the flipped class has led to MOOCs as the next important frontier in education.



Perhaps my biggest asset to creating “Learning How to Learn” was that I had been a terrible student. I flunked my way through elementary, middle, and high school math and science. Remedial math didn’t even hit my playbook until age 26, after I’d gotten out of the military. (Poor job prospects can be a great motivator for career change.) I couldn’t learn well by listening to lectures — in class, virtually everything but the professor was a shiny object of glorious distraction for me. The only way I could ultimately be successful was to become a classroom stenographer — later studying the notes at my own pace and in my own way.

As I started to learn math as an adult, I was often terribly frustrated by the material — sometimes I felt that textbooks and professors ganged up to present matters in the most arcane

way possible. Whenever some professor with a near lifetime experience with Fourier and Laplace transforms would say something like, “Of course, it’s intuitively obvious that . . .” I’d get a shiver, because I knew it wouldn’t be intuitively obvious to *me*. I’m not a quick study — it would often take me a long time to see that what I was looking at was actually very simple.

Terry and I created “Learning How to Learn” to get students to grasp that simplicity themselves. We wanted to incorporate some of the advantages of face-to-face tutoring with recent lessons from video game makers and TV. From the fast pace of *Grand Theft Auto* to money flying in a dryer in *Breaking Bad*, motion is an important aspect of reaching deep into viewers’ subconscious to get a lock on their attention.

In “Learning How to Learn,” we make assiduous use of motion. Using green screen, I can suddenly pop from one side of the screen to another. Or I can loom from full standing to a close up of my face. Or, as I laugh on the side of the screen, I can speed up the onscreen picture-in-picture video of my daughter ineptly backing the family car off the driveway and onto the lawn — a living example of what can happen when procedural fluency hasn’t been acquired. It’s all video trickery, of course, but it works to keep students’ attentions.

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Claudio Muñoz/The Economist

Does this cartoon support or challenge Oakley’s claim that MOOCs are “the next important frontier in education” (para. 16)? Explain.

In fact, one of the tricks used by many of the past greats in science has been to imagine themselves transported into what they're trying to understand. Einstein famously imagined himself chasing a beam of light to help him formulate theories of relativity. Nobel Prize winner Barbara McClintock imagined herself in the realm of the "jumping genes" she became famous for discovering. We can help our students to develop the same sort of intuition as these Nobel Prize winners by bringing objects to life in video in a way that's virtually impossible to do in a classroom. We can walk into the mitochondria of a cell, or the ionic interaction that sparks an aurora, or the spiraling epiphany of Euler's equation.

A technology often used in current "in person" classroom instruction is to have a PowerPoint slide on the screen while the instructor stands to the side. Mimicking this approach in video format, we often see a small talking head in the corner of the screen (which is basically, because of its limited range of motion, like a still image), while the main image — whether it's a piccolo or a Picasso — is enlarged and discussed on another part of the screen.

But this "two image" approach actually increases a learner's cognitive load. With two separate images on the screen, you've got to process two different things at once. However, green-screen technology can allow a professor to appear to walk around a digitally upsized Greek vase that's the same size as she. In a biology video, the professor can point to life-sized structures of the cell. In engineering, she can point to the counter flow aspects of a heat exchanger. This cinematic joining of professor and object-under-discussion into one image reduces cognitive load and focuses students' attention on important details — even when, in real life, those details are small. All this has a big effect in making it easier for students to grasp key ideas.

Metaphors and analogies are just as important to learning as reducing the cognitive load. A theory called "neural reuse" posits that we seem to often use the same neural circuits to understand a metaphor or analogy as we do to understand

the underlying process itself.⁶ When we use water flow as an analogy for electron flow, or the idea of a stalker who creeps ever closer to help us understand the concept of limits in calculus, we're calling into play the same neural circuits that underpin our ability to understand those abstract concepts. Science, engineering, and math professors can be a bit snooty about dumbing down their material through sometimes silly analogies. These types of pedagogical tools are extraordinarily valuable — they serve as intellectual on-ramps to get students on board with complex ideas more quickly by using pre-existing neural circuitry.

Good online courses make students feel professors are speaking directly to them. A teacher's direct focus on the camera translates as personal attention in the videos. Students develop a sense of familiarity; we are often seen as friendly private tutors. It makes us more approachable and "listen-to-able." It's not that we're replacing teachers in a classroom. It's that we serve as additional personalized resources, despite the fact that we're explaining at massive scales. And I should mention that every single video lecture I give in our MOOC is the *best* lecture on that topic I've ever given in my life.

Online classes make enhanced quizzing available. Testing, as it turns out, is one of the best ways we can learn.⁷ Tests at key points in videos, and dozens of carefully created alternative quiz questions at the end of each module, can do a lot to improve students' understanding of the materials. Educators sometimes point to research from physics showing that students don't really learn from careful explanations — they learn from making mistakes. But physics, unlike most subjects, is rife with pre-existing misconceptions that induce students to skip past explanations because they think they already understand — a stuck-in-a-rut mindset known as "Einstellung."⁸ Mistakes in the frequent low-stakes quiz questions available online can force students in physics — or any other subject — to revisit the explanation.

So online videos allow students to do what their brains are naturally geared for — first focusing,

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then replaying the toughest parts of what they're trying to learn, then taking a little break. They can quiz themselves, or I can quiz them. They can stop the video and stare into the distance, thinking away until all of a sudden, it clicks. They can touch base on the discussion forums with a friend in Zimbabwe or Chile. Much of this is impossible to do in a conventional 2-hour class period. (Have you ever tried to follow 10 fully worked out examples of Bayes Theorem in a 2-hour class period?)

Not all MOOCs are fabulous. But with their increasing diversity and quality, what MOOCs offer students — those enrolled in colleges and those not — is choice. Students can sample a wealth of subjects and classes, and if they are not sparked, move on. And MOOCs alone aren't the answer to improved education. That will come from a variety of sources: MOOCs, resources developed by textbook companies, and teachers themselves. Online assets will not serve as a replacement for in-person instructors — rather, they'll serve as assets, providing high-quality personalized tutoring and great testing materials with rapid grading.

Terry and I made "Learning How to Learn" for less than \$5,000, and largely in my basement. I had no previous film editing experience — in fact, I could barely click a camera shutter. Much of the moving imagery for the course was created using simple PowerPoint slides. So I would issue a challenge to MOOC critics. Make your own online course. Film the most interesting, most insightful lecture you've ever given in your life. If you don't think your lecture is good enough, reshoot it until you're

happy. Make your video available for millions of students around the world, not just the privileged few in your classes. Come up with questions for a quiz on the mistakes you most commonly see in your classes. You will learn more than you know about the outreach and capabilities of MOOCs. More importantly, you will exemplify a wonderful openness for learning to students everywhere.

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[2015]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. What is the irony in the title of this article? Do you find it funny, powerful, caustic, confusing, attention-getting, a combination of these, or something else entirely? Explain your response.
2. Barbara Oakley is currently a professor of engineering who is co-teaching a massive online

open course (MOOC), so part of her ethos is automatic: she's a credible academic. In what other ways does she establish her ethos with her readers? Does her use of informal language — e.g., "dinged" (para. 3), "[t]hose suckers are big" (para. 6); "flunked" (para. 17) — undermine her ethos

or add a dimension to it? Cite specific passages in your analysis, and pay close attention to the Reference list at the end of Oakley's essay.

3. What are two counterarguments that Oakley discusses? How effectively does she refute them? How does she use her refutation to build or qualify her own argument?
4. What evidence does Oakley provide to support her assertion that students in a good MOOC "are getting an education that does indeed encourage complex thinking about the goals of education" (para. 5)? You may wish to include a discussion of the "flipped" classroom in your response.
5. What does Oakley believe is "the paradox about the value of teachers" (para. 13)? How does this "paradox" relate to the argument she develops about MOOCs and online education in general?
6. More than halfway through her argument, Oakley brings in her personal experience of being "a terrible student" (para. 17). What effect does her narrative have on the argument? What different responses might her various audiences have, depending upon their own experiences?
7. In paragraph 8, Oakley refers to the brain's "flitting, fleeting ability to maintain focus," a concept she returns to throughout the essay. In what ways is this a key point in her argument? How is her example of the Chilean recluse spider part of this reasoning? How does her championing of video instruction relate to this point?
8. How does Oakley support her assertion that metaphors and analogies are key strategies for effective learning? In your eyes, how successfully does she make the case that such strategies are more useful and/or accessible in an online environment than in a face-to-face classroom?
9. By the end of the essay, it seems clear that Oakley's intended audience — particularly other teachers and scientists — are skeptics of online learning. What assumptions does she make about their chief concerns? How effectively does she reassure them and invite them to try developing an online course or course component?
10. At the very end of the essay, Oakley brings up the issue of cost. Is this an effective placement, given her audience, or would it have been better to raise the topic earlier? Why or why not?
11. To what extent do you think that Oakley proves her thesis: "Online courses allow us to scale up those opportunities — a better education at lower cost" (para. 2)? To support your viewpoint, cite specifics from her argument, draw from your own experience if you've engaged in online learning (formally or informally), and conduct some independent research.

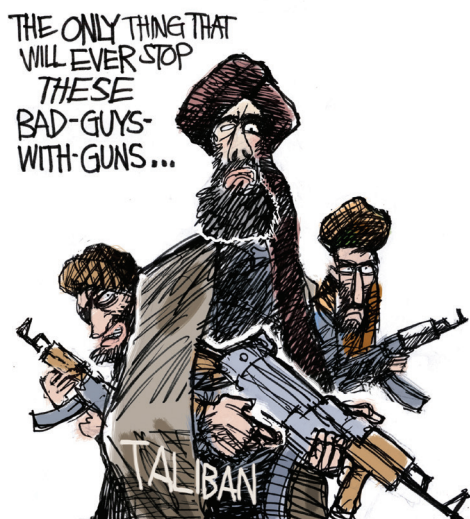
My Friend, the Former Muslim Extremist

NICHOLAS KRISTOF

Nicholas Kristof (b. 1959) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning American journalist best known for the opinion column he has written for the *New York Times* since 2001. Kristof grew up in Oregon and, after studying government at Harvard University, went on to study law at Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. In 1990, he and his wife Sheryl WuDunn earned a Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting for their coverage of the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests of 1989, and in 2006 Kristof won a Pulitzer for his coverage of genocide in Darfur. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn have also co-authored several best-selling books, including *Thunder from the East: Portrait of a Rising Asia* (1999), *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (2009), and *A Path Appears: Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity* (2014). The following op-ed column appeared in a 2016 issue of the *New York Times*.

WHENEVER a Muslim carries out a terror attack in the West, the question arises: *Why do they hate us?*

Provocative answers come from my friend Rafiullah Kakar, who has lived a more astonishing life than almost anyone I know. Rafi is a young



IS NOT A GUN.



How might Nicholas Kristof use this cartoon of the Nobel Peace Prize Winner Malala to support one of the points he makes in his article?

Pakistani who used to hate the United States and support the Taliban. His brother joined the Taliban for a time, but now I worry that the Taliban might try to kill Rafi — ah, but I’m getting ahead of myself.

One of 13 children, Rafi is a Pashtun¹ who grew up in a mud home close to the Afghan border, in an area notorious for tribal feuds and violent clashes. His parents are illiterate farmers, and it looked as if Rafi’s education would end in the fifth grade, when he was sent to a madrasa. His mom wanted him to become a hafiz, someone who has memorized the entire Quran.

“One reason people send kids to madrasa² is that a hafiz can get to paradise and take 10 other people along,” Rafi notes, explaining a local belief about getting to heaven. “My mother wanted me to be a hafiz, so I could be her ticket to paradise.”

Ultimately, Rafi’s life was transformed because his eldest brother, Akhtar, pinched pennies and sent Rafi to the best public school in the family’s home province, Balochistan. Rafi had an outstanding mind and rocketed to the top of his class. But he also fell under the spell of political Islam.

A charismatic Islamic studies teacher turned Rafi into a Taliban sympathizer who despised the West.

“I subscribed to conspiracy theories that 9/11 was done by the Americans themselves, that there were 4,000 Jews who were absent from work that day,” Rafi recalls. “I thought the Taliban were freedom fighters.”

I’ve often written about education as an antidote to extremism. But in Pakistan, it was high school that radicalized Rafi. “Education can be a problem,” Rafi says dryly.

He’s right. It’s possible to be too glib about the impact of education: Osama bin Laden was an engineer. Ayman al-Zawahri, the current leader of Al Qaeda, is a trilingual surgeon. Rafi notes that Pakistani doctors or engineers are sometimes extremists because in that country’s specialized education system they gain the confidence of a university degree without the critical thinking that (ideally) comes from an acquaintance with the liberal arts.

Donor countries should support education, Rafi says, but pay far more attention to the curriculum. I think he’s right, and we should also put more pressure on countries like Saudi Arabia to stop financing extremist madrasas in poor countries in Africa and Asia.

¹A member of a community from southern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan. —Eds.

²An Arabic term meaning “school.” —Eds.



Ton Koene/AP Images

This photograph shows a boy at a Pakistani madrasa wearing an Osama bin Laden t-shirt.

How might Rafiullah Kakar respond to him if the two met?

We should also invest in girls' education, for it changes entire societies. Educated women have fewer children, which reduces the youth bulge in a population — one of the factors that correlates most strongly to terrorism and war. And educating girls changes boys. Ones like Rafi. 10

When Rafi attended college in the city of Lahore, he encountered educated women for the first time. Previously, he had assumed that girls have second-rate minds, and that educated women have loose morals.

"I'd never interacted with a woman," he said. "Then in college there were these talented, outspoken women in class. It was a shock." It was part of an intellectual journey that led Rafi to become a passionate advocate for girls' education, including in his own family. His oldest sisters are illiterate, but his youngest sister is bound for college.

Rafi won a Fulbright scholarship to study at Augustana College in South Dakota, an experience that left him more understanding of the United States, though still exasperated at many American policies. After college he won a Rhodes scholarship, and last year he completed graduate studies at Oxford.

He's now in London, writing for Pakistani newspapers, and he plans to return to Pakistan to start a boarding school for poor children in Balochistan, and ultimately to enter politics — if the Taliban don't get him on a return trip to his village.

Today Rafi is a voice against the Taliban, against conspiracy theories and against blind anti-Americanism, in part because the United States did not take Donald Trump's advice to ban Muslims. Extremist American voices like Trump's, Rafi says, empower extremist voices throughout the Islamic world. 15

"It's people like Donald Trump who are put forward by the extremists back home," Rafi told me. "It pours cold water on us."

To fight Islamic terrorism, the West spends billions of dollars on drones, missiles and foreign bases. Yet we neglect education and the empowerment of women, which if done right can be even more transformative. The trade-offs are striking: For the cost of deploying one soldier for a year, we could start more than 20 schools.

Rafi teaches us that a book can be a more powerful force against extremism than a drone. But it has to be the right book!

[2016]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. Nicholas Kristof begins by asking a question — “Why do they hate us?” — referring to Muslim terrorists (para. 1). How effective is this opening strategy? To what extent does Kristof answer this question in this piece?
2. In the course of relaying Rafi’s education to the audience, Kristof discusses both positive and negative results. What are they? What brought about a change in Rafi’s attitude?
3. While he is telling Rafi’s story, Kristof raises a number of larger issues. What are they? How does he relate these issues to Rafi’s situation, and what effect does this have on his main argument?
4. Narrative — that is, storytelling — is Kristof’s central rhetorical strategy in this column. What point is he making by telling us the story of Rafiullah Kakar? To what extent do you find Rafi’s story compelling as evidence?
5. Readers of the *New York Times*, where this column was published, know Kristof as someone who often writes about international affairs and education. Does his reference to “my friend” Rafi (in both the title and the article itself) add to or undermine his ethos? Explain your response.
6. What does Kristof mean in his closing when he says that “Rafi teaches us that a book can be a more powerful force against extremism than a drone”? Why does he add “[b]ut it has to be the right book!” (para. 18) and how does that idea contribute to his central argument?
7. How does the language Kristof uses to describe Rafi emphasize his admiration of this young man? Cite specific examples to support your response.
8. Although this column received largely positive responses in social media, one thread of criticism that surfaced in its wake holds that Kristof oversimplifies the transformation from poverty to radicalism to educational success story. Do you think this is a fair criticism? Why or why not?

What Is Education For?

DANIELLE ALLEN

Danielle Allen (b. 1971) is an award-winning classicist and political scientist who studied classics as an undergraduate at Princeton and went on to earn doctorates from both the University of Cambridge and Harvard University. Allen is currently Director of the Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics and professor of government and education at Harvard. She is the author of six books, including *The World of Prometheus: The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens* (2000), *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship Since Brown v. the Board of Education* (2004), and most recently, *Education and Equality* (2016). For her unique blend of classics and political science scholarship, Allen was named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow in 2001. In 2016, she became a James Bryant Conant University Professor, the highest faculty honor at Harvard. In the following article, published in the *Boston Review* in 2016, Allen discusses how the concept of citizenship relates to what she sees as the dominant paradigm, or worldview, on education policy in America.

In 2006, the highest court in New York affirmed that students in the state have a right to civic education. It was a decision thirteen years in the making, and it spoke to a fundamental question: What is an education for? Lawyers representing

the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE), which brought suit, argued that the purpose of education is to develop not only vocational capacities, but also civic agency. Students, in other words, are entitled to learn in public schools the “basic

literacy, calculating, and verbal skills necessary to enable children to eventually function productively as civic participants capable of voting and serving on a jury.”

The state, in the position of defendant, did not disagree with the need for civic education. But it argued that once students had completed eighth grade, the public schools had met their responsibility to enable children “to eventually function productively as civic participants.” Not coincidentally, the state argued that this education level was adequate preparation for minimum-wage labor.

CFE disagreed, arguing that the standard should be set higher. “Capable” civic participation, Judge Leland DeGrasse finally ruled, includes, for instance, the ability to make sense of complex ballot propositions and follow argumentation about DNA evidence at trial. The court agreed that “meaningful civic participation” and prospects for “competitive employment,” not simply minimum-wage employment, demanded a twelfth-grade level of verbal and math skills and similarly advanced competence in social studies and economics. The court ordered New York City to increase school funding with these goals in mind.

In part because of the Great Recession, the state and city failed to deliver, and a new lawsuit is underway. But the economic downturn cannot be blamed for the fact that citizenship remains effectively absent from discussions of education policy, not only in New York but also generally. The dominant policy paradigm attends almost exclusively to education’s vocational purpose: the goal is to ensure that young people, and society generally, can compete in a global economy. This view is tightly connected to a technocratic economic policy that focuses on the dissemination of skills as a way to reduce inequality in a technology-dependent economy. The result has been massively increased investment in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education — STEM — and correspondingly reduced outlays for the humanities.

Yet this is not the only possible response to contemporary inequalities. As economists such as Dani Rodrik have pointed out, gross economic inequalities do not result from an inexorable forward march of technology or globalization or from the nature of markets. They are products of policy choices, which are themselves the outcome of politics. “Inequality,” as Joseph Stiglitz argues in *Rewriting the Rules of the American Economy* (2015), “has been a choice.” Achieving an economy with more egalitarian outcomes will require different political choices and economic policies. It will require that we choose different rules to govern labor, housing, and financial markets.

Where does education enter the picture?
At the most fundamental level.

When we think about education and equality, we tend to think first about distributive questions — for example, how to design a system that will offer the real possibility of equal educational attainment, if not achievement, to all students. The vocational approach imagines that this equal attainment will translate into a wider distribution of skills, which will reduce income inequality.

The civic conception of education suggests a very different way to understand the link between education and equality. This understanding begins with the recognition that fair economic outcomes are aided by a robust democratic process and, therefore, by genuine political equality. Thus an education focused not merely on technical skills, but also on what I call *participatory readiness*, provides a distinct and better way to promote equality through schooling.

Moreover, the aspiration to educate for civic participation and not merely work has important distributive implications. The participatory paradigm demands a higher educational standard than the vocational, and meeting that standard requires that more resources be allocated for schools.

It should not be necessary to argue for a vigorous public commitment to civic education

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in our society. The vast majority of state constitutions include a right to education tied either explicitly or through legislative history to a civic purpose. In addition, as scholar and litigator Michael Rebell writes, twenty-four state courts “have explicitly held that preparation for capable citizenship is a primary purpose of public education, and no state court has disputed this proposition.”

And yet, the argument for civic education is now indispensable. To see why, we should begin by exploring more deeply how the vocational paradigm arose and why it can neither vindicate our rights nor overcome the challenge of inequality.

Equality and the Vocational Paradigm

The language of work and global competitiveness did not always dominate public conversations about education. Its recent ascendancy can be traced to 1957. The Soviet launch of Sputnik, the first satellite, provoked a sense that the United States was falling behind in a Cold War scientific contest. The response was the National Defense Education Act, signed into law in 1958, which increased funding for science and math education, as well as vocational training. The 1983 Reagan administration report *A Nation at Risk* deepened the country’s anxiety: “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war,” reads one provocative sentence. Although its data were later debunked, *A Nation at Risk* is generally understood to have kicked off the era of school reform that currently shapes education discussion and policy. Tellingly, the commission that produced the report held hearings on “Science, Mathematics, and Technology Education” and “Education for a Productive Role in a Productive Society,” but none concerning the humanities, social sciences, or civic education.

By 2007, when the National Academy of Sciences’ *Rising above the Gathering Storm* again emphasized the need for significant

improvements in science and technology education, these disciplines had already been consolidated under the umbrella of STEM, a concept that has been employed with equal gusto by education reformers and politicians. “An educated, innovative, motivated workforce — human capital — is the most precious resource of any country in this new, flat world,” the report asserts. “Yet there is widespread concern about our K-12 science and mathematics education system, the foundation of that human capital in today’s global economy.”

Consensus thus emerged in the 1980s around vocational education’s essential role in global economic competitiveness. At the same time, economists drew closer connections between education and inequality. By the early 1990s, economists had identified technological change, which biased available jobs toward high-skilled workers, as the primary culprit. It was a short step from this diagnosis to the argument that education was the remedy. That was the lesson of Claudia Goldin and Larry Katz’s important book on *The Race between Education and Technology* (2008). In *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014), French economist Thomas Piketty writes, “Historical experience suggests that the principal mechanism for convergence [of incomes and wealth] at the international as well as the domestic level is the diffusion of knowledge. In other words, the poor catch up with the rich to the extent that they achieve the same level of technological know-how, skill, and education.” Broad dissemination of skills is expected to drive down the wage premium on expertise and compress the income distribution. To the degree that Piketty’s recommendations turn to educational policy, he focuses on access. When he considers curriculum, he is explicit only about vocational goals. Thus he argues that educational institutions should be made broadly accessible; elite institutions, which serve mainly privileged youth from the highest income brackets, should draw students from other backgrounds; schools

should be run efficiently; and states should increase investment in “high-quality professional training.”

Such arguments from economists — that vocationalism generally and STEM in particular are the solutions both for inequality and for America’s ostensibly precarious global economic standing — have been widely adopted at the highest levels of government. President Obama, in his 2013 State of the Union address, announced a competition to “redesign America’s high schools.” Rewards would go, he said, to schools that develop more classes “that focus on science, technology, engineering, and math — the skills today’s employers are looking for to fill jobs right now and in the future.” More recently, in his 2016 State of the Union address, the president announced a Computer Science for All initiative that would make students “job-ready on day one.”

Today, these technologically oriented, vocational approaches to education and the problem of inequality leave almost no room for the civic alternative. It is not that civic education is incompatible with professional training, but policymakers, education specialists, and many parents — including low-income parents, whose children are most likely to see their civic education shortchanged — have narrowed their focus exclusively to the economic field. In the process, they have lost sight of the full range of inequalities from which our society suffers and which well-rounded education could alleviate.

Equality and the Participatory Paradigm

When we invoke the concept of equality in conversations about education, we generally don’t bother to define it or to identify which concept of equality pertains. Is it political equality that concerns us? Social equality? Or economic equality only?

The technology-based analysis of inequality and the vocational paradigm focuses specifically on economic equality. Questions of political equality have no place in this picture. Indeed, the purely technocratic treatment of income and

wealth inequality as problems of technology to be solved through the dissemination of skills is blind precisely to politics.

This is shortsighted because economic inequality is an outgrowth of politics. “Today’s world economy is the product of explicit decisions that governments had made in the past,” Rodrik writes. “It was the choice of governments to loosen regulations on finance and aim for full cross-border capital mobility, just as it was a choice to maintain these policies largely intact, despite a massive global financial crisis.” Or, as Daron Acemoglu and Jim Robinson argue, “It is the institutions and the political equilibrium of a society that determine how technology evolves, how markets function, and how the gains from various different economic arrangements are distributed.”

Piketty agrees that the wage premium on skill can explain only part of growing U.S. income inequality: political forces shape distributive outcomes, and there are limits to how much the advantages of education can be moderated through the dissemination of technological skills. Income growth at the highest end, accruing to what he calls “supermanagers,” reflects social acceptance of sky-high executive pay. In his argument, such social norms constitute and reinforce a political ideology endorsing “hypermeritocracy.” Reining in income inequality therefore requires not only the dissemination of skill but also social and political change. If political choices determine the rules that shape distributive patterns, it makes sense to focus first on political, not economic, equality. And if we choose political equality as our orienting ideal — empowering all to participate capably in the life of a polity — a different view of education’s purpose, content, and consequence comes into view.

In an important 2006 paper, “Why Does Democracy Need Education?” economists Edward L. Glaeser, Giacomo Ponzetto, and Andrei Shleifer argue that education is a causal

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force behind democracy. Specifically, they point to the relationship between education and participation, considering three hypotheses for why the former might be a source of the latter: through indoctrination, through the cultivation of skills that facilitate participation (reading and writing and “soft skills” of collaboration and interaction), and through the increased material benefits of participation. (On the last, the idea is that education increases income, and participation correlates to socioeconomic status.) The authors reject the first and third hypotheses in favor of the second. Education, they argue, fosters participation because it prepares people for democratic engagement. Reading, writing, and collaboration are, after all, the basic instruments of political action.

An education that prepares every student for civic and political engagement not only supports political equality but may also lead to increased economic fairness. As Acemoglu and Robinson argue, the expansion of political participation drove egalitarian economic reforms in Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States in the early twentieth. We are currently seeing a resurgence of participation on both the right and left. These movements, dubbed populist by many commentators, are putting issues of distributive justice on the agenda once again.

This resurgence increases the stakes for participatory readiness. It also raises the question of how best to prepare students for their lives as civic agents. While the technological view of the link between education and equality reinforces a vocational approach to curriculum and pedagogy, a participatory view demands a renewed focus on the humanities and social sciences.

Participatory Readiness

So what exactly is participatory readiness, and how can education help people achieve it? To answer these questions, we first need to understand what students should be getting ready for: civic agency. While there is no single model of

civic agency dominant in American culture, we can identify a handful at work.

Following philosopher Hannah Arendt,¹ I take citizenship to be the activity of co-creating a way of life, of world-building. This co-creation can occur at many social levels: in a neighborhood or school; in a networked community or association; in a city, state, or nation; at a global scale. Because co-creation extends beyond legal categories of membership in political units, I prefer to speak of civic agency instead of citizenship.

Such civic agency involves three core tasks. First is disinterested deliberation around a public problem. Here the model derives from Athenian citizens gathered in the assembly, the town halls of colonial New Hampshire, and public representatives behaving reasonably in the halls of a legislature. Second is prophetic work intended to shift a society’s values; in the public opinion and communications literature, this is now called “frame shifting.” Think of the rhetorical power of nineteenth-century abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe, of Martin Luther King, Jr., or of Occupy Wall Street activists with their rallying cry of “we are the 99 percent.” Finally, there is transparently interested “fair fighting,” where a given public actor adopts a cause and pursues it passionately. One might think of early women’s rights activists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage.

The ideal civic agent carries out all three of these tasks — disinterested deliberation, prophetic frame shifting, and fair fighting — ethically and justly. Stanton is an example of this ideal at work. At the Seneca Falls Convention,² she was in

¹A prominent twentieth-century political philosopher, Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) was born in Germany but fled after being imprisoned by the Gestapo in 1933. She eventually became a U.S. citizen. Her work primarily explores how democracy, totalitarianism, and authoritarianism function. —Eds.

²The first women’s rights convention, which took place in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. —Eds.

deliberative mode for the debate about the text of the Declaration of Sentiments.³ However, before the convention's deliberations, when she drafted that text, she was in the prophetic mode, just as she was in her innumerable speeches. Finally, in campaigning for legal change, as in the adoption of the Woman's Property Bill⁴ in New York and similar laws in other states, she was operating as an activist.

Yet if these three are the rudimentary components of civic agency, they do not in themselves determine the content of any given historical moment's conception of citizenship. There is no need for each of these functions to be combined in a single role or persona, nor is there any guarantee that all three will be carried out in each historical context. These tasks can also become separated from one another, generating distinguishable kinds of civic roles. This is the situation today, as roles have been divided among civically engaged individuals, activists or political entrepreneurs, and professional politicians.

The civically engaged individual focuses on the task of disinterested deliberation and actions that can be said to flow from it. Such citizens pursue what they perceive to be universal values, critical thinking, and bipartisan projects. Next comes the activist, who seeks to change hearts and minds by fighting fairly for particular outcomes, often making considerable sacrifices to do so. Finally, the professional politician, as currently conceived, focuses mainly on fighting, not necessarily fairly. In contemporary discourse, this role, in contrast to the other two, represents a degraded form of civic agency; for evidence one has only to look at Congress's all-time-low approval ratings.

³A document modeled on the Declaration of Independence written primarily by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and signed in 1848 by one hundred attendees of the Seneca Falls Convention. —Eds.

⁴A collection of laws that allowed women to own property, work for an income, and participate in business matters independently of a husband. —Eds.

In the current condition, we have lost sight of the statesman, a professional politician capable of disinterested deliberation, just frame shifting, and fighting fair. And, even more importantly, we have lost sight of the ideal ordinary citizen, who is not a professional politician but who has nonetheless developed all of the competencies described above and who is proud to be involved in politics.

If we are to embrace an education for participatory readiness, we need to aim our pedagogic and curricular work not at any one of these three capacities but at what lies behind all of them: the idea of civic agency as the activity of co-creating a way of life. This view of politics supports all three models of citizenship because it nourishes future civic leaders, activists, and politicians. Such an education ought also to permit a reintegration of these roles.

The United States has a history of providing such an education: it is called the liberal arts. How, you may ask, can the seemingly antique liberal arts be of use in our mass democracies and globalized, multicultural world? Let us consider where we find ourselves and how we got here.

Science, technology, engineering, math, and medicine have done much to create the contemporary condition. Thanks to the industrial, aeronautical, biomedical, and digital revolutions, the world's population has grown from one to seven billion in little more than 200 years, a profound historical transformation. We surely need the STEM fields to navigate this new landscape. But if the STEM fields gave us the mass in "mass democracy," the humanities and social sciences gave us the democracy.

The Europeans and American colonists who designed systems of representative democracy capable of achieving continental scale — while employing genocidal techniques in the process — were broadly and deeply educated in history, geography, philosophy, literature, and art. The pithiest summary of the intellectual demands of democratic citizenship that I know appears

in the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence, especially the final clause:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness — That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed; *that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.*

This final clause summarizes the central intellectual labor of the democratic citizen. Citizens must judge whether their governments meet their responsibility, spelled out earlier in the sentence, to secure rights. If a government fails in its core purposes, it is the job of the citizen to figure this out and decide how to change direction. This requires diagnosing social circumstances and making judgments about grounding principles for the political order and about possible alternatives to the formal organization of state power. Properly conducted, the citizen's intellectual labor should result in a probabilistic judgment answering this critical question: What combination of principle and organizational form is most likely to secure collective safety and happiness?

To make judgments about the course of human events and our government's role in them, we need history, anthropology, cultural studies, economics, political science, sociology, and psychology, not to mention math — especially the statistical reasoning necessary for probabilistic judgment — and science, as governmental policy naturally intersects with scientific questions. If we are to decide on the core principles that should orient our judgments about what will bring about safety

and happiness, surely we need philosophy, literature, and religion or its history. Then, since the democratic citizen does not make or execute judgments alone, we need the arts of conversation, eloquence, and prophetic speech. Preparing ourselves to exercise these arts takes us again to literature and to the visual arts, film, and music.

In other words, we need the liberal arts. They were called the free person's arts for a reason.

To say that we need all these disciplines in order to cultivate participatory readiness is not to say that we need precisely the versions of these disciplines that existed in the late eighteenth century. To the contrary, it is the job of today's scholars and teachers, learning from the successes and errors of our predecessors, to build the most powerful intellectual tools we can. Where their versions of the tools were compatible with preserving patriarchy, enslaving black Africans, and committing genocide against indigenous peoples, ours must not be. This revision of the liberal arts curriculum is controversial but necessary, for we want to retain the purposes and intellectual methods of the liberal arts, if not all of its content. We still need to cultivate capacities for social diagnosis, ethical reasoning, cause-and-effect analysis, and persuasive argumentation.

Given that the liberal arts are especially useful for training citizens, it should come as little surprise that attainment in the humanities and social sciences appears to correlate with increased engagement in politics. There is a statistically significant difference between the rates of political participation among humanities and STEM graduates. Data from the Department of Education reveal that, among 2008 college graduates, 92.8 percent of humanities majors have voted at least once since finishing school. Among STEM majors, that number is 83.5 percent. And, within ten years of graduation, 44.1 percent of 1993 humanities graduates had written to public officials, compared to 30.1 percent of STEM majors. As college graduates, the students are generally of

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similar socioeconomic backgrounds, suggesting that other distinctions must account for the difference in political engagement.

Of course, the self-selection of students into the humanities and STEM majors may mean that these data reflect only underlying features of the students rather than the effects of teaching they receive. Yet the same pattern appears in a study by political scientist Sunshine Hillygus, which controls for students' preexisting levels of interest in politics.

Hillygus also finds that the differences in political engagement among college graduates are mirrored in K-12 education. High SAT verbal scores correlate with increased likelihood of political participation, while high SAT math scores correlate with decreased likelihood of participation. Again, since socioeconomic effects on SAT scores move both verbal and math scores in the same direction, this difference between how high verbal and high math scores affect the likelihood of participation must be telling us something about the relationship between attainment in specific subject domains and participatory readiness. Moreover, the SAT effect endures even when college-level curricular choices are controlled for. Just as Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Shleifer conclude, it is attainment

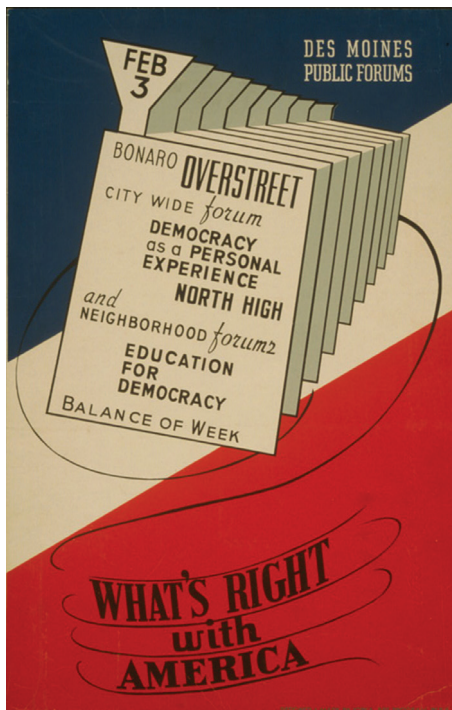
in the verbal domain that correlates with participatory readiness.

To identify a correlation is not, of course, to identify, let alone prove, causation. But those with more sophisticated verbal skills and with more skills at socio-political analysis are clearly more ready to participate in civic life. Another source of motivation may have engaged them in politics, leading them, once engaged, to seek out the verbal and analytical skills needed to thrive as civic participants. Or verbal competence and social analytical skills may make engagement easier in the first place. We don't have a study that considers levels of engagement before and after significant increases in these kinds of competence. Nonetheless, data suggest that the work of the humanities and social sciences on verbal empowerment and social analysis is intrinsically related to the development of participatory readiness. The riches of the liberal arts of course extend well beyond verbal empowerment and social analysis, but these core activities are themselves of immense value. Such equality as the world has managed to achieve — whether political or economic — can often be traced to the operations of these human capacities.

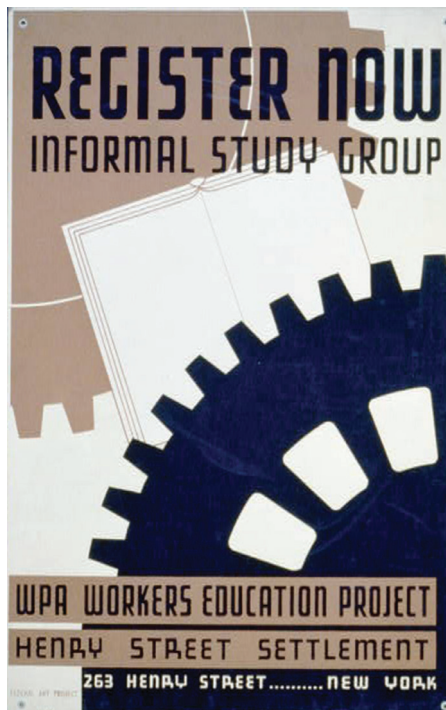
seeing connections

During the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in an effort to revive the economy. The WPA employed millions of Americans, who carried out everything from public works projects such as highway construction to artistic endeavors such as murals and music concerts. Look carefully at the WPA posters shown here.

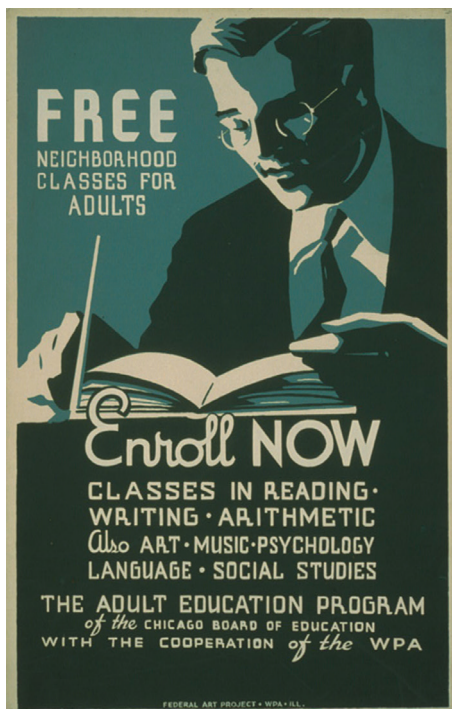
How does each of them endorse the idea of “participatory readiness,” especially as it relates to education? Why might such public forums be seen as particularly important during times of economic strife?



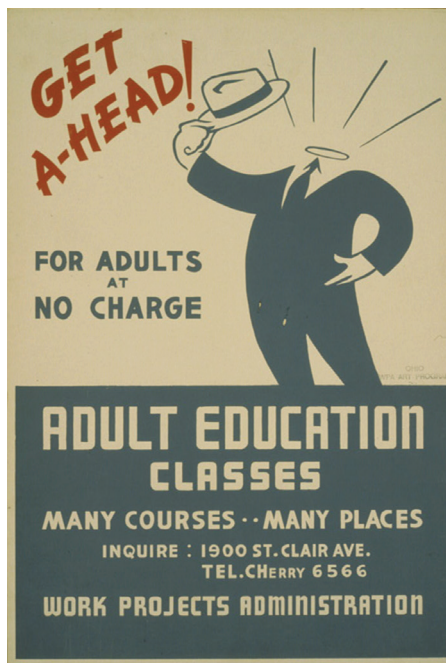
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Few among us pay adequate attention to the fact that almost all of our state constitutions guarantee a right to education. We pay even less attention to the fact that we have a right to civic education. Our state constitutions, in other words, are directed at the pursuit of equality. Through the acquisition of participatory readiness, a great diversity of citizens could tap into the power to challenge oligarchical social and political arrangements.

In the final analysis, the reliance on an exclusively vocational paradigm as the sole guide to education policy-making is a failure to meet

the legal standard for securing a basic right. Precisely those parts of the K-12 curriculum most vulnerable during a recession — humanities, social studies, arts, and extracurricular activities such as debate and model UN — deserve rights-based legal protection. What is more, defending the right to civic education, and the kind of curriculum that delivers it, would benefit not only individual students but also society as a whole, advancing both political equality and distributive justice. This is an untapped source of advocacy around educational rights and on behalf of an egalitarian America.

[2016]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. Danielle Allen opens by summarizing the legal argument the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) makes: that “the purpose of education is to develop not only vocational capacities, but also civic agency” (para. 1). What does she mean by “civic agency”? To what extent do you agree with the CFE (and Allen) on this key point?
2. Allen argues that the “dominant policy paradigm” privileges job preparation “in a technology-dependent economy” (para. 4). How does she challenge the belief that this approach will help to level “contemporary inequalities” (para. 5)?
3. In paragraphs 7 and 8, Allen summarizes two different explanations of the link between education and equality. What are they? How is each related to what she calls “distributive implications” (para. 9)?
4. In the section entitled “Equality and the Vocational Paradigm,” Allen provides a history, starting in the 1950s, of how concern for global competitiveness has influenced educational policy. How does this historical perspective contribute to the development of her argument?
5. In what ways does paragraph 16 (“Today, these technologically oriented, vocational approaches to education . . .”) signal a shift in Allen’s argument?
6. In paragraph 20, Allen discusses political, social, and economic inequality in relationship to education — and reaches the conclusion that we should shift the primary focus of education to political rather than economic equality. To what extent do you agree with her? Explain your response.
7. What does Allen mean by “participatory readiness,” a phrase she introduces in paragraph 8 and uses throughout the essay? What distinction does she make between “civic agency” and “citizenship”? To what extent do you think your education thus far has fostered participatory readiness, according to Allen’s definition?
8. In Allen’s view, how does Elizabeth Cady Stanton embody the three core ideals of civic agency (disinterested deliberation, prophetic work, and fair fighting)? Can you think of another public figure, historic or contemporary, whose work also expresses these three ideals? Explain specifically how.
9. Allen argues that today’s “professional politician . . . represents a degraded form of civic agency”; she says we have “lost sight of the statesman” (paras. 29–30). On what grounds does she support this claim? To what extent do you agree with her?
10. In the final part of her argument, Allen asserts the importance of “the seemingly antique liberal arts” in education (para. 32). In fact, she goes on to state that they are “the free person’s arts” (para. 37). How does she support this position? What do you think is her strongest point? Her most vulnerable to criticism?
11. What is the correlation that Allen discusses between political engagement and education in the humanities and social sciences? How does she address potential counterarguments? Explain

why you find this analysis effective or ineffective evidence to support her argument about the importance of liberal arts.

12. Allen calls the final clause of the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence a summary of “the central intellectual labor of the democratic citizen” (para. 35). Why does she believe this to be the case? How persuasive is she in tying this clause to her argument for a liberal arts education?
13. According to its website, the *Boston Review*, where this essay appeared, is a publication that is “a public space for robust discussion of ideas and culture. Independent and nonprofit, animated by hope and committed to equality, we believe in the power of collective reasoning and imagination to create a more just world.” Keeping this in mind, what specific rhetorical strategies has Allen employed to reach her audience? Discuss at least three.
14. Allen’s article provoked a number of responses, including challenges such as the following by Carleton College educational policy professor Jeffrey Aaron Snyder:

In spite of its checkered track record, vocational education remains an integral part of schooling in the United States. The insistent call for more STEM education reflects a vocational training ideal, forecasting

that enhanced coursework in these fields will allow students to plug into the new digital economy after they graduate. While we have reason to be skeptical about tidy claims such as these, the human-capital approach to education is hard to resist in light of today’s economic and political landscape. There are nearly 47 million Americans living in poverty, just under 15 percent of the population.

There are, of course, stark racial disparities in play here as well, with the poverty rate for Latinos and African Americans higher than 20 percent. Recent polling shows Americans consider the economy the most important problem facing the country. . . . In an age of staggering economic inequality, how does Allen suggest we turn the public’s attention to political equality?

How would you defend Allen’s argument in light of such concerned criticism?

15. Allen cites philosopher Hannah Arendt’s concept of citizenship as “the activity of co-creating a way of life,” whether at the local level of neighborhood or school, a networked community, or a national or international level (para. 25). What is one way that you are trying to embody this view of citizenship at this point in your life? That is, how are you “co-creating a way of life, of world-building”?

Have We Lost Sight of the Promise of Public Schools?

NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES

Nikole Hannah-Jones (b. 1976) is an award-winning reporter known for her in-depth coverage of civil rights issues. Originally from Waterloo, Iowa, Hannah-Jones earned a BA in history and African American studies from Notre Dame in 1998 and an MA in journalism and mass communication from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2003. After working for several news outlets across the country, she joined the *New York Times* in 2015. Hannah-Jones’s coverage of race, inequality, and education, has earned her a National Magazine Award, a Peabody Award, and a Polk Award. The following article, published in the *New York Times Magazine* in 2017, was written in response to the confirmation of Betsy DeVos as secretary of education.

In the days leading up to and after Betsy DeVos’s confirmation as secretary of education, a hashtag spread across Twitter: #publicschool-proud. Parents and teachers tweeted photos of

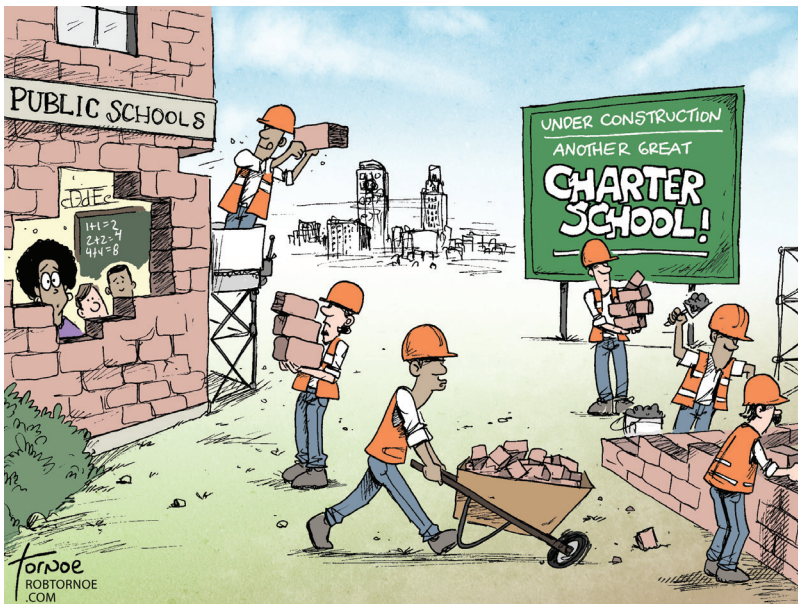
their kids studying, performing, eating lunch together. People of all races tweeted about how public schools changed them, saved them, helped them succeed. The hashtag and storytelling was

a rebuttal to DeVos, who called traditional public schools a “dead end” and who bankrolled efforts to pass reforms in Michigan, her home state, that would funnel public funds in the form of vouchers into religious and privately operated schools and encouraged the proliferation of for-profit charter schools. The tweets railed against DeVos’s labeling of public schools as an industry that needed to adopt the free-market principles of competition and choice. #Publicschoolproud was seen as an effort to show that public schools still mattered.

But the enthusiastic defense obscured a larger truth: We began moving away from the “public” in public education a long time ago. In fact, treating public schools like a business these days is largely a matter of fact in many places. Parents have pushed for school-choice policies that encourage shopping for public schools that they hope will give their children an advantage and for the expansion of charter schools that are run by private organizations with public funds. Large numbers of public schools have selective admissions policies that keep most kids out.

And parents pay top dollar to buy into neighborhoods zoned to “good” public schools that can be as exclusive as private ones. The glaring reality is, whether we are talking about schools or other institutions, it seems as if we have forgotten what “public” really means.

The word derives from the Latin word *publicus*, meaning “of the people.” This concept — that the government belongs to the people and the government should provide for the good of the people — was foundational to the world’s nascent democracies. Where once citizens paid taxes to the monarchy in the hope that it would serve the public too, in democracies they paid taxes directly for infrastructure and institutions that benefited society as a whole. The tax dollars of ancient Athenians and Romans built roads and aqueducts, but they also provided free meals to widows whose husbands died in war. “Public” stood not just for how something was financed — with the tax dollars of citizens — but for a communal ownership of institutions and for a society that privileged the common good over individual advancement.



Rob Tormoe/Cagle Cartoons, Inc.

How does this cartoon relate to Nikole Hannah-Jones’s argument about the purpose of public schools? On what basis would she agree or disagree with the message this cartoon conveys?

Early on, it was this investment in public institutions that set America apart from other countries. Public hospitals ensured that even the indigent received good medical care — health problems for some could turn into epidemics for us all. Public parks gave access to the great outdoors not just to the wealthy who could retreat to their country estates but to the masses in the nation's cities. Every state invested in public universities. Public schools became widespread in the 1800s, not to provide an advantage for particular individuals but with the understanding that shuffling the wealthy and working class together (though not black Americans and other racial minorities) would create a common sense of citizenship and national identity, that it would tie together the fates of the haves and the have-nots and that doing so benefited the nation. A sense of the public good was a unifying force because it meant that the rich and the poor, the powerful and the meek, shared the spoils — as well as the burdens — of this messy democracy.



Achieving this has never been an easy feat. The tension between individual striving and the common good, between the beliefs that strong government protects and provides for its citizens and that big government leads to tyranny, has always existed in this country. As a result, support for public institutions and expansive government has ebbed and flowed. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in response to the Great Depression, ushered through the biggest expansion of federal programs in our nation's history, he did so because he thought that government regulation was necessary to empower common people against corporations and banks but also that government should provide certain protections for its citizens. Under the New Deal, we got Social Security and unemployment insurance. Federal housing projects — public housing — meant quality dwellings for the nation's working people.

Federal works projects employed millions of out-of-work Americans and brought infrastructure to communities that had not been able to pay for it on their own.

At the same time, the New Deal stoked the ire of a small-government, antiregulation minority, who began to push back, though it would take some decades before their views became mainstream. They promoted free-market principles, deregulation and the privatization of functions normally handled by the government and sought to define all things — like the benefits of education — strictly in terms of their economic value.

Nonetheless, Roosevelt's government expansion was widely supported, and Americans elected him to an unprecedented four terms as president. But the broad support of public programs and institutions hinged on a narrow definition of who that public was: white Americans. To get his New Deal passed, Roosevelt compromised with white Southerners in Congress, and much of the legislation either explicitly or implicitly discriminated against black citizens, denying them many of its benefits.

As the civil rights movement gained ground in the 1950s and 1960s, however, a series of court rulings and new laws ensured that black Americans now had the same legal rights to public schools, libraries, parks and swimming pools as white Americans. But as black Americans became part of the public, white Americans began to pull away. Instead of sharing their public pools with black residents — whose tax dollars had also paid for them — white Americans founded private clubs (often with public funds) or withdrew behind their fences where they dug their own pools. Public housing was once seen as a community good that drew presidents for photo ops. But after federal housing policies helped white Americans buy their own homes in the suburbs, black Americans, who could not get government-subsidized mortgages, languished in public housing, which became stigmatized. Where once public transportation showed a city's forward progress, white communities

seeing connections

Nikole Hannah-Jones refers to the Depression-era New Deal as she develops her argument. Public murals such as Maxine Albro's *California*, painted inside San Francisco's Coit Tower in 1934, were part of that program. Some details of that mural are shown below.

How does — or can — art created for public spaces contribute to the concept of “public good” that Hannah-Jones believes is essential to education in a democracy?



Erik Falkenstein/Granger, NYC — All rights reserved



Richard Cummins Photography, Inc./Getty Images

began to fight its expansion, fearing it would give unwanted people access to their enclaves.

And white Americans began to withdraw from public schools or move away from school districts with large numbers of black children once the courts started mandating desegregation. Some communities shuttered public schools altogether rather than allow black children to share publicly funded schools with white children. The very voucher movement that is at the heart of DeVos's educational ideas was born of white opposition to school desegregation as state and local governments offered white children vouchers to pay for private schools — known as segregation academies — that sprouted across the South after the Supreme Court struck down school segregation in 1954.

“What had been enjoyed as a public thing by white citizens became a place of forced encounter with other people from whom they wanted to be separate,” Bonnie Honig, a professor of political science and modern culture and media at Brown University and author of the forthcoming book *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair*, told me. “The attractiveness of private schools and other forms of privatization are not just driven by economization but by the desire to control the community with which you interact.”



Even when they fail, the guiding values of public institutions, of the public good, are equality and justice. The guiding value of the free market

is profit. The for-profit charters DeVos helped expand have not provided an appreciably better education for Detroit's children, yet they've continued to expand because they are profitable — or as Tom Watkins, Michigan's former education superintendent, said, “In a number of cases, people are making a boatload of money, and the kids aren't getting educated.”

Democracy works only if those who have the money or the power to opt out of public things choose instead to opt in for the common good. It's called a social contract, and we've seen what happens in cities where the social contract is broken: White residents vote against tax hikes to fund schools where they don't send their children, parks go untended and libraries shutter because affluent people feel no obligation to help pay for things they don't need. “The existence of public things — to meet each other, to fight about, to pay for together, to enjoy, to complain about — this is absolutely indispensable to democratic life,” Honig says.

If there is hope for a renewal of our belief in public institutions and a common good, it may reside in the public schools. Nine of 10 children attend one, a rate of participation that few, if any, other public bodies can claim, and schools, as segregated as many are, remain one of the few institutions where Americans of different classes and races mix. The vast multiracial, socioeconomically diverse defense of public schools that DeVos set off may show that we have not yet given up on the ideals of the public — and on ourselves.

[2017]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. Nikole Hannah-Jones opens her essay by discussing the 2017 hearings to approve Betsy DeVos as secretary of education, specifically reacting to DeVos's characterization of public schools as a “dead end” (para. 1). Was this an effective way to launch into her analysis of public education, its history, and its role in a democracy? Keep in mind the audience as you support your response.
2. How does Hannah-Jones support her claim that “treating public schools like a business these days is largely a matter of fact” (para. 2)?
3. When Hannah-Jones calls the United States “this messy democracy” (para. 4), is she being negative or positive? Is she setting herself up as a critic, a patriot, or a little of both?

4. Hannah-Jones supports her assertion that we have lost site of the “‘public’ in public education” (para. 2) with historical facts and analysis. In fact, she begins with ancient Greece and Rome, early democracies, and then moves to the United States. What is her reasoning in this section (paras. 3–10)? How effective do you believe her use of history as evidence is here? How does such evidence appeal to both logos and pathos?
5. Hannah-Jones shines a bright light on the role of race in changing the meaning of “public” schools in paragraphs 8–10. To what extent do you think she risks offending or alienating her audience with this brief interpretation? Or is this section key to achieving her purpose? Pay careful attention to her language and tone as you explain your viewpoint.
6. What does Hannah-Jones mean by the “social contract” (para. 12)? Why is this concept vital to her argument?
7. Hannah-Jones cites only one contemporary expert (Bonnie Honig) and a single statistic in her argument (in the final paragraph). To what extent were these choices an effective rhetorical strategy to develop her argument?
8. Ultimately, how does Hannah-Jones answer the question she poses in her title? Explain why you agree or disagree with her. Refer to specifics in the essay as well as your own experience and knowledge.

VISUAL TEXTS

The Exam Room

CYRIL EDWARD POWER

Cyril Edward Power (1872–1951) was a prolific English artist, architect, and teacher primarily known for linocut, a printing process like woodcutting in which a design is cut into linoleum before being rolled with ink and impressed onto fabric or paper. He wrote *A History of English Mediaeval Architecture* (1912) before managing repairs for the Royal Flying Corps during World War I. After the war, Power engaged in a career of artistic printmaking, co-authoring many prints with the artist Sybil Andrews. Power also helped found and lectured frequently at The Grosvenor School of Modern Art in London. He was elected to the Royal Society of British Artists in 1930. Considered a Modernist work, *The Exam Room* is a linocut emblematic of Powers's style. It was made around 1934, the year it was exhibited alongside other linocuts in London's Redfern Gallery.



CHRISTIES IMAGES/Private Collection/Bridgeman Images

[1934]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. In what ways does this image capture the tension and pressure of the experience of taking an exam? Pay attention to the lines (vertical and horizontal), the geometric shapes, and color.
2. In what ways do the eyes, the distorted clock, and the standing figure serve as symbols?
3. The style of this piece has been described as “hallucinatory realism.” Is that an oxymoron — or does it capture the mood of the piece?
4. What argument is the artist making in this image? State his claim and then explain what visual rhetorical strategies he uses as evidence.
5. What music might you pair with this print? Working in groups, choose a piece of music, with or without lyrics, and discuss why you believe it comments on, reflects, or provides a counterpoint to the visual image.
6. Although the artist created this work in 1934, does it strike you as antiquated? To what extent is “the exam room” the same today — even if computer screens have entered the scene?

What I Learned

A Sentimental Education from Nursery School through Twelfth Grade

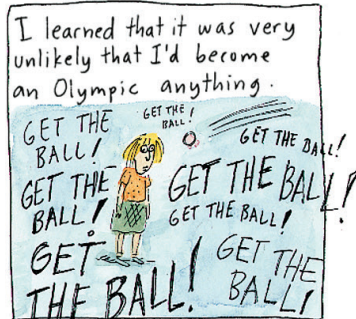
ROZ CHAST

Roz Chast (b. 1954) grew up in Brooklyn as the only child of a schoolteacher and an assistant principal, and received a BFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design. After she graduated, as she says on her website, she “reverted to type and began drawing cartoons once again.” More than a thousand of her cartoons have been published in the *New Yorker* magazine since 1978. A collection of twenty-five years of her work was published in *Theories of Everything* (2006). Chast collaborated with comedian and novelist Steve Martin on the children’s book *The Alphabet from A to Y with a Bonus Letter Z!* (2007), and has also written numerous children’s books and cartoon collections, including *Too Busy Marco* (2010), *What I Hate: From A–Z* (2011), *Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (2014), and most recently, *Around the Clock* (2015). She has won many awards and received an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Pratt Institute and the Art Institute of Boston. Chast is known for her wry commentaries on the experiences of ordinary life, such as going to school, which the following cartoon depicts. She has written of her own experience: “I doodled all the time in school — that is what kept me from going completely out of my head.”

WHAT I LEARNED:



A Sentimental Education



FROM NURSERY SCHOOL THROUGH TWELFTH GRADE



© Roz Chast/The New Yorker Collection/www.cartoonbank.com

R. Chast

[2006]

EXPLORING THE TEXT

1. Identify one part of this cartoon, a single frame or several, that you find to be an especially effective synergy of written and visual text. Why do you think the section you chose works so well?
2. On the second page, the middle frame is a large one with a whole list of what Roz Chast learned “Up through sixth grade.” Is she suggesting that all these things are foolish or worthless? Explain your response.
3. The three-page cartoon presents a narrative, a story. Discuss the extent to which Chast uses the techniques of a fiction writer, such as plot, character, and setting.
4. Chast subtitles her cartoon “A Sentimental Education . . . ,” which is a reference to a French novel of that title written by Gustave Flaubert in 1869. The American writer Henry James described *Sentimental Education* as far inferior to Flaubert’s earlier and more successful novel *Madame Bovary*; in fact, he characterized the 1869 work as “elaborately and massively dreary.” Why do you think Chast uses this reference to Flaubert’s novel? Or do you think that she is not specifically alluding to Flaubert but, rather, to more generalized “sentimental” notions of education? Consider her audience as you respond to these questions.
5. What, ultimately, is Chast’s critique? What is the relationship she sees among learning, K-12 school, and education?

CONVERSATION

The Future of High School

Each of the following texts presents a viewpoint on the American high school.

SOURCES

- 1 **Horace Mann** / from *Report of the Massachusetts Board of Education*
- 2 **Leon Botstein** / *Let Teenagers Try Adulthood*
- 3 ***Meditation in Schools across America*** (infographic)
- 4 **Nicholas Wyman** / *Why We Desperately Need to Bring Back Vocational Training in Schools*
- 5 **Amanda Ripley** / from *What America Can Learn from Smart Schools in Other Countries*
- 6 **Leslie Nguyen-Okwu** / *How High Schools Are Demolishing the Classroom*
- 7 **Brentin Mock** / from *We Will Pay High School Students to Go to School. And We Will Like It.*
- 8 **Amy Rolph** / *This High School Wants to Revolutionize Learning with Technology*

After you have read, studied, and synthesized these pieces, enter the Conversation through one of the suggested topics on p. 289.

1

from **Report of the Massachusetts Board of Education**

HORACE MANN

The following selection is taken from an official 1848 policy document by Horace Mann (1796–1859), who is known as the father of American public education.

Intellectual Education as a Means of Removing Poverty, and Securing Abundance

... According to the European theory, men are divided into classes, — some to toil and earn, others to seize and enjoy. According to the Massachusetts theory, all are to have an equal chance for earning, and equal security in the enjoyment of what they earn. The latter tends to equality of condition; the former, to the grossest inequalities. . . .

But is it not true that Massachusetts, in some respects, instead of adhering more and more closely to her own theory, is becoming emulous of the baneful examples of Europe? The distance between the two extremes of society is lengthening, instead of being abridged. With every generation,

fortunes increase on the one hand, and some new privation is added to poverty on the other. We are verging towards those extremes of opulence and of penury, each of which unhumanizes the human mind. A perpetual struggle for the bare necessities of life, without the ability to obtain them, makes men wolfish. Avarice, on the other hand, sees, in all the victims of misery around it, not objects for pity and succor, but only crude materials to be worked up into more money.

I suppose it to be the universal sentiment of all those who mingle any ingredient of benevolence with their notions on political economy, that vast and overshadowing private fortunes are among the greatest dangers to which the happiness of the people in a republic can be subjected. Such fortunes would create a

feudalism of a new kind, but one more oppressive and unrelenting than that of the middle ages. The feudal lords in England and on the Continent never held their retainers in a more abject condition of servitude than the great majority of foreign manufacturers and capitalists hold their operatives and laborers at the present day. The means employed are different; but the similarity in results is striking. What force did then, money does now. The villein¹ of the middle ages had no spot of earth on which he could live, unless one were granted to him by his lord. The operative or laborer of the present day has no employment, and therefore no bread, unless the capitalist will accept his services. The vassal had no shelter but such as his master provided for him. Not one in five thousand of English operatives or farm-laborers is able to build or own even a hovel; and therefore they must accept such shelter as capital offers them. The baron prescribed his own terms to his retainers: those terms were peremptory, and the serf must submit or perish. The British manufacturer or farmer prescribes the rate of wages he will give to his work-people; he reduces these wages under whatever pretext he pleases; and they, too, have no alternative but submission or starvation. In some respects, indeed, the condition of the modern dependent is more forlorn than that of the corresponding serf class in former times. Some attributes of the patriarchal relation did spring up between the lord and his lieges to soften the harsh relations subsisting between them. Hence came some oversight of the condition of children, some relief in sickness, some protection and support in the decrepitude of age. But only in instances comparatively few have kindly offices smoothed the rugged relation between British capital and British labor. The children of the work-people are

abandoned to their fate; and notwithstanding the privations they suffer, and the dangers they threaten, no power in the realm has yet been able to secure them an education; and when the adult laborer is prostrated by sickness, or eventually worn out by toil and age, the poor-house, which has all along been his destination, becomes his destiny. . . .

Now, surely nothing but universal education can counterwork this tendency to the domination of capital and servility of labor. If one class possesses all the wealth and the education, while the residue of society is ignorant and poor, it matters not by what name the relation between them may be called: the latter, in fact and in truth, will be the servile dependants and subjects of the former. But, if education be equably diffused, it will draw property after it by the strongest of all attractions, for such a thing never did happen, and never can happen, as that an intelligent and practical body of men should be permanently poor. Property and labor in different classes are essentially antagonistic; but property and labor in the same class are essentially fraternal. The people of Massachusetts have, in some degree, appreciated the truth, that the unexampled prosperity of the State — its comfort, its competence, its general intelligence and virtue — is attributable to the education, more or less perfect, which all its people have received: but are they sensible of a fact equally important; namely, that it is to this same education that two-thirds of the people are indebted for not being today the vassals of as severe a tyranny, in the form of capital, as the lower classes of Europe are bound to in the form of brute force?

Education, then, beyond all other devices 5
of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men — the balance-wheel of the social machinery. I do not here mean that it so elevates the moral nature as to make men disdain and abhor the oppression of their fellow-men. This idea pertains to another of its

¹In a feudal society, a serf who has the right to own property. —Eds.

attributes. But I mean that it gives each man the independence and the means by which he can resist the selfishness of other men. It does better than to disarm the poor of their hostility towards the rich: it prevents being poor. Agrarianism is the revenge of poverty against wealth. The wanton destruction of the property of others — the burning of hay-ricks and corn-ricks, the demolition of machinery because it supersedes hand-labor, the sprinkling of vitriol on rich dresses — is only agrarianism run mad. Education prevents both the revenge and the madness. On the other hand, a fellow-feeling for one's class or caste is the common instinct of hearts not wholly sunk in selfish regards for person or for family. The spread of education, by enlarging the cultivated class or caste, will open a wider area over which the social feelings will expand; and, if this education should be universal and complete, it would do more than all things else to obliterate factitious distinctions in society. . . .

For the creation of wealth, then, — for the existence of a wealthy people and a wealthy

nation, — intelligence is the grand condition. The number of improvers will increase as the intellectual constituency, if I may call it, increases. In former times, and in most parts of the world even at the present day, not one man in a million has ever had such a development of mind as made it possible for him to become a contributor to art or science. Let this development precede, and contributions, numberless, and of inestimable value, will be sure to follow. That political economy, therefore, which busies itself about capital and labor, supply and demand, interest and rents, favorable and unfavorable balances of trade, but leaves out of account the element of a widespread mental development, is nought but stupendous folly. The greatest of all the arts in political economy is to change a consumer into a producer; and the next greatest is to increase the producer's producing power, — an end to be directly attained by increasing his intelligence. For mere delving, an ignorant man is but little better than a swine, whom he so much resembles in his appetites, and surpasses in his powers of mischief.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does Horace Mann begin with a description of the “feudal lords in England and on the Continent” (para. 3)?
2. What does Mann mean by the following statement: “Property and labor in different classes are essentially antagonistic; but property and labor in the same class are essentially fraternal” (para. 4)?
3. When Mann uses the term *intelligence*, does he mean innate ability or developed skill?
4. How does Mann draw the connection between democracy in a young nation and the educational opportunities for its citizenry?
5. Mann is writing about the foundations of American society and how education contributes to the country's sense of self. What are two issues that he raises in this context that are relevant to an assessment of high school as we know it today?
6. Identify one claim Mann makes and explain whether you believe it remains true today.

2 Let Teenagers Try Adulthood

LEON BOTSTEIN

The following opinion piece, published in the *New York Times* in 1999, was written by Leon Botstein, president of Bard College and author of *Jefferson's Children: Education and the Promise of American Culture* (1997).

The national outpouring after the Littleton [Columbine High School] shootings has forced us to confront something we have suspected for a long time: the American high school is obsolete and should be abolished. In the . . . month [after the shootings] high school students present and past [came] forward with stories about cliques and the artificial intensity of a world defined by insiders and outsiders, in which the insiders hold sway because of superficial definitions of good looks and attractiveness, popularity and sports prowess.

The team sports of high school dominate more than student culture. A community's loyalty to the high school system is often based on the extent to which varsity teams succeed. High school administrators and faculty members are often former coaches, and the coaches themselves are placed in a separate, untouchable category. The result is that the culture of the inside elite is not contested by the adults in the school. Individuality and dissent are discouraged.

But the rules of high school turn out not to be the rules of life. Often the high school outsider becomes the more successful and admired adult. The definitions of masculinity and femininity go through sufficient transformation to make the game of popularity in high school an embarrassment. No other group of adults young or old is confined to an age-segregated environment, much like a gang in which individuals of the same age group define each other's world. In no workplace, not even in colleges or universities, is there such a narrow segmentation by chronology.

Given the poor quality of recruitment and training for high school teachers, it is no wonder

that the curriculum and the enterprise of learning hold so little sway over young people. When puberty meets education and learning in modern America, the victory of puberty masquerading as popular culture and the tyranny of peer groups based on ludicrous values meet little resistance.

By the time those who graduate from high school go on to college and realize what really is at stake in becoming an adult, too many opportunities have been lost and too much time has been wasted. Most thoughtful young people suffer the high school environment in silence and in their junior and senior years mark time waiting for college to begin. The Littleton killers, above and beyond the psychological demons that drove them to violence, felt trapped in the artificiality of the high school world and believed it to be real. They engineered their moment of undivided attention and importance in the absence of any confidence that life after high school could have a different meaning.

Adults should face the fact that they don't like adolescents and that they have used high school to isolate the pubescent and hormonally active adolescent away from both the picture-book idealized innocence of childhood and the more accountable world of adulthood. But the primary reason high school doesn't work anymore, if it ever did, is that young people mature substantially earlier in the late 20th century than they did when the high school was invented. For example, the age of first menstruation has dropped at least two years since the beginning of this century, and not surprisingly, the onset of sexual activity has dropped in proportion. An institution intended

for children in transition now holds young adults back well beyond the developmental point for which high school was originally designed.

Furthermore, whatever constraints to the presumption of adulthood among young people may have existed decades ago have now fallen away. Information and images, as well as the real and virtual freedom of movement we associate with adulthood, are now accessible to every 15- and 16-year-old.

Secondary education must be rethought. Elementary school should begin at age 4 or 5 and end with the sixth grade. We should entirely abandon the concept of the middle school and junior high school. Beginning with the seventh grade, there should be four years of secondary education that we may call high school. Young people should graduate at 16 rather than 18.

They could then enter the real world, the world of work or national service, in which they would take a place of responsibility alongside older adults in mixed company. They could stay at home and attend junior college, or they could go away to college. For all the faults of college, at least the adults who dominate the world of colleges, the faculty, were selected precisely because

they were exceptional and different, not because they were popular. Despite the often cavalier attitude toward teaching in college, at least physicists know their physics, mathematicians know and love their mathematics, and music is taught by musicians, not by graduates of education schools, where the disciplines are subordinated to the study of classroom management.

For those 16-year-olds who do not want to do 10 any of the above, we might construct new kinds of institutions, each dedicated to one activity, from science to dance, to which adolescents could devote their energies while working together with professionals in those fields.

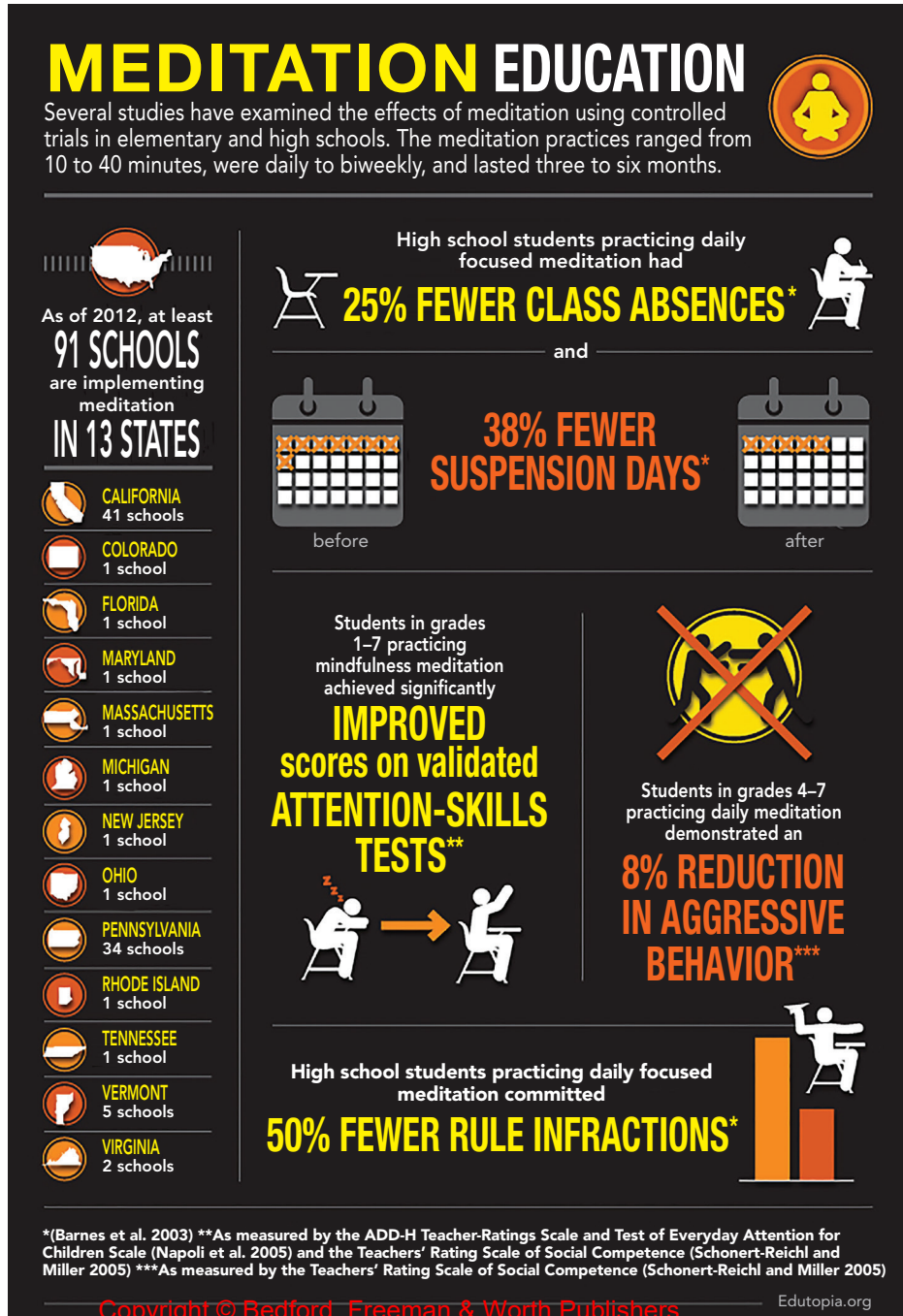
At 16, young Americans are prepared to be taken seriously and to develop the motivations and interests that will serve them well in adult life. They need to enter a world where they are not in a lunchroom with only their peers, estranged from other age groups and cut off from the game of life as it is really played. There is nothing utopian about this idea; it is immensely practical and efficient, and its implementation is long overdue. We need to face biological and cultural facts and not prolong the life of a flawed institution that is out of date.

QUESTIONS

1. In his opening, Leon Botstein states, “[T]he American high school is obsolete and should be abolished” (para. 1). Why? What specific reasons does he provide?
2. Do you agree with Botstein that the Columbine High School violence is evidence that high school in general is antiquated? How persuasively does he prove this connection?
3. What does Botstein mean by “the rules of high school turn out not to be the rules of life” (para. 3)?
4. What is Botstein’s proposed solution?
5. Where does Botstein address a counterargument? Does he refute (or concede) in sufficient detail to be persuasive?
6. Which parts of Botstein’s reasoning do you find to be the strongest? The weakest? Explain.
7. Is this article, written in 1999, still relevant today? Has the situation in high schools as Botstein describes it remained pretty much the same?

3 Meditation in Schools across America

The following infographic was published in 2012 by Edutopia, a self-described “comprehensive website and online community that increases knowledge, sharing, and adoption of what works in K-12 education.”



This infographic was published in 2012 by Edutopia, a comprehensive web site and online community that increases knowledge, sharing, and adoption of what works in K-12 education.

QUESTIONS

1. What problems does this graphic suggest public schools need to address?
2. What additional information would you need to know about the studies the graphic is based on before you would endorse daily meditation as a part of high school curriculum?
3. Given the improvements that this infographic attributes to meditation, what can you conclude are the skills and behaviors valued in high school? How does your conclusion affect your attitude toward meditation in school?
4. Have you ever practiced meditation? Based on this experience or what you know of meditation, how do you think your peers would respond to meditation as a requirement? As an extracurricular activity?

4 Why We Desperately Need to Bring Back Vocational Training in Schools

NICHOLAS WYMAN

Nicholas Wyman is the CEO of the Institute for Workplace Skills and Innovation, a global enterprise committed to skills and workforce development, and author of *Job U: How to Find Wealth and Success by Developing the Skills Companies Actually Need* (2015). Wyman published this article in *Forbes* magazine in 2015.

Throughout most of U.S. history, American high school students were routinely taught vocational and job-ready skills along with the three Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic. Indeed readers of a certain age are likely to have fond memories of huddling over wooden workbenches learning a craft such as woodworking or maybe metal work, or any one of the hands-on projects that characterized the once-ubiquitous shop class.

But in the 1950s, a different philosophy emerged: the theory that students should follow separate educational tracks according to ability. The idea was that the college-bound would take traditional academic courses (Latin, creative writing, science, math) and received no vocational training. Those students not headed for college would take basic academic courses, along with vocational training, or “shop.”

Ability tracking did not sit well with educators or parents, who believed students were assigned to tracks not by aptitude, but by socio-economic status and race. The result being

that by the end of the 1950s, what was once a perfectly respectable, even mainstream educational path came to be viewed as a remedial track that restricted minority and working-class students.

The backlash against tracking, however, did not bring vocational education back to the academic core. Instead, the focus shifted to preparing all students for college, and college prep is still the center of the U.S. high school curriculum.

So what’s the harm in prepping kids for college? Won’t all students benefit from a high-level, four-year academic degree program? As it turns out, not really. For one thing, people have a huge and diverse range of different skills and learning styles. Not everyone is good at math, biology, history and other traditional subjects that characterize college-level work. Not everyone is fascinated by Greek mythology, or enamored with Victorian literature, or enraptured by classical music. Some students are mechanical; others are artistic. Some focus best in a lecture hall or classroom; still others learn best by doing, and would thrive in the studio, workshop or shop floor.

And not everyone goes to college. The latest figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) show that about 68% of high school students attend college. That means over 30% graduate with neither academic nor job skills.

But even the 68% aren't doing so well. Almost 40% of students who begin four-year college programs don't complete them, which translates into a whole lot of wasted time, wasted money, and burdensome student loan debt. Of those who do finish college, one-third or more will end up in jobs they could have had without a four-year degree. The BLS found that 37% of currently employed college grads are doing work for which only a high school degree is required.

It is true that earnings studies show college graduates earn more over a lifetime than high school graduates. However, these studies have some weaknesses. For example, over 53% of recent college graduates are unemployed or underemployed. And income for college graduates varies widely by major — philosophy graduates don't nearly earn what business studies graduates do. Finally, earnings studies compare college graduates to *all* high school graduates. But the subset of high school students who graduate with vocational training — those who go into well-paying, skilled jobs — the picture for non-college graduates looks much rosier.

Yet despite the growing evidence that four-year college programs serve fewer and fewer of our students, states continue to cut vocational programs. In 2013, for example, the Los Angeles Unified School District, with more than 600,000 students, made plans to cut almost all of its CTE programs by the end of the year. The justification, of course, is budgetary; these programs (which include auto body technology, aviation maintenance, audio production, real estate and photography) are expensive to operate. But in a situation where 70% of high school students do not go to college, nearly half of those who do go

fail to graduate, and over half of the graduates are unemployed or underemployed, is vocational education really expendable? Or is it the smartest investment we could make in our children, our businesses, and our country's economic future?

The U.S. economy has changed. The manufacturing sector is growing and modernizing, creating a wealth of challenging, well-paying, highly skilled jobs for those with the skills to do them. The demise of vocational education at the high school level has bred a skills shortage in manufacturing today, and with it a wealth of career opportunities for both under-employed college grads and high school students looking for direct pathways to interesting, lucrative careers. Many of the jobs in manufacturing are attainable through apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and vocational programs offered at community colleges. They don't require expensive, four-year degrees for which many students are not suited.

And contrary to what many parents believe, students who get job specific skills in high school and choose vocational careers often go on to get additional education. The modern workplace favors those with solid, transferable skills who are open to continued learning. Most young people today will have many jobs over the course of their lifetime, and a good number will have multiple careers that require new and more sophisticated skills.

Just a few decades ago, our public education system provided ample opportunities for young people to learn about careers in manufacturing and other vocational trades. Yet, today, high-schoolers hear barely a whisper about the many doors that the vocational education path can open. The "college-for-everyone" mentality has pushed awareness of other possible career paths to the margins. The cost to the individuals and the economy as a whole is high. If we want everyone's kid to succeed, we need to bring vocational education back to the core of high school learning.

10

QUESTIONS

1. According to Nicholas Wyman, why did vocational education fall out of favor in high schools?
2. On what grounds does Wyman argue that the current emphasis on college preparation is wrong-headed? Consider the reasons he gives and the data he uses as evidence in your response.
3. On what grounds does Wyman raise doubts about studies that show college graduates as having higher earnings over their lifetimes than high school graduates?
4. How does Wyman use the changing U.S. economy as further evidence that college is not the best choice for everyone?
5. Based on your own experience and the emphasis of your school, to what extent do you agree with Wyman's position?

5

from **What America Can Learn from Smart Schools in Other Countries**

AMANDA RIPLEY

Amanda Ripley is an investigative journalist and author of *The Smartest Kids in the World: And How They Got That Way* (2014). Her work has appeared in numerous publications including *Time*, the *New York Times*, the *Atlantic*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. The following excerpt is from an article published in the *New York Times* in 2016.

Every three years, half a million 15-year-olds in 69 countries take a two-hour test designed to gauge their ability to think. Unlike other exams, the PISA, as it is known, does not assess what teenagers have memorized. Instead, it asks them to solve problems they haven't seen before, to identify patterns that are not obvious and to make compelling written arguments. It tests the skills, in other words, that machines have not yet mastered.

The latest results, released Tuesday morning, reveal the United States to be treading water in the middle of the pool. In math, American teenagers performed slightly worse than they usually do on the PISA — below average for the developed world, which means they scored worse than nearly three dozen countries. They did about the same as always in science and reading, which is to say average for the developed world.

But that scoreboard is the least interesting part of the findings. More intriguing is what the PISA has revealed about which conditions seem to make smart countries smart. In that realm, the news was not all bad for American teenagers.

Like all tests, the PISA is imperfect, but it is unusually relevant to real life and provides increasingly nuanced insights into education for researchers like Andreas Schleicher, who oversees the test at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. After each test, he and his team analyze the results, stripped of country names. They don't want to be biased by their pre-existing notions of what teenagers in Japan or Mexico can or cannot do.

♦ ♦ ♦

A year later, after their analysis is finished, team members gather in a small conference room at their Paris offices to guess which countries are which. It's a parlor game of the high-nerd variety — or, as Mr. Schleicher put it, "a stress test of the robustness of our analysis."

When the team started this game back in 2003, it could predict about 30 percent of the variation in scores using its statistical models, Mr. Schleicher said. Now, the models can predict 85 percent of the variation.

So how do the researchers make their predictions? The process is not entirely intuitive. They can't, for example, assume that countries that spend the most will do the best (the world's biggest per-student spenders include the United States, Luxembourg and Norway, none of which are education superpowers).

Nor can they guess based on which countries have the least poverty or the fewest immigrants (places like Estonia, with significant child poverty, and Canada, with more immigrant students than the United States, now top the charts). All those factors matter, but they interact with other critical conditions to create brilliance — or not.

This year, when the PISA team made its guesses, it predicted the United States would show

modest improvement. Eventually, it figured, the federal government's Ham-handed but consistent push to get states to prioritize their lowest-achieving students (under No Child Left Behind and other efforts) was likely to have some effect.

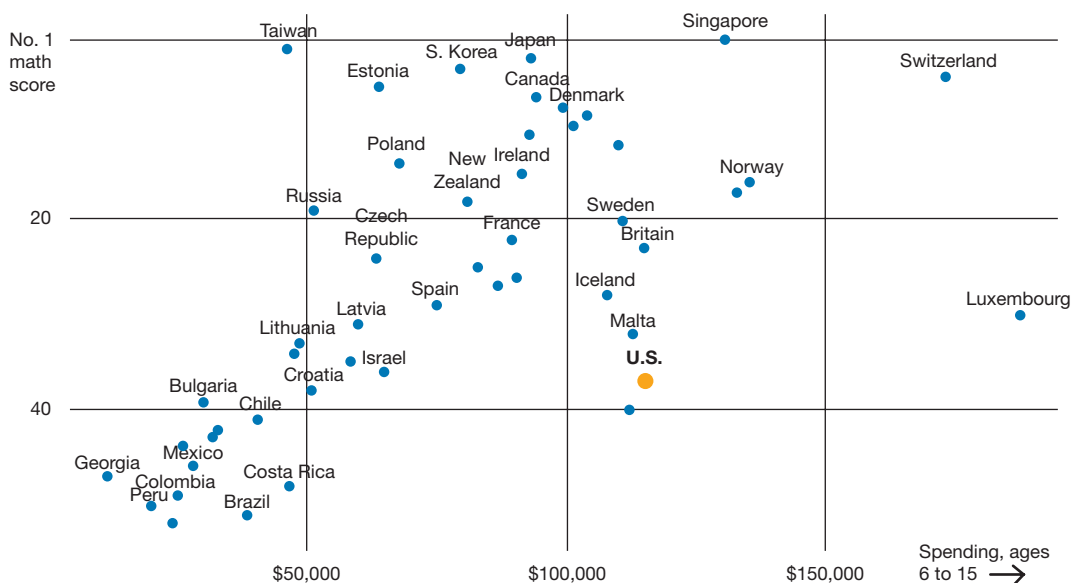
Team members expected Colombia to continue to improve, given policy makers' focus on enrolling more students at younger ages and raising standards for entering teaching. Singapore would probably crush every other country, raising the bar for what children are capable of doing.

"An easy guess, maybe," Mr. Schleicher said a bit sheepishly. "They are constantly looking outside for ways to improve, questioning the established wisdom. That's the classic thing that Singapore has always done."

10

Bad at Math

The United States is among the world's biggest per-student spenders on education, but its 15-year-olds still trail in math against peers in most developed countries.



Math ranks include only countries for which spending data is available.

Source: OECD

By contrast, the team did not expect good news out of France, where Mr. Schleicher lives and where his children are enrolled in school. “Most reforms have been on the surface, not reaching into the classroom,” he said. “Nobody predicted France would be a star performer.”

Finally, it was time for the results: The analysts looked at the country names to see how their predictions held up. It was, by statistician standards, a huge thrill. The United States had not raised its average scores, but on measures of equity, it had improved. One in every three disadvantaged American teenagers beat the odds in science, achieving results in the top quarter of students from similar backgrounds worldwide.

This is a major accomplishment, despite America’s lackluster performance over all. In 2006, socioeconomic status had explained 17 percent of the variance in Americans’ science scores; in 2015, it explained only 11 percent, which is slightly better than average for the developed world. No other country showed as much progress on this metric. (By contrast, socioeconomic background explained 20 percent of score differences in France — and only 8 percent in Estonia.) . . .

Here’s what the models show: Generally speaking, the smartest countries tend to be those that have acted to make teaching more prestigious and selective; directed more resources to their neediest children; enrolled most children in high-quality preschools; helped schools establish cultures of constant improvement; and applied rigorous, consistent standards across all classrooms.

Of all those lessons learned, the United States has employed only one at scale: A majority of states recently adopted more consistent and challenging learning goals, known as the Common Core State Standards, for reading and math. These standards were in place for only a year in many states, so Mr. Schleicher did not expect them to boost America’s PISA scores just yet. (In addition, America’s PISA sample included students living in states that have declined to adopt the new standards altogether.)

But Mr. Schleicher urges Americans to work on the other lessons learned — and to keep the faith in their new standards. “I’m confident the Common Core is going to have a long-term impact,” he said. “Patience may be the biggest challenge.” . . .

Some of the other reforms Americans have attempted nationwide in past years, including smaller class sizes and an upgrade of classroom technology, do not appear on the list of things that work. In fact, there is some evidence that both policies can have a negative impact on learning.

For now, the PISA reveals brutal truths about America’s education system: Math, a subject that reliably predicts children’s future earnings, continues to be the United States’ weakest area at every income level. Nearly a third of American 15-year-olds are not meeting a baseline level of ability — the lowest level the O.E.C.D. believes children must reach in order to thrive as adults in the modern world.

And affluence is no guarantee of better results, particularly in science and math: The latest PISA data (which includes private-school students) shows that America’s most advantaged teenagers scored below their well-off peers in science in 20 other countries, including Canada and Britain.

The good news is that a handful of places, including Estonia, Canada, Denmark and Hong Kong, are proving that it is possible to do much better. These places now educate virtually all their children to higher levels of critical thinking in math, reading and science — *and* do so more equitably than Americans do. (Vietnam and various provinces in China are omitted here because many 15-year-olds are still not enrolled in school systems there, limiting the comparability of PISA results.)

As we drift toward a world in which more good jobs will require Americans to think critically — and to repeatedly prove their abilities before and after they are hired — it is hard to imagine a more pressing national problem. “Your president-elect has promised to make America great again,” Mr. Schleicher said. But he warned, “He won’t be able to do that without fixing education.”

QUESTIONS

1. What is the bad news for American students, according to PISA results? What is the good news?
2. Based on PISA results, will upgrading technology in the classroom likely improve student performance in math, reading, or science?
3. According to the PISA test results, what are the characteristics of the countries with the highest performing students?
4. Why should America's poor performance in math signal an urgent need to take action to improve?
5. How would you describe Amanda Ripley's ethos in this article? Is she an objective observer? An engaged educator? A concerned citizen? Consider the extent to which she explains her own position on the education that today's high school students are receiving.
6. Based on what PISA tests have shown over the years in terms of the factors affecting students' performance, what measures should the United States be taking?

6 How High Schools Are Demolishing the Classroom

LESLIE NGUYEN-OKWU

Leslie Nguyen-Okwu is a recent graduate of Stanford University's international relations program, currently working as a journalist specializing in Southeast Asia. The following article appeared in 2017 in OZY, a daily global news website and digital magazine.

Cool mist rises off the Mississippi and drifts across the deck of the classroom. Below, the murky waters of the Delta gush past in a torrent. In fact, little separates the gaggle of gossiping teenagers from the venomous snakes and oil-stained river beneath their feet. Not exactly Hogwarts Express, right?

New Harmony High in Louisiana isn't your typical little red schoolhouse. Instead, students live and learn on an armada of barges that floats along the gritty marshes and wetlands of the Bayou State. All the while, workshops on rising sea levels and coastal preservation allow students to confront the realities of climate change face-to-face. A winner of the XQ: Super School Project, New Harmony High's doors are set to open later this year, when students will learn in a living, breathing lab on the water and get hands-on experience in studying biology, river ecology and environmental justice, in addition to the usual reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic. "[The students] are out in the world, not in an ivory tower, not

clustered behind the fence," says Elliot Washor, one of the nontraditional education gurus behind New Harmony High. In fact, this high school isn't the only one venturing outside the four walls of the stuffy traditional classroom to teach the next generation of pupils.

- At The Mountain School in rural Vermont, students can go off-grid and spend a semester learning on an organic farm.
- Michigan's Grand Rapids Public Museum School is in a renovated, 80-year-old public museum.
- If you're stuck in an academic rut, you could always enroll in the Dongzhong Cave School in China.
- Stay in your pajamas while venturing through Fulton High School's forthcoming virtual reality campus.
- Avoid walls entirely and attend an "open classroom" with "squiggly" desk and a mountaintop for speeches, like the Telefonplan School in Stockholm.

- The Traveling School lets students learn and adventure in the Galapagos, Guatemala and Botswana.

These high schools probably don't look anything like your alma mater. But their atypical classrooms are designed to encourage out-of-school learning for those who don't work as well inside the mold of traditional education, says Christopher Hanks, the principal at the Grand Rapids Museum School. The 21st century has flooded schools with high-tech blackboards, virtual reality headsets and other fancy learning gizmos, yet the traditional four walls of most classrooms have mostly stayed put, thanks to an old-era approach to learning. During the Industrial Revolution, educators adopted a factory-model system that monolithically processed students in batches, funneling them in one door as raw material at age 5 and ejecting them out another as finished educational products 12 years later. Back then, isolated boxlike classrooms were designed for crowd control and stodgy lectures, and learning was thought to occur in only prescribed places.

Today, the same ol' shape, structure and style still persist inside most schools. However, a pioneering group of architects, designers and educators are calling for something decidedly different in the world's most avant-garde high schools. Research on classroom design has long touted the benefits of flexible learning spaces: Ever-changing surroundings keep students more engaged, spur creativity and motivation and, yes, improve grades. Couple that fact with another study from the University of Salford, in England, which found that the classroom environment can affect a child's academic progress over a year by as much as 25 percent — for better or worse. There's been a whole lot more attention paid to high school design as of late, says Kris

Magnusson, the dean of education at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, B.C.: "What that signals is we're moving away from a rigid, one-size-fits-all idea. . . . By broadening the repertoire of what we count as educational experiences and legitimizing the different ways in which students learn, we open the door to a whole new world."

So, just as architects are starting to build better hospitals to aid the dying and better parks to aid play and recreation, the same movement is taking place in schools to create spaces that are more conducive to learning, says Rosan Bosch, the intrepid designer behind the Telefonplan School in Sweden. "We have to accept that design impacts us," she says, "how we feel, how we react and how we function."

But not everyone works best in nontraditional environments, and for some students, unconventional settings could even serve as a distraction rather than as an aid to learning. Plus, it's not as though these ideas on better classroom design haven't been percolating for millennia — all of ancient Athens was a classroom to Socrates — but it's easier and cheaper to stick with the "old-school" model, Magnusson says. Most schools, he adds, are "designed to replicate themselves, not to imagine a different future." In the U.S., standardization is the bedrock of the current education system. So, how are we to evaluate the pedagogic benefits of a semester spent in an organic garden? "There's this massive inertia in effect" when it comes to today's massive, unwieldy educational systems, Magnusson claims. "It's difficult to get it to change course."

Still, who wouldn't have more fun learning on a river barge or in a spooky museum, a la Ben Stiller? Just like kids, the schools of the future will soon outgrow the classroom. Now, all we need is a flying, souped-up school bus to jet them there.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the philosophy of the schools described in this article?
2. What are the characteristics of the “factory-model” system of education that these innovative high schools are designed to challenge?
3. What potential problems or drawbacks can you imagine might occur if one of the new models discussed in this article were to fully supplant more traditional classroom education?
4. Leslie Nguyen-Okwu asks Kris Magnusson, an advocate of less traditional, more experiential models of education, how these unconventional approaches might be evaluated. He does not respond to the question directly except to say that change is difficult. Does this issue of assessing the impact of different classroom environments on student growth seem a significant problem? To what extent do you think colleges would be uneasy about such different approaches?
5. If given a choice, would you choose to attend a high school like one of those mentioned in the article or to stay in your current environment? Explain your response.

7

from **We Will Pay High School Students to Go to School. And We Will Like It.**

BRENTIN MOCK

Brentin Mock is a staff writer for CityLab, a website sponsored by the Atlantic magazine that focuses on ideas and issues facing urban environments.

When I read that my old high school in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, suspended half of its student population for excessive absences — defined as roughly a week’s worth of unexcused truancy over the last quarter — my first thought was, *Only half?*

School absence was a huge problem when I was a student there in the mid-90s. Not going to class was arguably a class of its own, and one that many of my peers mastered. (No comment on whether I was part of the problem.)

But to be clear, I’m not taking truancy lightly. It’s a serious issue, then and now. I sympathize with Harrisburg High’s new principal, Lisa Love, whose actions have made headlines internationally. The problems she’s inherited go beyond attendance to poor test scores and low graduation rates; she can’t deal with either of those problems when kids don’t show up. She told the local press that she took the “radical” step of suspending over 500 students to send a message to parents and the community, and the district’s

superintendent backed the mass suspension. “In order for us to get different results, we have to do something different,” Superintendent Sybil Knight-Burney told PennLive.com.

The problem: Suspending kids who don’t go to school isn’t “different.” That’s what they did when I was there. At risk of stating the obvious here, suspension is no punishment for those who are already voluntarily suspending themselves. Suspension is better than criminalizing truancy, but it won’t necessarily inspire kids to start coming to homeroom. For that kind of inspiration — and inspiration is truly what’s needed here — educators will have to come up with something more creative, and competitive.

And here it is: We need to pay high school students to go to school. I don’t mean some punk-ass weekly or monthly allowance, or a gift card for Dave & Busters. I’m talking about a deposit of somewhere in the ballpark of \$50 to \$100, every school day. That’s not for making honor roll; it’s just for making it to school in the

morning and staying until the end of the day. Yes, compensated just for showing up. Think Universal Basic Income — but for kids.

This is my own unsolicited proposal. I promise my 8th grade son did not put me up to this (though he enthusiastically endorses it). But as crazy as it sounds, I'm pretty convinced this is the only solution to keeping as many kids as possible in school, ensuring timely graduation, and disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline. I see this solution as applicable exclusively for public high school students. And before you post your rebuttal — as I'm sure there are many — please hear out my five-point argument:

1: Paying kids gives them a financial incentive to pursue perfect attendance.

I know what you're going to say. "What they get out of going to school is an *education*! That should be motivation enough!"

Yeah, but it's not. Which is why we've been talking about this problem for decades and losing. Others will insist that paying kids to do what they should be doing will spoil their work ethic — except paying people to do what they should be doing is what already happens in the real world. It's called going to work.

Teenagers are the only people on the planet who we ask to go places they don't want to be, to do work they don't want to do, starting at an hour in which they are supposed to be asleep — and we not only require them to do it for free, but we require them to *like it*.

This is not preparing them for the real world. ¹⁰ This is more like preparing them for prison. That's the only other place in North America where people are held against their will to do unpaid work.

2: Paying kids will allow schools to compete with the *not-going-to-school* market.

What's often overlooked in discussions about truancy is the fact that there is a very large market for not going to school. You can kick that story

about how you went to school every day as a kid because it was an honor if you want. But you and I know the truth: You went to school every day because where else were you gonna go? Church? Mr. Adams's 5 & Dime store? That playground with two swings and a half-a-slide? You went to school every day because you had no choice.

Today's kids have *options*, especially when the parents are working two and three jobs and can't be home to regulate. For one, they can go to legit work — and seriously, for many low-income families that is the *only* choice. More uncomfortably, kids have the option to go to the corner and deal drugs, which is a much more lucrative prospect than math class. Most cities would happily pay now for schools to recapture these teens from the block so that they won't be caught up in the criminal justice system later.

Not to mention, there are the myriad entrepreneurial opportunities offered via the internet that did not exist in decades past, further incentivizing kids to pull a Zuckerberg and drop out early. A kid with a laptop can extract cash via YouTube, Snapchat, eBay, and all manner of sites and apps. Hell, you can make a gang of money just playing video games and talking about it, Pewdie Pie-style. Some innovative teenager might use his time off from school while suspended to make a mixtape online that will go viral and make him into a rap star. Oh, I forgot: Chance the Rapper already did that.

In other words: The *not-going-to-school* market is boomin', and schools are competing with it whether they acknowledge that market or not.

3: Salaried students will have a financial incentive to actually perform and behave well.

Just as it does in the adult working world, putting ¹⁵ kids on salary will fix a lot of behavior problems. Kids won't want to get suspended if it means their pay will get docked. Augmenting their base wages with daily performance bonuses — say, an extra \$1 to \$5 for achieving daily micro-goals

like asking questions in class and doing extra assignments — could further entice kids to give classtime their all. (Those kinds of “secondary quest” rewards would also allow the classroom experience to more closely resemble more stimulating activities like videogames.)

4: Fewer parents will feel pressured to put their kids in a private or charter school.

It’s paramount that the daily stipend be applied to public high schools exclusively. For one, these are the schools that usually take in kids from families at the bottom of the economic spectrum. With this kind of financial enticement, though, more families of all incomes would consider putting or keeping their kids in public schools, especially if the stipends produce the kind of academic and behavioral outcomes projected above.

And to be clear, I don’t think a stipend should be available to children of families of all tax brackets. There should probably be a household income cap on families that are

able to participate in the program, with an opt-out clause for middle-class families (perhaps 80 percent of AMI) who don’t need their kids to accept the stipend, but who might otherwise qualify for it. This way, we’ll know that returning higher-income families — those who normally would flee to private/charters — are there for the educational outcomes, not for the checks.

5: Kids in K through 8 — especially middle school kids — will have something to look forward to.

We know that a lot of students coming up through the lower grades are anticipating high school more for reasons related to puberty than academics. But let’s start seeding in their heads as early as third grade that they’ll get paid once they hit the higher grades: By middle school they’ll be developing study habits, learning how to stay organized, and getting all the goofball stuff out of their system. They understand that once 9th grade arrives, getting good grades and perfect attendance is serious business.

QUESTIONS

1. How does Brentin Mock define the problem that he believes offering financial incentives to attend high school classes will solve?
2. Why does Mock indicate that his proposal should be targeted at public school students, not those in charter or private schools?
3. Mock offers a five-point argument. Which of his reasons is most appealing to you and why? Which do you find the least likely to be effective and why?
4. Mock writes in a lively, informal style and includes anecdotes from his own experience in school and as a parent. Does this approach enhance or detract from his argument? Why?

8 This High School Wants to Revolutionize Learning with Technology

AMY ROLPH

Amy Rolph, an independent journalist, wrote this article, published in *USA Today* in April 2017, about the Washington D.C. Leadership Academy, one of the award-winning schools from XQ, the Super School Project.

High school freshman Zoe Valladares has been the mayor of a major metropolis. She's chatted with former President Barack Obama. And she's been assigned a house within her school by a magical sorting hat, just like the lucky students of Hogwarts in a Harry Potter novel.

Each of these incredible experiences was powered by virtual reality and computer technology — cornerstones of learning at Washington Leadership Academy in Washington, D.C. Valladares is one of 110 freshmen at the new charter school, which admitted its inaugural class of 9th graders in 2016.

Along with her fellow classmates, Valladares uses virtual reality and computer science to supplement her studies — but she's not just a consumer of technology. She's also learning to write code and has ambitious plans for her life after high school. She wants a career in virtual reality, and to perhaps even found her own company.

She says virtual reality is the future, and she wants to be a part of it.

"It's going to take over the world someday," Valladares said. 5

Stacy Kane, one of Washington Leadership Academy's co-founders, explains that the school uses technology and online courses to meet students at their level, rather than teaching an entire grade the same content. "Our classes are really pushing boundaries in terms of their uses of technology," Kane said. "Our students can grow at their own paces."

And instead of taking the same sequence of classes available at most high schools, students assemble a unique blend of classes and projects based on their interests and goals.

The school's foundation in technology stretches far beyond virtual reality and computer science. Students also study what it means to participate in civic life as a digital citizen by creating blogs, coding complex websites and using social media tools. Leadership skills are another focus. Students are encouraged to practice crafting persuasive arguments and speaking in public.

Joseph Webb, Washington Leadership Academy's founding principal, explains that teachers encourage students to think like designers by examining problems from a user's perspective and subsequently hypothesizing possible solutions. Fittingly, Webb says this is the same approach educators should take to reimagine high school.

In 2016, Washington Leadership Academy 10 was one of 10 schools to receive a \$10 million grant from XQ: The Super School Project. XQ planned to award five grants, but doubled that number after 700 applications were submitted. The winners are all working to create high schools where students work to solve real-world problems in collaborative, flexible environments.

Sponsored by XQ Institute and backed by Laurene Powell Jobs' philanthropic organization Emerson Collective, XQ sought out innovative ideas from the education community. The project's mission statement reads: "We've gone from the Model T to the Tesla and from the switchboard to the smartphone. Yet high school has remained frozen in time."

In moving towards a more modern educational paradigm, XQ's Senior School Strategist Monica Martinez says faculty members must battle the biggest enemy of educational progress: Apathy.

"Using design thinking and the user experience when designing high school, rather than thinking about just what's been done in the past, is critical," she said. "There is so much apathy and so much boredom in high school."

"We are stuck with an irrelevant model, and students are dissatisfied, but what are we doing about it as a society?" said Martinez. "The high school is a cultural icon and everybody has experienced it and therefore do not question its usefulness for today's students and our future economic needs."

Washington Leadership Academy is already 15 changing the face of education in Washington, D.C. The school's computer-science-for-all policy

will triple the number of black students enrolled in AP computer science — and quadruple the number of girls.

The school is also one of just a handful of schools across the country making virtual reality a pillar of its curriculum. But co-founder Seth Andrew said he wants to see more schools adopt a similar approach to education. That's why Washington Leadership Academy makes its curriculum available to copy and revise on an open-source development platform.

"We're asking teachers and principals to steal it and make it their own," he said.

Andrew stresses that everything the school has built so far was funded with public dollars and is "100 percent sustainable," meaning it's feasible for other schools to do the same.

One goal of Andrew's is to develop a virtual reality chemistry lab that can reach students who might not have access to a real-world lab. There, he says, students could learn from the best teachers in a safe environment.

As for what the distant future holds in terms of educational development, the school's founders are intrigued to explore the use of holographic technology, which would allow educators from all over the world to virtually visit classrooms.

When imagining the next advances of education, Andrew is often reminded of something he heard Valladares say about virtual reality's endless possibilities for education. "She said, 'If virtual reality is infinite, that means education is infinite.'"

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QUESTIONS

1. What characteristics does Washington Leadership Academy have that presents "a more modern educational paradigm" (para. 12)?
2. In what ways does the school's focus on technology stretch "far beyond virtual reality and computer science" (para. 8)?
3. How have the faculty of the Academy countered what they identify as the most significant problem of today's high schools: student apathy?
4. Would you like to attend Washington Leadership Academy? Why or why not?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Based on his beliefs about the interconnection of democracy and education, why do you think that Horace Mann would or would not support the call for a new educational paradigm to replace the traditional high school, what some call the factory model?
2. In what ways does the fact that American students have a low-ranking achievement in math, as Amanda Ripley reports, challenge Leon Botstein's position? In what ways does it support his position?
3. How would Brentin Mock be likely to respond to the methods employed by the Washington Leadership Academy? Would he find the school's approach a promising way to address student truancy problems? Why or why not?
4. Based on his call to bring back vocational education, how would Nicholas Wyman respond to the PISA data that Amanda Ripley reports?
5. Given the conditions in other countries that promote student achievement, would the alternative classroom approaches that Leslie Nguyen-Okwu describes be likely to raise student test scores?
6. How do you think Nicholas Wyman would respond to Brentin Mock's proposal to pay students for attending school?
7. Which of the approaches represented in this Conversation do you think would be most open to making daily meditation a required part of high school curriculum? Cite specific evidence in the text to support your choice.

ENTERING THE CONVERSATION

As you respond to the following prompts, support your argument with references to at least three of the sources in this Conversation on the future of the American high school. For help using sources, see Chapter 4.

1. Write an essay explaining whether you agree with Leon Botstein's critique of the American high school (p. 274).
2. Using the texts in this Conversation on the American high school, as well as your own insights into high school, identify two serious problems with today's educational system, and propose recommendations for addressing them. Cite at least three sources from the Conversation in your response.
3. Statistical data show that nearly one in four students drops out of high school each year, making the United States fall below twenty other countries in graduation rates. The unemployment rate for recent dropouts is 50 percent because it's difficult to get even low-paying jobs without a high school diploma. Survey data show that most who do not graduate cite boring classes without relevance to real-world learning as their reason for dropping out. Write an argument explaining what measures you believe need to be taken to encourage teenagers to stay in school and graduate.
4. John Dewey (1859–1952), the father of experiential education, described the interaction of education and democracy as follows:

Democratic society is peculiarly dependent for its maintenance upon the use in forming a course of study of criteria which are broadly human. Democracy cannot flourish where the chief influences in selecting subject matter of instruction are utilitarian ends narrowly conceived for the masses, and, for the higher education of the few, the traditions of a specialized cultivated class. The notion that the "essentials" of elementary education are the three R's mechanically treated, is based upon ignorance of the essentials needed for realization of democratic ideals. . . . A curriculum which acknowledges the social responsibilities of education must present situations where problems are relevant to

the problems of living together, and where observation and information are calculated to develop social insight and interest.

— *Democracy and Education*, 1916

- Develop a position on the extent to which Dewey's vision for education, as he explains it in this excerpt, remains relevant to today's high schools. Draw on your experience and observation, and cite at least three of the readings from the Conversation to build your argument.
5. The mission statement of the XQ Initiative, the organization behind the Washington Leadership Academy, is as follows: "We've gone from the Model T to the Tesla and from the switchboard to the smartphone. Yet high school has remained frozen in time." Some might argue, however, that there are advantages to maintaining the more traditional model of high school, particularly during a time of such rapid change fostered by technological advances and globalization. What are the best qualities, values, and practices of a traditional high school? Write an argument explaining what is worth keeping even as schools adapt to new generations and changing times.
 6. Suppose you had the freedom to design a high school that you want to attend. What would be the prevailing philosophy of the school? What would be three or four key characteristics of the school that implement this philosophy? Draw on at least three of the sources from the Conversation in your discussion.
 7. How do popular movies depict life in high school? Choose one — maybe even an old movie — and explain what you'd think of high school based on the film. Possibilities include *10 Things I Hate about You* (1999); *The Breakfast Club* (1985); *Bring It On* (2000); *Clueless* (1995); *Cooley High* (1975); *Dead Poets Society* (1989); *Easy A* (2010); *Friday Night Lights* (2004); *Grease* (1978); *Mean Girls* (2004); *The Principal* (1987); *Rushmore* (1998); and *To Sir, with Love* (1967).

 from **In Defense of a Liberal Education**

FAREED ZAKARIA

If you want to live a good life these days, you know what you're supposed to do. Get into college but then drop out. Spend your days learning computer science and your nights coding. Start a technology company and take it public. That's the new American dream. If you're not quite that adventurous, you could major in electrical engineering.

What you are not supposed to do is study the liberal arts. Around the world, the idea of a broad-based "liberal" education is closely tied to the United States and its great universities and colleges. But in America itself, a liberal education is out of favor. In an age defined by technology and globalization, everyone is talking about skills-based learning. Politicians, business-people, and even many educators see it as the only way for the nation to stay competitive. They urge students to stop dreaming and start thinking practically about the skills they will need in the workplace. An open-ended exploration of knowledge is seen as a road to nowhere.

A classic liberal education has few defenders. Conservatives fume that it is too, well, liberal (though the term has no partisan meaning). Liberals worry it is too elitist. Students wonder what they would do with a degree in psychology. And parents fear that it will cost them their life savings.

This growing unease is apparent in the numbers. As college enrollment has grown in recent decades, the percentage of students majoring in subjects like English and philosophy has declined sharply. In 1971, for example, 7.6 percent of all bachelor's degrees were awarded in English language and literature. By 2012, that number had fallen to 3.0 percent. During the same period, the percentage of business majors in the undergraduate population rose from 13.7 to 20.5.

Some believe this pattern makes sense — that new entrants into higher education might simply prefer job training to the liberal arts. Perhaps. But in earlier periods of educational expansion, this was not the case. In the 1950s and 1960s, for instance, students saw college as more than a glorified trade school. Newcomers, often from lower-middle-class backgrounds and immigrant families with little education, enthusiastically embraced the liberal arts. They saw it as a gateway to a career, and also as a way to assimilate into American culture. "I have to speak absolutely perfect English," says Philip Roth's character Alex Portnoy, the son of immigrants and hero of the novel *Portnoy's Complaint*. Majors like English and history grew in popularity precisely during the decades of mass growth in American higher education.

The great danger facing American higher education is not that too many students are studying the liberal arts. Here are the data. In the 2011–12 academic year, 52 percent of American undergraduates were enrolled in two-year or less-than-two-year colleges, and 48 percent were enrolled in four-year institutions. At two-year colleges, the most popular area of study was health professions and related sciences (23.3 percent). An additional 11.7 percent of students studied business, management, and marketing. At four-year colleges, the pattern was the same. Business led the list of majors, accounting for 18.9 percent of students, and health was second, accounting for 13.4 percent. Another estimate found that only a third of all bachelor's degree recipients study fields that could be classified as the liberal arts. And only about 1.8 percent of all undergraduates attend classic liberal arts colleges like Amherst, Swarthmore, and Pomona.

As you can see, we do not have an oversupply of students studying history, literature, philosophy,

or physics and math for that matter. A majority is specializing in fields because they see them as directly related to the job market. It's true that more Americans need technical training, and all Americans need greater scientific literacy. But the drumbeat of talk about skills and jobs has not lured people into engineering and biology — not everyone has the aptitude for science — so much as it has made them nervously forsake the humanities and take courses in business and communications. Many of these students might well have been better off taking a richer, deeper set of courses in subjects they found fascinating — and supplementing it, as we all should, with some basic knowledge of computers and math. In any event, what is clear is that the gap in technical training is not being caused by the small percentage of students who choose four-year degrees in the liberal arts.

Whatever the facts, the assaults continue and have moved from the realm of rhetoric to action. The governors of Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Wisconsin have announced that they do not intend to keep subsidizing the liberal arts at state-funded universities. “Is it a vital interest of the state to have more anthropologists?” Florida’s Rick Scott asked. “I don’t think so.” Wisconsin is planning to cut money from subjects that don’t train students for a specific job right out of college. “How many PhDs in philosophy do I need to subsidize?” the radio show host William

Bennett asked North Carolina’s Patrick McCrory, a sentiment with which McCrory enthusiastically agreed. (Ironically, Bennett himself has a PhD in philosophy, which appears to have trained him well for his multiple careers in government, media, nonprofits, and the private sector.)

It isn’t only Republicans on the offensive. Everyone’s eager to promote the type of education that might lead directly to a job. In a speech in January 2014, President Barack Obama said, “I promise you, folks can make a lot more, potentially, with skilled manufacturing or the trades than they might with an art history degree.” He later apologized for what he described as a “glib” comment, but Obama has expressed similar sentiments during his presidency. His concern — that in today’s world, college graduates need to focus on the tools that will get them good jobs — is shared by many liberals, as well as conservatives and independents. The irrelevance of a liberal education is an idea that has achieved that rare status in Washington: bipartisan agreement.

The attacks have an effect. There is today a ¹⁰ loss of coherence and purpose surrounding the idea of a liberal education. Its proponents are defensive about its virtues, while its opponents are convinced that it is at best an expensive luxury, at worst actively counterproductive. Does it really make sense to study English in the age of apps?

1. In context of the passage as a whole, the tone of paragraph 1 is best described as
 - a. emphatic
 - b. didactic
 - c. lighthearted
 - d. ironic
 - e. optimistic
2. According to paragraph 1, “the new American dream” is based on
 - a. hard work and persistence
 - b. studies and social engagement
 - c. entrepreneurship and monetary success
 - d. academic ambition and individual commitment
 - e. self-satisfaction and hedonistic pursuits
3. The primary function of paragraph 2 is
 - a. to defend the idea of a liberal education against its detractors
 - b. to explore the relevance of skills-based learning
 - c. to suggest arguments a student might use when choosing a major
 - d. to present the counter-arguments to studying technology-based subjects
 - e. to summarize the views of the opponents of a liberal education

4. In context, the reference to “an open-ended exploration of knowledge” (para. 2) is best understood as
 - a. a key tenet of a liberal education
 - b. a central characteristic of a necessary tool in the technology fields
 - c. an alternative pathway for those who drop out of college
 - d. a primary quality of the traditional American dream
 - e. a metaphor for the study of psychology
5. The primary function of paragraph 3 is
 - a. to summarize arguments for a liberal education
 - b. to list arguments against liberal education
 - c. to identify the claims made by political supporters of liberal education
 - d. to ridicule the interference of politicians in college education
 - e. to lampoon opponents of liberal education
6. The primary purpose of the statistics in paragraphs 4 and 6 is
 - a. to support the relevance of liberal education
 - b. to demonstrate that participation in liberal education has declined
 - c. to show that liberal arts major can still succeed in careers
 - d. to undermine the arguments against liberal education
 - e. to praise the growth of technology-based majors in America
7. The quotation from *Portnoy’s Complaint* (para. 5) functions as
 - a. criticism of the elitism of liberal arts colleges
 - b. exemplification of the content covered in English and history departments
 - c. evidence of the relevance of liberal education to first-generation college students
 - d. satire of those who major in liberal arts subjects
 - e. exaggeration of the rigors of a liberal education
8. In paragraph 7, which sentence functions as a concession?
 - a. “A majority is specializing in fields because they see them as directly related to the job market.”
 - b. “It’s true that more Americans need technical training, and all Americans need greater scientific literacy.”
 - c. “But the drumbeat of talk about skills and jobs has not lured people into engineering and biology — not everyone has the aptitude for science — so much as it has made them nervously forsake the humanities and take courses in business and communications.”
 - d. “Many of these students might well have been better off taking a richer, deeper set of courses in subjects they found fascinating — and supplementing it, as we all should, with some basic knowledge of computers and math.”
 - e. “In any event, what is clear is that the gap in technical training is not being caused by the small percentage of students who choose four-year degrees in the liberal arts.”
9. Which of the following sentences most directly states the author’s position?
 - a. “The great danger facing American higher education is not that too many students are studying the liberal arts” (para. 6).
 - b. “As you can see, we do not have an oversupply of students studying history, literature, philosophy, or physics and math for that matter” (para. 7).
 - c. “Many of these students might well have been better off taking a richer, deeper set of courses in subjects they found fascinating — and supplementing it, as we all should, with some basic knowledge of computers and math” (para. 7).
 - d. “Everyone’s eager to promote the type of education that might lead directly to a job” (para. 9).
 - e. “The irrelevance of a liberal education is an idea that has achieved that rare status in Washington: bipartisan agreement” (para. 9).
10. Over the course of the passage as a whole, the author’s tone becomes increasingly
 - a. ironic
 - b. irrational
 - c. personal
 - d. bitter
 - e. humorous

 from **The Blessings of Liberty and Education**

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

In his natural condition, however, man is only potentially great. As a mere physical being, he does not take high rank, even among the beasts of the field. He is not so fleet as a horse or a hound, or so strong as an ox or a mule. His true dignity is not to be sought in his arm, or in his legs, but in his head. Here is the seat and source of all that is of especially great or practical importance in him. There is fire in the flint and steel, but it is friction that causes it to flash, flame and burn, and give light where all else may be darkness. There is music in the violin, but the touch of the master is needed to fill the air and the soul with the concord of sweet sounds. There is power in the human mind, but education is needed for its development.

As man is the highest being on earth, it follows that the vocation of teacher is among the highest known to him. To properly teach is to educe man's potential and latent greatness, to discover and develop the noblest, highest and best that is in him. In view of this fact, no man whose business it is to teach should ever allow himself to feel that his mission is mean, inferior, or circumscribed. In my estimation, neither politics nor religion present to us a calling higher than this primary business of unfolding and strengthening the powers of the human soul. It is a permanent vocation. Some know the value of education, by having it. I know its value by not having it. It is a want that begins with the beginning of human existence, and continues through all the journey of life. Of all the creatures that live and move and have their being on this green earth, man, at his birth, is the most helpless and the most in need of instruction. He does not know even how to seek his food. His little life is menaced on every hand. The very elements conspire against him. The cattle upon a thousand hills; the wolves and bears in the forest, all come

into the world better equipped for life than does man. From first to last, his existence depends upon instruction.

Yet this little helpless weakling, whose life can be put out as we put out the flame of a candle, with a breath, is the lord of creation. Though in his beginning, he is only potentially this lord, with education he is the commander of armies; the builder of cities; the tamer of wild beasts; the navigator of unknown seas; the discoverer of unknown islands, capes and continents, and the founder of great empires, and capable of limitless civilization.

But if man is without education, although with all his latent possibilities attaching to him, he is, but a pitiable object; a giant in body, but a pigmy in intellect, and, at best, but half a man. Without education, he lives within the narrow, dark and grimy walls of ignorance. He is a poor prisoner without hope. The little light that he gets comes to him as through dark corridors and grated windows. The sights and sounds which reach him, so significant and full of meaning to the well-trained mind, are to him of dim and shadowy and uncertain importance. He sees, but does not perceive. He hears, but does not understand. The silent and majestic heavens, fretted with stars, so inspiring and uplifting, so sublime and glorious to the souls of other men, bear no message to him. They suggest to him no idea of the wonderful world in which he lives, or of the harmony of this great universe, and hence impart to him no happiness.

Education, on the other hand, means eman- 5
cipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the light only by which men can be free. To deny education to any people is one of the greatest crimes against human nature. It is to

deny them the means of freedom and the rightful pursuit of happiness, and to defeat the very end of their being. They can neither honor themselves nor their Creator. Than this, no greater wrong can be inflicted; and, on the other hand, no greater benefit can be bestowed upon a long benighted people than giving to them, as we are

here this day endeavoring to do, the means of useful education. It is aimed to make them both better and more useful in life and to furnish them with increased means of livelihood; to make of them more skilled workmen, more useful mechanics, and better workers in wood, leather, tin and iron.

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1. In paragraph 1, the analogies of the flint and steel and the violin serve to
 - a. define the specific benefits of education
 - b. suggest the capabilities of the intellect as opposed to the body
 - c. emphasize the need for education in forming a human
 - d. contrast the practical with the aesthetic
 - e. identify skills that distinguish humans from animals
 2. The speaker's claim that "the vocation of teacher is among the highest known to him" is based on the reasoning that
 - a. humans are the smartest creatures and teachers are the smartest humans
 - b. humans have great capabilities, and teachers help students achieve them
 - c. unlike politicians or religious leaders, teachers respond to a personal calling
 - d. within American culture, teachers are universally admired
 - e. teaching is a business that can be productive for both the teacher and the student
 3. As used in paragraph 2, "to enduce" most nearly means:
 - a. to catalyze
 - b. to capture
 - c. to realize
 - d. to educate
 - e. to recognize
 4. Which of the following sentences from paragraph 2 signals the beginning of a rhetorical shift?
 - a. "To properly teach it to enduce man's potential and latent greatness, to discover and develop the noblest, highest and best that is in him."
 - b. "In view of this fact, no man whose business it is to teach should ever allow himself to feel that his mission is mean, inferior, or circumscribed."
 - c. "It is a permanent vocation."
 - d. "Some know the value of education, by having it."
 - e. "It is a want that begins with the beginning of human existence, and continues through all the journey of life."
 5. The speaker's use of the first person in paragraph 2 functions to do all of the following EXCEPT
 - a. contrast his experience with others'
 - b. enhance his ethos
 - c. emphasize why he appreciates education
 - d. criticize those who do not value teachers
 - e. suggest that his experience has influenced his perspective
 6. The list in paragraph 3 ("he is . . . limitless civilization") defines human achievement in terms of all of the following EXCEPT
 - a. consensus-building
 - b. leadership
 - c. power over others
 - d. risk-taking
 - e. exploration
 7. In paragraph 4, the speaker uses a central metaphor primarily to convey
 - a. the role of teachers in unlocking the minds of students
 - b. the experience students may have in authoritative schools
 - c. the lack of opportunity afforded to the lower classes
 - d. the value of books and libraries in the educational process
 - e. the limitations of those who are not educated

8. In the context of paragraph 5, “benighted” primarily means
- a. rewarded
 - b. darkened
 - c. oppressed
 - d. troubled
 - e. irreligious
9. Which of the following is the primary emphasis of the final paragraph?
- a. the religious and social value of education
 - b. the importance of teachers in the educational process
 - c. the implications of education for the criminal justice system
 - d. the benefits of education for manual laborers
 - e. the intangible rewards received by educators
10. Taken as a whole, the tone of the speaker can best be described as
- a. frustrated and brash
 - b. authoritative and reasonable
 - c. fanciful and discursive
 - d. defensive and combative
 - e. pedantic and detached

EDUCATION

Now that you have examined a number of readings and other texts that focus on education, explore this topic yourself by synthesizing your own ideas and the readings. You might want to do more research or use readings from other classes as you write.

1. What do you believe are the two most important steps (or changes or actions) that the United States should take to improve K-12 education that will ensure the country's continued leadership on the world stage? Should we address economic inequities? Place a stronger emphasis on STEM? Return to a greater emphasis on liberal arts? Provide more job skills and training? Develop stronger character education? Express your viewpoint in a well-written essay, using at least three sources from this chapter in your response.
2. Many see standardized testing as the answer to improving public education in the United States. Thus, students face district- and state-mandated tests as well as national ones. What do you think? Write an essay discussing whether standardized testing is an effective way to improve instruction and performance. Be sure to research the topic, and broaden the scope of your essay beyond your own experience.
3. Homeschooling has become a popular alternative to public or private school for an increasing number of students in the United States. Research this trend by consulting print and electronic resources and, if possible, by interviewing someone involved with homeschooling. Would Ralph Waldo Emerson (p. 208) or Horace Mann (p. 271) support or oppose this method of education? Write an essay exploring both the benefits and the liabilities of homeschooling.
4. Many people believe that children should be required to attend at least one year of school prior to kindergarten. Write an essay explaining why tax dollars should or should not be used to pay for mandatory, government-funded preschool.
5. Write your own "Talk to Teachers," addressing either the teachers in your school or teachers in general. To start this assignment, replace the name *Khrushchev* with the word *terrorism* in the opening paragraph of James Baldwin's "A Talk to Teachers" (p. 211). How does this substitution set the stage for your more contemporary view?
6. Write a roundtable discussion among three or four of the authors in this chapter as they discuss *one* of the following quotations:
 - a. The only real education comes from what goes counter to you.
— André Gide
 - b. I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.
— Mark Twain
 - c. Education is not filling a bucket but lighting a fire.
— William Butler Yeats
 - d. Rewards and punishments are the lowest form of education.
— Chuang-Tzu
7. According to Francine Prose, "Education, after all, is a process intended to produce a product." Examine your school or another part of an educational system (for example, your school district, a Montessori class, a private religion-affiliated school). Describe specific parts of the educational process, and the "product" they strive to produce. Think of this as a cause-and-effect essay, with the process as the cause and the product as the effect.
8. Write a comparison/contrast of the high school classroom as you've experienced it in the United States with the high school experience in another country. If you've attended school in another country, you can use your own experience; if you know someone who has,

you might interview that person; or you can research the topic. Consider how the classroom, including the relationship of teacher and student, reflects the values of the larger society.

9. Congratulations class of 2045! What will high school be like for the next generation? Write an essay explaining what changes you anticipate for high schools in the not-too-distant future. Will the high school be pretty much the same as yours? Will students interact with teachers solely online? Or will future students face a backlash to a more traditional model? What books will students be reading? Will they be reading at all? Can you imagine yourself as one of the teachers?
10. Create your own version of Roz Chast's "What I Learned," presenting your thoughts on education as a cartoon with a narrative line. Feel

free to develop your own illustration style, rather than emulating hers.

11. Write your own humorous account of a learning experience, either in a traditional classroom or in a different context. Use some of David Sedaris's rhetorical strategies, such as dialogue, a self-deprecating persona, or hyperbolic descriptions.
12. Suppose you are delivering the commencement address at your high school. What key characteristics do successful commencement addresses share? Consider watching and/or reading commencement speeches by people such as Donovan Livingston (Harvard University, 2016), Barack Obama (Wesleyan University, 2008), J. K. Rowling (Harvard University, 2008), and David Foster Wallace (Kenyon College, 2005). Then, write one that is tailored to your school and community.