

# VSCC English Department's Best Essays 2008-09

## English Composition at VSCC: Expository Writing, Researched Argument, and Literary Analysis

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## Introduction

The fifth edition of the *VSCC English Department's Best Essays* focuses on the three major categories of writing that students at Volunteer State Community College do in the various English courses we offer: Expository Writing, Researched Argument, and Literary Analysis. The purpose of this edition is to provide our faculty with helpful tools for teaching writing and critical thinking skills to our students by offering sample student essays, chapter introductions focused on modes-based writing and literary analysis, and quick tips to offer to students as they write and revise their essays.

As evidenced by the wide variety of student writings in this publication, Vol State students are offered creative writing assignments, and these student essays exhibit the elements essential to a college-level essay. These student submissions have been judged holistically based on the criteria for good writing: creatively developing ideas around a focused thesis statement, logically organizing thoughts into unified and coherent paragraphs under that thesis, understanding of audience and purpose for which a student is writing, and using appropriate language and proper documentation based on the rules for written communication. These criteria are the focus for the suggestions offered in the chapter introductions, and the Best Essays Committee believes that we have chosen a sample of student essays that best exemplifies these qualities of good college-level writing.

As Laura Black, Director of VSCC's Language Center, noted in the second edition of the Best Essays, "It is essential that our students understand how their abilities to think critically and to express their ideas in written communication have an impact on our

society, our culture, and our everyday life.” With this understanding, our students will become more effective communicators so they may become more successful in a world that demands an awareness of our environment and our place within it.

This edition includes student essays submitted between the Summer 2008 and Spring 2009 semesters, and it is representative of the diversity of the types of students in writing and English classes at Vol State. Our number of submissions continues to grow, and we hope that our English faculty will continue to recommend to this contest the best students from their developmental writing, composition, literature, and film classes as a way to recognize their hard work and their creative approaches to writing assignments.

--Renee' Byrnes, Assistant Professor of English  
August 15, 2009

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**SECTION 1:**  
**EXPOSITORY WRITING**

## Writing Narrative Essays

Narration is frequently the first assignment in most English 1010 Composition classes but may also be assigned in other classes or used as support in other types of essays. Although students and teachers often view narrative writing as one of the simplest forms of writing, there are actually many skills a writer needs to effectively convey meaning in this form.

The purpose of narrative writing is to tell a story with which an audience can relate or from which an audience can learn. Narratives must have both a cohesive plot and a central point of significance to be complete; you cannot have one without the other. While many narratives may use a clear thesis statement to present the main idea of the story, others are not so explicit. The thesis in any narrative, however, should reveal the purpose or reason for telling the story in the first place so that the audience can understand the story's underlying significance or relevance to their own lives.

Narratives are organized around the plot points of the story a writer is telling and developed with the most important details. Often, a writer will start the paper at the beginning of the story and tell us the story straight through. Another way of organizing a narrative is to tell the story as a series of flashbacks where the plot is interrupted in well-chosen places with commentary by the writer. Once the writer has a purpose, thesis, and method of organization, he or she can begin to develop the plot of the story. Often students can get bogged down in all the possible details they can include in their narrative. For example, if the writer is telling a story about a childhood baseball game, he may be tempted to tell his audience about the uniforms, the weather conditions of



the day, and how many people were watching the game. While all of these details help create a precise picture of that baseball game, they may not have anything to do with the point the writer is making, i.e. the writer's specific purpose. A good rule for developing narratives is to include details about emotions and thoughts of the central characters, and descriptions of the most important objects and places to give the audience clues that will lead the audience to the central purpose of the story.

When a student writes a narrative, it is important to keep in mind the fact that the reader might not be as familiar with the events and places as the writer is. Consequently, the writer should try to include details that will make the readers see the characters and events of the story as if they were watching the story play out in front of them. An audience should be able to anticipate the point the story is making and follow the plot of the story without confusion. Narrative writing, at its best, will take an audience through some chronological version of events and reveal to them something that they can learn through the experiences of others.

#### Quick Tips for Students:

1. Pay close attention to the assignment requirements for length when determining the timeframe for your narrative. Especially in English 1010 essays that are usually shorter in length, it sometimes helps to consider narrowing the timeframe for the body of the essay to the most significant part of a day, an hour, or even a portion of an hour. Then, student writers can employ methods of flashback or use introductory paragraphs to offer essential background information (exposition) for the narrative.

2. Prioritize when it comes to choosing the most important details, characters, and events for developing a narrative, but make those details, characters, and events vivid for your readers by employing methods of description and appealing to the five senses. Keep your audience in mind by understanding that they may not be as familiar with the people, places, and things that make up your story, so you may need to offer a little more description for those people than you would for others.
3. Don't forget to include dialogue in your narrative, but choose dialogue that reveals something about the characters or the relationships between the characters who are speaking to one another.

## “Moment of a Lifetime: Returning to College at Any Age”

Here we have a first-person narrative which blends witty hyperbole with an open and direct tone to create a picture of back-to-college jitters experienced by most returning students. Readers will note a strong voice and a fresh use of a quotation from Forrest Gump as a strategy for the concluding paragraph.

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Velvet Hale

Professor Renee' Byrnes

English 1010, Section 011

23 September 2008

### Moment of a Lifetime – Returning to College at Any Age

During the course of my life, I have faced many new things. There was taking my first step, getting my first haircut, losing my first tooth, and getting my first car. These are part of my once-in-a-lifetime moments, my “get out the camera; momma don’t want to miss this” exclusives. Returning to college after years of sitting on the sidelines has reminded me to get back in the game and be a winner in the end. I have gained a whole new perspective on the education I am receiving.

My call to return to school after eighteen years of working in different areas may not have been the brightest, most shining moment I’ve ever had. I had given it thought for a couple years and had pretty much decided that I had forgotten more than I would EVER remember, and that was the end of it. But then I began to consider returning to school and knew that I had matured since high school; I wondered whether or not I still had the capacity to learn and explore all the possibilities placed before me. I might also add that I fought the urge to run screaming, dig a large hole somewhere, jump in and pull the ground in behind me.

I understood that returning to school had to be carefully balanced. So many times we as adults “fill our plates,” so to speak, leaving little to no time for self, let alone time to consider our families, children, and relationships; learning to adjust would be important in trying to juggle church, work, college, and family.

Even before the first day in class, I knew I had much to do in the way of preparation. It was an overwhelming sense of “WHAT IN THE WORLD?” I had already visited Financial Aid around 103 times. I thought for a minute they were going to give me my own office and a desk plate. I went on to fill out admission paperwork and was accepted. My next step was to register for classes, which, by the way, is reason alone for prayer in school, and believe me, I was praying. I sat in the admission office that day, absolutely sure of only one thing: This was not the way things were supposed to be going.

My friend Chastity was a lifeline during this trying time, rescuing me before the drowning. My most significant instance of this “lifeline” happened to be on Friday, August 22, 2008. That’s right...it was three days before school was supposed to start, and I was not registered for one single class. As I began the search for classes to check availability, and they all showed full, I felt I had no other choice. Technologically-challenged as I am, I sent a text message to Chastity, with four pleading words zooming through cyber space: “Chasi...HELP! HELP! HELP!”

I should let you know that all of the insecurity and fear I felt was short-lived as I began to see classes open up, the exact classes that I had been searching for, and all the pieces began to fall into place. And now, as I sit in my home away from home, the Thigpen Library at Volunteer State Community College, I don’t have any regrets for the

path I'm on so far. The journey ahead of me promises to keep me on my toes. Forrest Gump once told us that "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." Far be it for me to get a box with all creamy caramels and chocolate-covered nougats. I proudly accept the box that is full of assorted nuts!

I have issued my battle cry, and I say to all those standing in the same shoes I stood in just a short time ago: "Forward, March!" Without these experiences, I would still be attempting to have this "moment of a lifetime." College is going to add an even greater dimension to an already exciting life, and I will boldly go where others have gone before.

**“Leaving” – Prize Winner**

This is a moving narrative about a soldier’s feelings when leaving his family to go to Iraq. Not only does the reader create an external narrative with the use of strong descriptive details and dialogue, but he also creates a scene which the reader will not easily forget by taking us on his internal journey by including details about the thoughts and emotions he experiences, only to be capped by the ironic last few words.

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Onie Wheeler

Prof. Linda Brady

English 1010, Section V02

14 September 2008

Leaving

As I knelt on the old hardwood floor of our apartment, I continued to pack my tattered rucksack. I tried to remain focused on the task at hand and not think about the emotional turmoil I was about to experience. I was about to leave my wife and home for a very long year in Iraq.

I tightened the straps on my ruck and threw it in the massive pile of green luggage that had accumulated by the door. The derelict German WWII barracks that served as army housing looked especially cozy now that I was about to leave for a less friendly environment. I asked my wife, Megan, if she was almost ready. She would go with me to the base where other husbands, wives, and children would say goodbye, some for the last time.

I began moving the pile of various rucks and duffel bags, required for a trip like this, down the stairwell and out to our car. At this point, my heart had sunk so low in my chest I feared internal damage. I struggled to suppress my emotions and maintain my composure. This day had been hanging over my head like a dark cloud for two years.

Once the pile of green luggage had made its way from the floor to the car, I sat down next to Megan on the couch.

“Are you ready?” I asked, lacking all enthusiasm.

“No,” she responded equally unenthusiastic.

“Well, let’s go,” I said. I stepped out the door of our apartment and looked back at the Army-issued furniture and hand-me-down couch where my wife and I had spent so much time; my heart sunk a little lower. I switched the lights off and headed to the car.

As we drove down the streets of Butzbach, Germany, I could not help but wonder how I got to this point in my life at the age of nineteen and how I ended up so far from home, soon to be further. I felt so guilty for ripping my wife from her family and bringing her to Germany. Now, here I was abandoning her. Even though I felt this way, I was glad she had been here with me through it all.

Rain began to pour down from the dark, oppressive sky. The pedestrians on the cobblestone sidewalks hurried for cover. I guiltily loathed these people carrying on their everyday lives. I envied their freedom. We held hands as we got closer to our unavoidable destination. We talked about mundane things, but none of them were what we were really thinking. We pulled out our military I.D. cards as we entered the gate. I brought the car to a stop and handed them to the German security guard.

“How are you today?” he asked with a heavy accent.

“Good,” I lied in response.

As we pulled up to my company headquarters, I noticed the throngs of soldiers already gathering, single soldiers grouped together and married people with their families

congregating separately. Children were playing in the wet grass, some too young to understand what was happening, others too familiar with it to care. I was not ready to be a part of these groups, not until I had to be. This was a personal moment between my wife and me.

The rain slowed to a drizzle. I unloaded my bags, some literally bursting at the seams, on the cracked sidewalk. I loathed each overweight bag as I threw it to the ground, knowing how much agony the bags would cause me over the next couple of months as we moved from place to place by plane and helicopter, never able to unpack fully.

We hugged sincerely, as you are only able to do when you truly love someone, meaning more than any kiss ever could. We both said “I love you,” but they were unnecessary words. The mixture of love and pain in my heart at that moment was indescribable. Though neither of us ever said it, we knew we had to say our goodbyes quickly and that there was no way for either of us to be satisfied with this moment. We had to get it over with while we were both able to maintain our composure.

I heard the company forming up, the sound of their boot steps on the soggy ground sealing my fate.

“I have to go,” I said.

“I know,” she replied.

We both said “I love you” again and kissed the last kiss either of us would have for a long time. I turned around quickly and walked to formation not caring who saw the tears welling in my eyes. I was not ready to go to Iraq, but here I was leaving everything I knew and the woman I loved for a war none of us believed in.



## Outline for “Leaving”

Purpose: To inform

Audience: Instructor

Tone: Serious

Point of view: First person

Thesis: I was about to leave my wife and home for a very long year in Iraq.

Pattern of development: Narration

Organizational approach: Chronological.

### I) Packing

- A. Focusing on the task at hand
  - 1. Ignoring the coming emotional pain
- B. Packing rucksack
- C. Leaving our home
  - 1. Reflection on the memories in our home
  - 2. Statement of the pain of leaving

### II) Car ride

- A. Reflection on current life
  - 1. Living in foreign country
  - 2. Being deployed to Iraq
  - 3. My youth and how quickly my life changed
  - 4. My wife going through these times with me
- B. My wife and I talking
  - 1. Lack of emotional conversation
  - 2. Trying to maintain composure
  - 3. Ignoring the overwhelming pain

### III) Goodbye

- A. Groups of soldiers at my company
  - 1. People seemed overly sociable to me
  - 2. I did not want to be part of it until necessary
- B. Walking away
- C. The pain of saying goodbye so quickly but knowing it was best for us both

### “A Basic Human Right” – Prize Winner

This moving, intelligent, and persuasive narrative essay about the writer’s encounter with our country’s health-care system portrays the imbalance between patients and health-care providers. The writer uses scene, character description, and dialogue to allow the reader to share the narrator’s fear, shock, anger, and humiliation. The conclusion, stating, “There must be something I can do,” will be joined by many sympathetic readers.

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Marija Raos Fitzhugh

Prof. Linda Brady

English 1010

25 November 2008

#### A Basic Human Right

I am not sure if my husband and I belong to the middle-class. We are concerned about every dollar that we earn and spend. I am fifty-one years old, and so is my husband. We are not getting younger, and accordingly, we are not getting healthier, so we both are scared of what the future could contain for us. Specifically, after a recent encounter with the health care system, any health issue that I am not able to handle by myself terrifies me.

In Croatia, where I lived all of my life until recently, I had many worries to deal with, but health care had never been one of them. Whenever I needed it, it was there for my children and me, free of charge, or I just had to pay a small, almost symbolic “cost participation.” I’ve been diagnosed with cancer twice. I’ve experienced the war in my country. I’ve witnessed the change and transition of political and economic systems. I’ve been a self-employed woman in the men’s business world and in an almost non-existent market economy. I’ve been a self-supporting mother of two sons for more than eighteen years. None of it was easy, but nothing ever shocked me as much as did the Skyline

Medical Center's bill, which was handed to me on my departure from the hospital. I felt unprotected, powerless, robbed, threatened, poor, humiliated, and lonely, but above all, I was angry. Thinking about the way in which the health system works here and understanding the reasons for it, I was overwhelmed by rage. I still am.

I arrived at the hospital on Saturday morning. I didn't know if I had had a heart attack or if my lungs had collapsed, but I was sure that I needed urgent expert help. Whatever my condition was, it caused an unbearable pain in my chest right where my heart is. I couldn't breathe, move, talk, or think for two days and nights. It was scary and absolutely confusing. William, my husband, was trying to encourage me. "Please, don't worry! These are great doctors; they know what to do, and you'll be fine!" he repeated. However, the color of his face told me that he needed encouragement, maybe even more than I did. He smiled at me, but he looked cramped and panicked. Because touches just made me hurt more, he didn't dare to hold me. So he held my hands in his, trying to warm them up.

In my mind, I recalled my children's faces. I could clearly see their goofy eyes and hear their witty jokes and quips, which I love so much. After the third shot of nitroglycerine, I didn't feel much better. The thought that I would never see my children again scared me to death. I started to cry uncontrollably.

I got three nitroglycerin shots, painkillers, steroids, and oxygen, and my body was scanned from the top of my head to the top of my toes. On Monday, I awaited the stress test results and my doctor's approval to be dismissed. I still felt physically exhausted, emotionally overwhelmed, and unable to forget thoughts and images that I had had just a couple of days before when I believed I was dying. The fact that I was

insured was comforting and lessened a bit my financial fears, but I worried about the hospital costs. I had heard many stories about the high cost of health care services in the United States. After all, it was the real reason why I waited so long before I decided to use them.

When a woman, a hospital financial staff member, knocked at the door, I was sure that she had my stress test's results, which I waited for impatiently. The woman held a large white paper in her hand. My husband quickly stretched out his hand, but I was faster. I put on my reading glasses and noticed numerous items followed by numbers. Just a second later I burst into tears. It was a hospital bill. The sum at the end of the page could not be the truth! The woman grabbed my hand, "Don't cry, Hon! You don't need to upset yourself! It'll make you sick again! You don't want to get sick, do you? Let me go negotiate with the hospital. Alright? I'll be back soon. Let me negotiate. O.K?"

I couldn't stop crying. The number 17,500 struck every part of my body. My brain was stuck in an endless loop repeating, "Seventeen thousand five hundred. Seventeen thousand five hundred. Seventeen thousand five hundred." Suddenly, I felt cold, and my shoulders trembled uncontrollably. My legs refused to hold me, and I fell down on the edge of the wrinkled hospital bed. Desperation swallowed me. I felt miserable as never before. My brain was working hard. "Seventeen thousand five hundred," my mind repeated, and finally, it answered in fear, "We don't have seventeen thousand five hundred of anything!"

The woman was back. "There it is, Hon. If you pay right now, before you leave, the hospital agrees to lessen your bill. It's only nine thousand! Didn't I tell you it'd be fine? What do you say?" My brain jumped in another loop. "Nine thousand, nine

thousand, nine thousand,” it repeated and then, in a sudden short circuit, screamed silently and helplessly, “We don’t have nine thousand of anything!”

I tried to control myself. “It cannot cost so much!” She probably forgot about my health insurance.

“It will cover three thousand,” the woman said as her long nails grabbed my arm again.

I stared at her. She was a professional. Suddenly, I understood everything. It was nothing personal. It was not about me. It was not about my health. It was about the hospital and the insurance businesses, the free market, deregulation and regulation, the society’s ethics, rich and poor, individualism, and loneliness. There was no mutually acceptable solution. No one negotiated with us, my husband and me. It was the hospital negotiating with itself. How ironic! My husband took out the American Express card from his wallet. He was happy that I was alive. On the other hand, I felt as if someone spat at my face and then wanted me to show gratitude. I felt offended by the so-called negotiation with demand to pay “right now” before we leave, and I stood there humiliated and full of rage.

I was in America in the 21st century, in the land of freedom and human rights. In this America, I ended up in the hospital for only three days, and I got a \$17,500 bill. I had no surgery. I didn’t receive someone’s organ, and they didn’t take out any. There were no plastics or metals embedded in me. I did not get new ceramic teeth for a shiny smile; my body was not enlarged or reduced in any way, and I didn’t get a new skeleton made of gold. I was in a hospital room, which was nothing like some luxury hotel room. It was a simple room with one hospital bed and sofa, a TV, some hospital equipment,

and a small bathroom. The food was not particularly good. A doctor came to my room only twice in three days. The hospital bill was approximately six thousand dollars a day! Yet that woman had the nerve to say that I was lucky. I wanted her to shut up and leave the room. I couldn't stand her voice, her touch, and that piece of paper in her hand. How many people were shocked with their bills the very same day as I was? "I just want to leave this place." I turned to my husband. "Please, let's go home."

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control," states the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United States Senate ratified The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a United Nations treaty based on The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1997. Nations that have signed this treaty are bound by it. Accessible, affordable health care is a basic human right. Americans who came to Croatia to help us rebuild and develop our society gave us lectures about human rights and democracy. Yet, in America in 2008, 47 million people have no health insurance. The American government supports so many human rights' interventions all over the world, using the money of American tax-payers, and yet the very same taxpayers, American citizens, are faced with foreclosures and bankruptcies, being unable to pay astronomic health care bills.

In my case, the bill I got was not the final one. Last Saturday a representative from Skyline Medical Center called and told us that the doctors' cost was not included. Now I am expecting an additional bill. I never learned what was wrong with me. Doctor X

told me to visit the hospital again. He said that we might do some more tests. If this terrible system won't be changed, I truly doubt I will see him again. I have no money to pay for it.

I try hard to forget my rage, but I cannot. When I open my eyes in the morning, I think about the debt that my husband and I have. When I close my eyes in the evening, I think again about the same. What shall I do if I get sick again? It's not just about me. A society that cares more for the profit of companies than for human life is not a just society. It hurts me. I am an immigrant in the nation that calls itself "the greatest country in the world" and the only developed country in the world without socialized health care. I know the experience that I had is not the worst. I've heard and read about many similar experiences with tragic endings. I've done research on my own, and I've seen statistics. I want to fight this system for it makes me sick. There must be something I can do about it. I am still searching.

## Writing Descriptive Essays

As part of the human experience, we take in and process the world around us through the use of our senses, and many times, we form opinions about objects, places, and people within our world based on the use of that sensory information. These sensory impressions are often the basis for our writing when we write a descriptive essay. The purpose of descriptive writing involves helping an audience understand more fully the subject of an essay, usually a person or place with which the audience is unfamiliar, and to create a dominant impression of that place or person.

The most explicit statement of that impression should be offered in the thesis of the descriptive essay. This thesis should show the audience the writer's plans to reveal something new or unconventional about the essay's subject. For example, a descriptive essay about an umbrella might have the following thesis: "While an umbrella is very useful in the rain, it also serves as an example of one of architecture's most useful elements—the arch." This thesis prepares the audience to look at an ordinary object in a new, more complete way, emphasizing the purpose and need for creating an essay to describe something.

Description can be used as a method of development for an entire essay, or it can be incorporated into other modes of writing, like narration, comparison/contrast, and definition to make those modes of writing more sensory experiences because descriptive papers seek to use language that creates for the audience a vivid mental picture.

Developing descriptions often means using similes and metaphors to describe something, invoking all five senses. For example, a writer may choose to describe eating a jalapeno



pepper in the following way: “Once the tongue registers the heat of the pepper, it is as if your whole mouth expands in an attempt to get away from the flames but cannot quite stay out of reach.” When an audience reads language such as this, they can understand the feeling much better than if you simply wrote, “Eating a jalapeno pepper makes your mouth hot.” At its best, descriptive writing allows readers to close their eyes and see the event, person, object, or place being described in the essay. The ultimate goal is to create an impression and to convey your attitude towards that subject by offering the most revealing and significant details and anecdotes about the subject.

#### Quick Tips for Students:

1. Pay careful attention to the details and examples you include: all should work towards conveying a dominant impression of the subject of your description, and they should be the most important details and examples for the reader’s understanding of that subject’s significance to you and your audience.
2. Avoid over-idealizing or demonizing the subject of a description. Present your description as being objective and realistic. Nothing is completely good or bad, so describe the subject as something REAL. Don’t forget to use sensory images, especially similes and metaphors, to draw your readers into the description.
3. When describing a person, choose the person for your description wisely. Avoid a person that will lead you to be overly sentimental, such as a family member or friend who has recently died. Choose, instead, a person who is somewhat unusual or engaging, not only to you, but to your audience.
4. Also, keep in mind that this is not a story about your experience, so remember that your purpose in describing is different from the narrative.

## “Snow Day”

This first-person narrative is a present-tense vignette of waking to find a fresh snowfall and going for a walk. The descriptions appeal to the senses of sight, sound, and touch. The narrator’s thought upon returning to the house is effective because it implies more excursions to come, offering a “look to the future” as a recommended strategy for concluding paragraphs.

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Travis King

Prof. Bobbie Kilbane

English 1010

23 September 2008

### Snow Day

I awaken, my feet cold under the sheets. The room is strangely quiet as I slip out of bed and look out the window. I see the world covered in a sea of white snow. I hurry to get dressed and start for the back door. Today I will walk through my snow-covered yard.

I stop at the door, silently watching the snow fall. The tiny ice crystals drift peacefully down from the sky, covering the world in white. The door creaks as I open it, and I carefully step onto the back porch so as not to slip and fall. I now have a full view of my backyard, a wintry paradise covered with snow. As I walk down the steps and to the sidewalk, the squeaking of the wooden steps combines with the crunch of the snow under my feet like two instruments in an orchestra, performing in the sweet silence all around me. The white, cottony powder covers the branches of the trees. As I walk down the sidewalk, I see the car resting under a thick layer of snow. The dogs run to meet me, leaving trails of paw prints in the snow. I continue to the driveway and scrape some snow off of the car window, looking inside. The powder chills my hand, so I put my

hand inside my pocket to warm it. The snow begins to fall harder. I wander around the car, crunching the snow under my feet.

I hear birds chirping and walk to the bird feeder, where several small birds are hopping around on the ground. The snow is peppered with tiny holes where seeds have fallen from the bird feeder. The birds fly away as I approach.

I continue walking and scoop some snow from the ground into my hand. After shaping the snow into a rough sphere, I throw it at a tree trunk. The snow scatters. I walk past the birdbath and see that the water has frozen. The snow falls even harder, making it hard to see. I close my eyes and feel myself being bombarded with tiny pieces of ice. After the snow subsides, I continue through the sea of white.

I brush against a cedar tree, and the snow falls to the ground like powdered sugar, revealing the green needles underneath. I begin walking down the trail to the pond. The dogs jump up and follow me eagerly, prancing down the trail behind me.

The forest is quiet. The only sounds are my breath and the snow crunching under my feet, as well as a few birds chirping in the branches above me. I see the pond beyond the next row of trees. The normally dark hole is now covered in white. The dogs run on ahead of me onto the snow-covered pond. The ice holds them up as they run to the other side. I test the ice under my feet, and the ice cracks slightly, so I decide not to risk stepping out onto the pond myself.

I walk back up to the trail and continue, noticing the snow-covered fence. The fence leads me around a curve to the now sleeping berry bushes, down the hill and up another hill, completing a small loop leading back into the clearing of my backyard. I walk up to the garden and see the large hay-covered rectangle sprinkled with snow. I

walk down to the other side of the backyard to another trail leading into the woods. I follow the short trail down to a second pond, and it also is frozen and covered in snow.

Feeling colder now, I decide to go back inside and eat breakfast. I walk back up the trail and see my house a few hundred feet away. As I reach the driveway, I see that the car window is covered with another thin layer of snow. I run back up the steps into the house, shaking the snow off of the porch railing. The dogs look at me sadly, and I pet them before I go inside. I'll be back later.

### Outline for "Snow Day"

Thesis: Today I will walk through my snow-covered yard.

- I. I wake up and walk outside.
  - A. I get dressed.
  - B. I go out the door.
  - C. I walk down the porch.
  - D. I walk down the sidewalk and see the car covered in snow.
- II. I walk to the bird feeder.
  - A. I see the birds and scare them away.
  - B. I make a snowball and throw it at a tree.
  - C. The snow falls harder.
- III. I walk to the pond.
  - A. I walk through the forest.
  - B. I see the pond.
  - C. The dogs run across the ice.
  - D. I decide not to walk on the ice.
- IV. I go back to the trail.
  - A. I walk past berry bushes.
  - B. I walk past the garden.
  - C. I walk to another pond.
- V. I decide to go back inside.
  - A. I walk back up the trail.
  - B. I see the car.
  - C. I pet the dogs.

## “The Shed”

This is an unusual first-person narrative with engrossing and, at times, disturbing sensory details which create an atmosphere in tune with the discovery made by the narrator and his friend. The descriptive sensory details offer some good examples of how to use figurative language to create an impression. The gripping conclusion, expressed in a powerful metaphor, has a ring of truth about the loss of innocence.

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12 Sept 2008

### The Shed

I never have forgotten the small lawn shed in my best friend, Shane’s, backyard. The whole time we were growing up, no one ever went into the shed, and it was always locked. I could never have imagined how a shed could change my life.

The rain moved in sometime overnight. When I had gone to bed, it was clear, and I never really thought much about rain coming. It was not a hard pounding rain as you might expect for a summer day. It was a soft rain, almost a mist, the kind that never seems to fall but always manages to get you wet. It was nothing more than a giant person sweating in the sky, and we happened to be the children playing beneath him. I had always loved rain and the fragrance that followed it, how it intensified the smell of everything around me and made me sleepy from its refreshing and comforting aroma.

This particular day, though, the rain had brought boredom. Shane and I had no indoor plans and found ourselves without much to occupy the endless hours of the day. I had mentioned to Shane that we could play in the shed if we could get in it. He thought

he knew where the keys were hidden, so off we went like archaeologists on a rare dig in a foreign land.

We strolled across the soggy backyard, splashing in puddles as we marched. The damp cool air caused a chill to flow up our spines. When we reached the shed, we just stared at it, wondering if we should really go in. The click of the wet lock was deafening; we were positive the sound echoed across the neighborhood. The door creaked and moaned as we opened it. The rancid, moist air from inside wafted up our nostrils and nearly made us sick. The dense air inside sat so heavily on our chests that it made us feel as though we could not breathe. The space inside was small, just about four feet by five feet, and was covered in spider webs and dust. There were no windows inside, just a bare light bulb that hung over our heads like a chandelier. I pulled the string, and it flickered and made a buzzing noise as it lit up the room. As the light cascaded down onto the contents below, we began to survey the space.

It looked as though no one had been there in years with everything frozen in time, like leaves frozen in a stream. Outdated electrical wires spanned across the wall. They were once the veins that carried life to this little building. Torn insulation was everywhere, longing to be carried off by some small creature. Boxes were lined along the walls. Nightgowns hung from the rafters, and there was a box full of women's panties. As we glimpsed around the small, confining space, we noticed at least a hundred boxes full of pictures, pictures of women. There were pictures of women in bras and underwear ads, pictures of lingerie, and pictures of naked women that had been cut out of pornographic magazines. The pictures had been cut out and glued to poster board where they were arranged by style or similarity. Bras went with bras, and breasts went

with breasts. The sheer time to make all of this would have taken a lifetime, countless hours spent cutting, sorting and pasting. We had rifled through box after box only to find the same contents inside them.

This was no longer a playful excursion; what had started out of boredom had turned into an albatross around our necks. It became almost like a dream to us as we tried to separate ourselves from reality. Now we felt more like pharaohs displaced from our thrones than like archaeologists, and this had become our tomb. Fearing we would be caught, we scampered to put everything back into order so our presence there would not have been known.

Leaving the shed we did not speak. For what should we have said? The weight of the world had been cast upon our shoulders, and we each felt like Atlas.

## Writing Comparison/Contrast Essays

Examining our world in terms of comparison and contrast is one of the most common intellectual activities we do on a day-to-day basis; it's the kind of thinking on which most practical decisions are based. These may be big decisions—choosing a college, buying a car, deciding on a career—or small decisions, such as what kind of shampoo to buy or where to go for pizza. In all of these activities, we are doing mental work—logically examining the information available to us and making a decision, based on that information. This decision results in our choice between two or more items or in our passing judgment on objects that are similar in some way, though not in all ways. In writing a comparison/contrast essay, we strive for the same goal except that in our writing, we explain the reasons behind our judgment to an audience outside of ourselves.

When writing comparison/contrast essays, we compare items to help our audience understand our choices or judgments. The audience comes to understand why we make the choices we do or come to a certain conclusion because we offer them the information that we have examined in order to come to that conclusion, information which they may or may not have had before reading our comparison. Many times, then, our purpose in writing is also to help people understand something with which they are not familiar. In such cases, we compare an object unfamiliar to the audience with something familiar to them, forming a basis of comparison so that they can understand the type of object we are examining even if they have not directly encountered it in their own lives. Ultimately, we write comparison/contrast essays to



share our knowledge about a subject with others and to persuade them to understand the subject in the way that we do, thus seeing our judgment as valid.

We make our judgment reasonable to our audience by deciding on specific points of comparison to ensure that we analyze our items based on the same criteria or standards for each item. For us, as writers, to set these criteria, the items we compare must be on the same level in some way; choosing items that are too different from one another makes it difficult to set standards that your audience would expect from both items. In our writing, we explain the similarities and differences between the items that we are comparing, illustrating how well those items live up to the expectations we have set for them. We pass judgment on the items, usually expressing a preference for one or noting the advantages of one over the other. This judgment is most explicitly stated in the essay's thesis, and writers support that judgment by comparing and/or contrasting the items in the essay's body paragraphs based on the criteria that we have previously set forth.

#### Quick Tips for Students:

1. Stick to two items for comparison and contrast because it's easier to manage.
2. Make sure that your items are comparable or are "on the same level."
3. Avoid vague thesis statements such as "There are many similarities between item A and item B." The audience cannot understand your perspective on or your judgment about those items based on this kind of thesis.
4. Understand that you may focus more on similarities *or* on differences; you do not have to treat both equally in your essay. However, even if you're focusing more on one than on the other, you should include at least one consideration of difference or similarity to show your objectivity towards the subject and your understanding of the ultimate connection between the objects you are comparing.

“Who Is Your Hero?”

This is a well-organized comparison/contrast essay on the subject of two superheroes, Superman and Spiderman. After comparing their childhoods and their *modus operandi*, the writer addresses the reader in second person with a series of questions about the motivation of both heroes and their respective fans. The reader is effectively engaged all the way to the conclusion when the writer suggests that despite our differences, we all wish to “triumph over evil and save the day.”

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### Who is Your Hero?

On the surface, Spiderman is very similar to another famous superhero, Superman. They both have secret identities. Spiderman hides as Peter Parker, while Superman’s secret identity is Clark Kent. Both superheroes were raised by someone other than their parents. Spiderman was raised by his aunt and uncle. Superman was raised by a couple in Kansas who found him. Spiderman and Superman both have arch-enemies, Goblin and Lex Luthor, respectively. Spiderman and Superman may appear very similar, but a look in depth into their characters reveals how different they truly are.

Superman has always been Superman. He has always had his strength on Earth. He could always fly; he could always lift cars, and he could always “leap tall buildings in a single bound.” Spiderman, on the other hand, obtained his superhuman strength in his most awkward time in life: during high school. Perhaps that dramatic change is the cause of Spiderman’s inner struggles. While Superman always seems secure with his role as a superhero, Spiderman is in a constant battle with his inner self, unsure about whether he

wants to be the superhero and wondering if it is his responsibility. Peter Parker demonstrates characteristics of a split personality. When he puts on his mask, his confidence builds. He goes from a wimpy, awkward adult to a confident alpha-male, able to battle evil, kiss the woman, and swing away. Most of Clark Kent's clumsiness is an act to throw off suspicious onlookers. Superman does not wear a mask; he just has a suit to identify him as the flying hero.

The inner drive to make these super-humans become superheroes is very different as well. Superman is guided by his morals to act as superhero. He wants to go out and save the world. He feels it is his responsibility to be the defender of Planet Earth. Superman is always on the lookout for evildoers. When he hears of trouble, he jumps into action. Spiderman finds himself creating his own enemies. Irony is a constant theme in all his conflicts. His actions, though unintentional, create his battles. The genesis of Venom was when Peter Parker beat an unemployed newspaper photographer out of a job. The night his uncle was killed, Peter Parker stepped out of the way of a robber, who eventually shot and killed his uncle. Spiderman is a hero not from an inner moral compass but from the sense of guilt and remorse.

Do you have a favorite superhero? Do you identify with one over the other? It may say something about your personality. If you like Spiderman, perhaps you prefer anonymous charity work. Spiderman's work is done mostly at night and under cover, swinging away after saving the day. Maybe you feel remorse about something and want to right a wrong. Spiderman feels responsible for his uncle's murder, and this memory inspires him to defeat his current villain. Or perhaps you feel your actions are responsible for your own undoing. Spiderman's series of unfortunate events usually leads him to his

next challenge. Is Superman your hero? Perhaps it says you feel you are on the right path in life. Superman never seems to waver on his path. His inner moral compass guides him to defeat his villains. Maybe you don't mind doing charity work on the front line.

Superman is an encourager. At the end of his rescues, he always stops to give kind words. Leadership may come naturally for you. Superman is a natural leader. He recognizes danger and leaps into action to save the day.

Which superhero we prefer perhaps says less about the superhero and more about ourselves. Superheroes are just like us. Their inner struggles are the same as all people's. Their superhero strength just makes their problems appear super-sized. The depth of their characters is what draws us in. They have these powers and battle on a mighty scale, but the same struggles are within us. We may have a superhero of choice because we can identify with one more than another. The hero always comes out on top. We love our heroes because we fantasize ourselves triumphing over evil and saving the day.

## Outline for “Who Is Your Hero?”

Thesis: Spiderman and Superman may appear very similar, but an in-depth look into their characters reveals how different they truly are.

### I. Introduction

### II. Similarities

- A. They both have red and blue costumes.
- B. Both have secret identities.
  - 1. Spiderman is Peter Parker
  - 2. Superman is Clark Kent
- C. Both were raised by someone other than their parents.
  - 1. Spiderman was raised by Aunt and Uncle
  - 2. Superman was raised by a couple in Kansas that found him
- D. Both have an arch-enemy
  - 1. Spiderman has Goblin
  - 2. Superman has Lex Luthor

### III. Differences

- A. They got their super-human strength at different times
  - 1. Superman was born with his strength
  - 2. Spiderman was created by a spider-bite
- B. Masks
  - 1. Spiderman wears a mask; his arch enemy wears a mask
  - 2. Superman does not wear a mask; his arch enemy does not wear a mask.
- C. Why they are super heroes
  - 1. Superman wants to help the world.
  - 2. Spiderman is a hero out of a sense of guilt.

### IV. Your superhero (The one you pick may say something about your personality.)

- A. If you like Spiderman
  - 1. You may like anonymous charity work.
  - 2. You may feel remorse about something and want to right a wrong.
  - 3. You may feel like you are responsible for your own undoing.
- B. If you like Superman
  - 1. You may feel like you are on the right path.
  - 2. You may want to save the world and do charity work on the front line.
  - 3. You feel like a leader.

### V. Conclusion: “With great powers comes great responsibilities.”

"Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus—Myth or Fact?"

This research essay demonstrates that a student's use of personal examples from friends and her own marriage can enhance the effectiveness of critical sources when writing persuasively. Beginning with a clear thesis statement, the writer devotes body paragraphs to three basic premises about the differences between men and women. For support, she draws on her critical sources which include interviews, emails, and Thigpen Library databases, and she illustrates her points by using examples from her own experience. The writer then argues against the oversimplification of these "differences" with support from her friends; one long indented quote is from an email post. Note the competence this writer shows when dealing with secondary quotes (qtd in ----). When research essays tend to be dry, this writer shows how we might consider the effectiveness of some first-person commentary to hold the reader's attention.

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18 November 2008

Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus—  
Myth or Fact?

*She:* I'm really tired. I have so much work to do—I don't know how I'm going to get it done!

*He:* Why don't you take a day off and rest if you're so tired?

*She:* (sarcastically) Thanks a lot! You think my contribution to this household is so trivial that I can do nothing and the difference won't even be noticed? (Burggraf Torppa)

Does this conversation seem familiar? Have you ever felt as though men and women must come from completely different planets? Have you struggled with bridging the communication gap between you and your boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse? If so, you are not alone because communication differences between men and women often create

stress and anxiety within relationships, often leading to misunderstandings and arguments (Burrell). Many people believe that men are from Mars and women are from Venus because they use a different style of language. They choose different conversational topics, and they process and share information in different ways; however, new research confirms that men and women are from the same planet.

First, one of the most common beliefs states that men and women have a distinct style of language. We can find thousands of publications about how they are different in the way they communicate with each other. Also many studies indicate that men and women are characterized by extremely diverse styles of language. For instance, Julia Wood, professor of Communication Studies, recognizes two styles of language: feminine and masculine. "Feminine styles of language," according to Wood, "typically use words of empathy and support, emphasize concrete and personal language, and show politeness and tentativeness in speaking" (qtd. in Verderber 60). Thus, in many cases, women are more likely to communicate empathy by saying: "I can understand how you feel," or "I am sorry that you are having difficulty," or they try to show support by communicating, "Please let me know if I can help you in any way." What is more, women also attempt to be polite in conversation; therefore, they will use a lot of phrases like: "I may be wrong," or "I don't want to step on anyone's toes here" (Wood qtd. in Verderber 61).

Masculine styles of language, by contrast, "often use words of status and problem solving, emphasize abstract and general language, and show assertiveness and control in speaking" (Wood qtd. in Verderber 60). Consequently, for the men it is most important to underline the status, so in their language they often include phrases like "I know

that..." or "my experience tells me...." They also frequently make statements, which include the expression of a solution or advice about the problem, such as "I would...", "you should...", or "the way you should handle it is...."

I have experienced this many times from male members of my family. My husband, for example, very often has said, "Darling, you should...." At the beginning of our relationship, every time I heard this comment, I was angry and frustrated. It seemed to me that he was trying to patronize me and was pretending to know the answer to every question. It took me some time to figure out that my husband did not have any intention to be bossy. Just the opposite, it was his form of giving me support and finding a solution to my problems. I, on another hand, very often used to assure my husband, "I know how you feel right now," or I would ask him, "Is there any way I can help you?" Many times he complained that I tried to be a psychologist and treated him as if he were my patient. He also needed his time to discover that this was the way I communicated. Both of us needed to make an extra effort to realize how different we were in the way we talked, and we had to find a healthy consensus.

The second contrast between men and women revealed by many researchers is how they approach conversational topics. The literature suggests that women, unlike men, choose more private subjects. As indicated by Kramarae and Treicher, "[W]omen, it is said, select more personal type topics to discuss: their families, their emotions, and their friendships.... Men, however, use more abstract communication, speaking in general terms" (qtd. in Sheridan). My friend Valeria Maritza, when asked about differences in topic between women and men, said, "Men talk about things, and women talk about feelings." In her opinion, men are more strict and serious. For instance, her



boyfriend gets bored and tries to change the topic or even escape when she tells him in detail what happened at work and how her co-worker upset her. Thus, to get support and release her emotions, she regularly goes for a lunch with her girlfriends. There she can talk for hours about how she felt upset, misunderstood, happy, or overjoyed.

The third distinction proposed by many studies implies that men and women may not understand each other because they process and share information in different ways. According to psychologist Bruce Christopher, “[W]omen think globally. ...connect everything, and when they remind men about the connections, men perceive it as nagging.” At the same time men, as indicated by Christopher, “think compartmentally. ...separate their thinking into mental ‘filing cabinets’—work, home, play” (qtd. in Stafford). The perfect example to share is the situation from my friend’s life. He can go to sleep even ten minutes after a fight, while his wife will spend the rest of the night tossing and trying to find the answer to the question, “Why did he say that?” They represent totally different approaches.

Another thing pointed out by Christopher is that “men speak in short declarations, starting with the bottom line first.” In his opinion, “women, however, speak in paragraphs with historical narrative and conclusion at the end” (qtd. in Stafford). My husband and I are perfect examples of this kind of speaking diversity. During dinnertime, usually my husband spends just a few minutes to tell me how his day was and what happened at work. His typical response to my question, “So, Darling, how was your work today?” would be, “You know, it was another quiet day in front of the computer, like always, thanks for asking.”

For me, to the contrary, it takes ages to report how exciting my day was. I never say, “You know, it was just another day at the college.” Rather than that, I usually give a lot of details about whom I met, what he or she said, what my response was, and later what was their response to my response. The same story repeats when my husband talks with his mom by Skype. I realize that he is focusing on the most important pieces of evidence. For example, he might say, “On Sunday we went to hike.” I, at the same time, would build a story of how we woke up and prepared the food. Later, I would describe how wonderful it was to have early Sunday’s breakfast with friends and how we drove to the park. Then, I would put in the picture what the weather was like, what we were talking about on the trail, how many beautiful leaves I found, and their incredible colors. At the end, I would probably conclude how happy I felt while hiking and direct my mother-in-law to see the pictures I took in the park. It would still be the same story about exactly the same event but expressed in a totally different way. So why are my story and my husband’s story so different? Christopher gives us a very simple answer: “[M]en generally speak to report facts; women speak to build the rapport” (qtd. in Stafford).

We can also find complete new evidence that the Mars-Venus concept is not only wrong, but also very harmful. As indicated by Erina MacGeorge, an interpersonal communication specialist, men and women typically use and favor similar tactics of expressing sympathy and advising people (qtd. in "Men and Women Are from Mars"). Moreover, she states, based on questionnaires and interviews with 417 women and 321 men, that “men and women were both likely to express sympathy, share similar

problems with distressed friends, or discourage their friends from worrying” (qtd. in “Men and Women Are from Mars”).

Deborah Cameron, professor of language and communication at the University of Oxford, also disagrees with the Mars-Venus hypothesis. In her book, The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do Men and Women Really Speak Different Languages, she challenges the myth that women talk more than men. She says, “There’s a lot of evidence that in more formal situations where status is a factor, it tends to be men who talk more than women—not because they’re men, but almost certainly because the real correlation is the status” (qtd. in Mooney). Her final thought is that “men are from earth. Women are from earth. Deal with it” (qtd. in Mooney). My Polish friend Justine shares exactly the same ideology. When asked about the differences in men’s and women’s communication, in her e-mail she wrote the following thoughts:

I am not sure if we are from different planets. I am also not sure if they are Venus and Mars. I think that most of the time differences in communication are more a matter of lack of willingness to communicate rather than gender differences. In my opinion, people do not want to improve their relationship. It seems to me that for them it is easier to say, “Sorry, I don’t understand you. You talk like somebody from a different planet.” To me this is selfishness rather than a real difference. (Gorlo)

Another friend, Katherine, claims that the idea about two different planets is an effect of incorrect interpretation. In her opinion, “The family, culture, and good or bad manners determine how people communicate, not Venus or Mars” (Chlabicz).

The issue about differences between men and women's communication styles is controversial and complex. We can find a lot of allies of the Mars-Venus philosophy, but at the same time, we can meet many skeptics. So, what is the truth? Are men and women similar, or are they totally different? Was the theory about men being from Mars and women being from Venus just a marketing catch to sell books, or was it a true discovery?

I accept the fact that women and men do communicate differently. However, I also believe that instead of emphasizing differences between each other, we should focus on building communication in our relationships.

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**SECTION 2:  
RESEARCHED ARGUMENT**

## Writing Claims of Fact

As active participants in our world community, we come into contact with the conditions of the world around us every day—through interacting with the people around us, watching the news on television, reading a newspaper, or even attending the performance of a drama. These experiences and the knowledge that we gain from them can often make us want to share our knowledge with others, a responsibility many of the world's citizens take seriously. Oftentimes, that responsibility leads to a desire to write in order to share our own knowledge—and the knowledge of reliable authorities—with others in our world. This desire results in our writing claims of fact.

Writers of claims of fact seek to offer factual information about past, present, or future societal conditions that involve specific communities or interest groups. Many times, our purpose in writing claims of fact is to discuss our reasons for disagreeing with some widely held belief, or because we endeavor to inform our audience about a condition in our society with which the audience is unfamiliar. For instance, we may write a claim of fact to explain why we see a condition in our society as a problem for a minority group by illustrating how that group of people is negatively affected by the beliefs and actions of the majority. On the other hand, we may write a claim of fact to explain how a specific group benefits from a program that has recently been implemented by our community. Thus, a claim of fact does not have to focus only on the negative, but instead it focuses on simply offering information to an audience who does not have ready access to all the facts and, as a result, may be mistaken in their beliefs.



To strengthen our argument, we support claims of fact with factual information such as firsthand experiences, examples, statistics, and information from other reliable authorities whom the audience would be able to verify through their own research. Our argument is made sound by giving irrefutable evidence for the claims that we make, which are often inferences based on the factual evidence we have gathered. We typically can prove claims of fact without a doubt although there may at times be exceptions to the fact. The thesis statement should offer a comprehensive explanation of our attitude towards the issue on which the essay focuses. When writing a claim of fact, we should always write with a specific audience in mind, addressing those people or groups who would have a vested interest in the issue and how that issue is viewed by the community, or world, around them.

#### Quick Tips for Students:

1. Be sure to offer evidence that is sufficient for proving your point, information that is relevant to the issue at hand. Depending on how complex or controversial your claim is, you may need to offer more data if the claim is difficult to prove or less if your audience would be easily convinced.
2. Always question the reliability of your sources because some may be misleading in the way they present themselves. Look for other sources who use your authorities' information instead of assuming the source is reliable. Since not all sources are reliable, it is up to you as the writer and researcher to determine the credibility and authority of your sources.
3. Balance information gleaned from sources with your own statement of factual information. Avoid reliance on the sources to make your argument for you; instead, offer inferences based on your interpretation and understanding of the facts.

## “Autism and Vaccines”

The smooth integration of quotations from Thigpen Library e-resource databases and the clear, understandable tone of this researched essay make this a model for handling a subject which calls for definitions, scientific explanations, and descriptions of chemical components. The subject, autism, is dealt with seriously but not in a grim or alarming tone, which makes the essay surprisingly upbeat. The reference to the autism symbol in the conclusion persuades us that autism is a puzzle which is solved through time and effort, and that engaging in a puzzle is an inherently hopeful act – bringing the essay to a rewarding close.

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11 April 2009

### Autism and Vaccines

It was not that long ago that autism was unheard of. Today, autism is a topic of discussion in almost every household. It is the fastest growing disability in the United States and is causing parents to live in constant fear of losing their children (Glazer par. 9). As this epidemic grows, so does the fight against it. Parents, doctors, psychologists and scientists are continuously learning more about this disorder and what causes it. Once never questioned, vaccine shots are now being blamed for the autism epidemic.

The severity of autism varies from case to case. There are some autistic people who rely on their caretaker for every need. Then, there are others who do not appear to be disabled at all, but are indeed autistic. According to the authors of Healing and Preventing Autism: A Complete Guide, “Autism is an abnormal response to everyday stimuli” (McCarthy and Kartzinel 11). These responses, that most of us take for granted, can be as common as not responding to his or her name or as severe as not responding

to hunger, pain, or danger. The authors also report that “[autism] is really a regression even though, technically, the child never lost words. It's a failure to keep up with his peers. Normal and predictable behaviors regress into abnormal behaviors” (McCarthy and Kartzinel12). Many autistic children have an obsession with repetitive movements in things like ceiling fans or escalators. The excitement of these movements leads to stimming, flapping of the arms or clapping of the feet. Basically, the child is excited, but does not know the appropriate way to express himself.

For a while, autism was believed to be hereditary. However, after further studies some doctors believe that autism is caused by an overload of toxins in an already fragile body. These toxins include pesticides, foods, and vaccines. The biggest controversy of these is the vaccines: “Many vaccines contain thimerosal, a water soluble that is 49.6 percent mercury by weight” (Kirby 48). Many parents believe that vaccines are the cause of their child's autism because signs of autism usually appear around the same time that these vaccines are given. Thimerosal is made by organic compounds, the second most toxic substance on earth (Kirby 48). The Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research discovered that mercury is a neurotoxin that can destroy cells in key centers of the brain and nervous system (Kirby 48).

After learning of this, parents questioned why this substance was in the shots that are given to their children. Every year the amount of autism increases, but so does the recommended vaccines. For instance, “in 1960, children received nineteen doses of four different vaccines before they reach school age. Today, an American child receives up to thirty-nine doses of twelve different vaccines, most given during the first two years of life” (Koch par. 5). Doctors try to explain to paranoid parents that if children are not

vaccinated then diseases such as measles and polio could storm back (Park par. 3). Parents argue that throughout time, epidemics have come along, and vaccines were created to prevent them from happening again. But then something new would come along, and a new vaccine would be created. Now, we inject our children with these vaccines to prevent all of these diseases, but eventually the vaccines become too much for these little bodies to handle. So where is it that Americans draw the line? Many diseases no longer exist and some, like hepatitis B, are caused from sexual activity or unsterilized needles. Dr. Kartizinel states, "Obviously [hepatitis] does not seem to concern our newborns. Since we cannot tell which newborn is going to make poor life choices, the American Academy of Pediatrics mandates that we must vaccinate every child" (McCarthy and Kartizinel 282). Still, there is no hard evidence to determine if vaccines actually are the cause of autism. According to Kirby, "Studies show that the effects of mercury toxicity are remarkably similar, if not identical, to the signs of autism"(51). Koch also observes that "as vaccination rates climb, chronic diseases and conditions, like asthma, allergies diabetes, autism, and learning disorders, are increasing nationwide among children, often at alarming rates. Some parents and doctors are questioning whether the rise in chronic diseases may be a long-term effect of childhood vaccines (par. 20).

A pleasing solution for parents and doctors is to split up the vaccines. A child could get half of the injection at the clinic and return six months later for the second half. This idea makes parents more relaxed about their child's injections and satisfies doctors because the children are getting vaccinated. Parents can also request that their children get the vaccines at an older age. This way, their bodies are stronger and more capable of

handling the ingredients of the shots; however, most vaccines must be given before the child reaches school age. Some doctors are worried that the parents might forget to return for the second half of the vaccines. This can be easily overcome by a reminder to parents through the mail or by phone. Koch warns that “parents who think their kids are already getting too many vaccines might be shocked to learn that more than two hundred vaccines are in the pipeline, to treat everything from cocaine addiction to herpes” (par. 23).

The autism symbol is appropriately a mixture of colorful puzzle pieces. The puzzle pattern reflects the mystery and complexity of autism. The different colors and shapes represent the diversity of people and families living with this disorder. The brightness of the colors signals hope. The controversy about what causes autism may never be calmed, but it has made impressive improvement in the last few years alone. Some believe that there is no cure for this disease, while others claim to have seen a change. A few things that have seemed to work for some include detoxifying the body and eliminating gluten foods from the diet. An autism activist and mother of an autistic son, Jenny McCarthy co-authored the book Healing and Preventing Autism with Dr. Jerry Kartzinel, in which she says that she has been able to recover her son from the autism disorder by getting him the best therapy available, by writing down everything from bowel movements to mood swings, and by completely changing his diet. Now, her son is much like any other child, and one may never know that he is autistic. The cure for autism may be nowhere near complete, but parents, doctors, psychologists, and scientists are constantly studying how the world’s children might overcome this disorder.

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## Writing Cause/Effect

Oftentimes we find ourselves in a situation, wondering how we got there, why certain events have happened, or what the results of our own actions will be. These are situations where we examine issues of cause and effect. We consider whose actions were responsible for the situation, why the person or group acted as they did, and what consequences result from those actions. In a similar respect, when writing a cause and effect essay, we are working to determine and explain reasons for behaviors, actions, or beliefs and the consequences of situations that arise because of those behaviors, actions, or beliefs.

When searching for reasons why something happened or why a situation exists, we usually find a variety of causes that are interconnected, albeit by a remote connection at times. Our purpose when writing a cause/effect essay, then, is to unravel the mystery of the causal relationship between events or happenings first for ourselves, and then for our audience. We write to explain what did or might occur, and why. Because it is not likely that a situation is the result of only a few causes—nor will there be only a few people affected by a situation or decision that is worthy of our writing—we must be sure to narrow our focus so that our subject is manageable based on the assignment's requirements. A cause/effect essay must thoroughly and reasonably discuss each cause and explain the logical connection between those causes in order to illustrate their effects on a certain person or group. Similarly, since one particular action (cause) may result in effects on any number of people in a number of ways, we need to narrow our subject for our writing to a few effects, while still recognizing the ongoing possibilities for other

consequences. Any time we find a number of apparent causes or effects, then, we should weigh them against one another and assign each a level of importance so that when we write, we may choose the most closely related causes and effects and create a thesis statement that clearly explains to our audience the connection between the most relevant causes and effects.

Another way to keep your essay focused is to consider who would and who would not agree with you; then, consider why. If there is widespread disagreement over causes or effects, you might need to go a bit further in your examination of causes and effects in order to be clear and accurate in your interpretation of the situation while also treating others' opinions fairly. Once you have determined whom your audience is and on what level they will agree with you, develop your subject by describing the event or situation for which you are explaining causes and effects, offering information on who is responsible for the situation and why, what beliefs they hold, what types of decisions they have made to cause the situation, when these decisions occurred, and where those people who are affected can be found. Organize your information into paragraphs by setting a goal for each paragraph: answer one question per paragraph, and order your paragraphs to offer cause(s) before effect(s).

#### Quick Tips for Students:

1. Beware of confusing coincidence with cause. There always needs to be a logical, explainable relationship between your causes and effects, and you'll need to be able to discuss that relationship in your essay.



2. Do not oversimplify causes by failing to recognize their full number and complexity. Show in your writing that you recognize that the causes you are outlining there are not the only ones although they are the most important to your argument or your point of view.
3. Do not assume that because one thing preceded another, they are directly or causally related. Cause and effect depends not only on a timeline of when things happened, but also on how and why those actions are related.

## “Performance-Enhancing Drugs in Today’s Athletics”

This researched persuasive essay draws on three sources to support the claim (thesis statement) that “Steroids [...] are extremely detrimental for an athlete’s health and moral esteem.” The organization of the body paragraphs includes clear topic sentences; pointed transitions close each paragraph. The integration of quotes into a strong, formal diction is exemplary. Sources include an e-book from Thigpen’s NetLibrary and two subscription databases, Proquest and Health and Wellness Resource Center. The parenthetical citations and the Works Cited page accurately follow MLA Guidelines.

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Dr. Schipper

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December 5, 2008

### Performance-Enhancing Drugs in Today’s Athletics

According to Ken R. Wells, author of “Anabolic Steroid Use,” “At least 1 in 15 male high school seniors in the United States- more than 500,000 boys- has used steroids” (“Anabolic”). Wells further claims that the earliest modern anabolic steroids were used in Germany in the 1930’s as muscle builders for the Nazi soldiers, but in more recent years, steroids are being used in the medical field as hormone replacements and to treat diseases such as breast cancer (“Anabolic”). Unfortunately, many of today’s athletes are also using steroids to unhealthily build their strength and endurance for their games. Steroids, also known as performance-enhancing drugs, are extremely detrimental for an athlete’s health and moral esteem.

Anabolic steroids have a significantly negative impact on an athlete’s health, and many sports players have suffered physically and mentally after using the drug. In Ken R. Wells’s article, he writes, “Excessive use can cause harmful imbalance in the body’s normal hormonal balance and body chemistry. Heart attacks, water retention leading to

high blood pressure and strokes, and liver and kidney tumors all are possible” (“Anabolic Steroid Use”). Other serious health issues have been known to occur in steroid users after they had used the drug for a long period of time. Wells points out that another health problem that some athletes have while using steroids is severe depression; severe depression usually affects athletes after they abruptly stop using the drug. Rapidly ending the drug greatly disrupts a human’s hormone balance, causing severe mood swings that can sometimes end in disastrous results (Wells). Tragically, in some cases the athletes’ depression is so severe that they eventually commit suicide. The feelings of severe depression can only be prevented by slowly decreasing the amount of steroid use, but unfortunately, the majority of athletes are unaware of this truth.

Not only do steroids have unhealthy results, but they also have a destructive impact on an athlete’s morals. It is well-known that steroids are illegal when it comes to sports, and yet the number of users grows every single year. When an athlete uses performance-enhancing drugs, he or she is cheating and, if caught, can suffer grave consequences. Author Ken R. Wells points out that drug use came into the national spotlight in 2005 after former baseball player, Jose Canseco, wrote his infamous book entitled Juiced. The book tells of the alarming percentage of performance-enhancing drug use in baseball and caused an intense investigation by the Congress involving many famous athletes. Since that investigation, players are now watched more closely and tested more frequently by the Major League Baseball (“Anabolic Steroid Use”). In the last few years, many athletes have been caught, including the well-known San Francisco Giants baseball player Barry Bonds. Bonds was convicted of steroid use, and though he still holds the record for the most home runs, history books are now required to put an

asterisk by his name stating that he broke the record while using illegal drugs. As a result, Bonds has lost part of his fan base, and America's view of him has been tarnished by his cheating. Unfortunately, Barry Bonds is not the only top American athlete who has been caught cheating; other well-known athletes, such as Roger Clemmons and Floyd Landis, have also tested positive for using anabolic steroids. Alarming, the number of steroid users is continuing to increase, greatly debasing the reputation of sports and athletes.

Perhaps one of the most daunting facts about performance-enhancing drugs is the growing number of young users. Athletes as young as in middle school and high school have been caught using the drug to improve their performance in their sports. David M. Jenkinson and Allison J. Harbert, in an article they penned for American Family Physician, reveal disturbing statistics about young athletes and performance-enhancing drugs:

In a survey of 902 Iowa high school athletes, 8 percent of adolescent males and 2 percent of adolescent females reported using some type of supplement to improve performance, with many taking multiple supplements in an effort to increase speed, strength, and endurance. In 1995, approximately 375,000 adolescent males and 175,000 adolescent females reported that they had used anabolic steroids at least once.

Another survey revealed that nearly four out of five were non-athletes attempting to achieve cosmetic benefits. (1039)

Surprisingly, the fault of the ever-growing number of users not only lies with the young athletes, but also with the youths' parents and coaches. Too many adults wrongfully pressure their children to do better in their sport, leaving the young ones feeling

desperate to find a way to achieve higher success. Coaches have also been known to put too much pressure on their players, and their criticism of young athletes has pushed many athletes onto the dangerous path of performance-enhancing drugs.

Although the sports federations have made valiant efforts to stop steroid use in competitions, part of the time their drug testing is inaccurate. Unfortunately, there are still different types of steroids that cannot be clearly detected by an official drug test. D. R. Mottram, author of Drugs in Sport, admits that “blood doping cannot as yet be detected with total confidence; hence it is likely to continue until such time as detection does become foolproof” (222). Regretfully, another problem with the sports federation’s testing is false signs of drug use. According to Mottram, runner Olga Yegorova falsely tested positive for steroid use in 2001, which resulted in a two-year suspension. Fortunately for her, she was later acquitted because it was discovered that the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) had neglected to obtain a necessary blood sample and instead had just taken a urine sample (222). With these costly hindrances, officials cannot properly test for drug use in athletes.

Though some people may think it impossible, there are ways to end the hazardous use of steroids in sports. Doctors need to publicly inform their patients about the sometimes-deadly results of using anabolic steroids. Teachers and coaches also need to relate to their students or players the risks and dangers of performance-enhancing drug use. In their article “Supplements and Sports,” David M. Jenkinson and Allison J. Harbert write, “One survey found that junior high school students who used anabolic steroids had less knowledge about the effects of steroids than the students who did not” (1042). Parents should also stay informed about steroids so they can intelligently encourage their

children not to use the harmful drug. Most importantly, governments need to find improved methods to test for drugs in order to decrease the number of cheating athletes. With community members, school leaders, and sports trainers working together, the percentage of drug use would most likely show a significant decrease.

Steroids are a threatening factor to sports and can be lethal for the athlete. If the use of illegal steroids is not stopped, fair and honest athleticism could become outdated. The complete removal of performance-enhancing drugs is only possible if the world community takes up its responsibility to inform people and to invent new ways of testing for these drugs. If no one does his or her part, the deterioration of sports is inevitable.

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## Writing Claims of Policy

Claims of policy make recommendations. These recommendations call for a specific solution to a specific problem. Because students must establish that a problem exists or will exist before making recommendations or discuss causes and effects of a problem first, this writing assignment may be assigned later in English 1020 since students will need to understand how to establish a claim of fact, cause, or value first.

Currently in the VSCC English Department, English 1020 instructors may have students focus on a single issue about which they feel passionate such as “creating a living working wage for workers,” “providing affordable health care for all Americans,” or “establishing a daycare on VSCC’s college campus for students with childcare needs.” English instructors may ask students to build shorter argumentative essays—a claim of fact, a claim of value, a claim of cause—to establish a problem, and the student will end the course by writing a longer argumentative essay, a claim of policy that offers solutions to the problem. Some instructors may begin the course with an I-Search paper that allows students to explore their interests as they begin to shape their research for a claim of policy. However, other VSCC English 1020 teachers take an opposite approach, asking students to write shorter claims of fact, definition, value, cause, and policy covering a variety of topics—one topic for each claim type. All of these methods can yield strong claims of policy. In the following included claims of policy, we see differing cases.

Students can write successful claims of policy by clearly establishing a specific problem, discussing the problem’s causes or effects, offering an evaluation of the



problem, and providing a solution to the problem. As is the case in writing successful arguments, the claim of policy should also provide a clearly focused persuasive thesis that identifies the problem and solution, well-supported reasons backed by relevant and sufficient evidence, a counter-argument, and an appeal to an audience's pathos, logos, and ethos.

#### Quick Tips for Students:

1. Note that policy claims are recognizable because they tend to use the words “should” and “should not,” but students need to also recognize when the words are implied. For example, “Support Our Troops” is a declarative bumper sticker that is a policy claim because the understood larger statement is, “We should support our troops.”
2. Writers of policy claims often have problems coming up with specific solutions for the problem, and many times, it is because those writers have failed to narrow their audience to a specific group of people. Consider your options when it comes to audience; in other words, determine who will be responsible for carrying out the actions you propose in your solution and what level of responsibility you are assigning to each group of people in that audience.
3. Don't forget to familiarize yourself with as many options as possible before suggesting a plan of action. Also consider research on solutions that have been implemented and how and why they have been unsuccessful in other places. This knowledge will help you improve your counterargument.

### “Changing Aim on Reducing Violent Crime” – Prize Winner

This is a daunting example of a thoroughly researched persuasive essay. One of the strengths is the writer’s ability to establish the credibility/authority of his sources with signal phrases so we will be more receptive to his ideas about gun control. This writer also shows skill with integration of quotes and “trimming” quoted material with the use of brackets and ellipses, so the reader experiences few distractions from the basic argument. The thesis statement is clear: “gun control laws should be relaxed while local law enforcement initiatives [...] should be allocated more funding to expand and further improve their efficiency.” This student’s parenthetical citations refer to paragraph numbers in online sources; he would have numbered those paragraphs himself for easy reference. Readers will be impressed by this well-written and strongly-supported argument with tight organization and excellent examples, no matter where they stand on the issue prior to reading. The writer clearly knows how to approach a reader effectively.

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John Henline

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19 March 2009

#### Changing Aim on Reducing Violent Crime

Gun control – action taken by the federal government to regulate the sale, purchase, safety, and use of firearms by citizens – is back in the spotlight again after the Washington D.C. gun ban was struck down as unconstitutional in the Supreme Court case of District of Columbia v. Heller on June 26, 2008. Some gun control restrictions include background checks and waiting periods to purchase firearms, regulation of secondary market sales, mandatory child safety features, concealment laws, as well as bans on some small handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons. Those against this gun control legislation are primarily supported by the National Rifle Association (NRA) and argue that gun control laws do not reduce gun violence, place unfair burdens on gun manufacturers, and infringe upon the Second Amendment rights of U.S. citizens to keep

and bear arms. On the other hand, gun control advocates promote more gun control legislation and stricter enforcement of these current laws with a majority of their support derived from the large grassroots organization known as the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence. In addition, gun control advocates believe that firearms endanger public safety and economic security by endorsing accidental shootings, suicide, and criminal activity rather than self-defense. Contrary to this popular belief, ineffective gun control laws should be relaxed while local law enforcement initiatives that truly reduce violent crime should be allocated more funding to expand and further improve their efficiency.

Gun control is not effective at reducing violent crime since crime is based on social, economic, and cultural climate, not the amount or availability of guns in society. Jeffrey Jenson supports this statement in his 2007 article in Social Work Research by stating, “trends in aggression and violence generally mirror a host of individual, social, and economic patterns” (par. 3). Jenson further validates this point by employing the example of “the well-documented increase in youth violence between the late 1980s and mid-1990s [which] was linked to increases in gang involvement and crack cocaine use” (par. 3). Similarly, Don B. Kates and Gary Mauser, two distinguished professors with many years of experience in gun control research, argue against “the mantra ‘more guns equal more death and fewer guns equal less death’” in their 2007 article from the Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy (par.16). The professors support their argument by showing that “nations with higher gun ownership rates [. . .] do not have higher murder or suicide rates than those with lower gun ownership” (Kates and Mauser, par. 16). Next, they turn from the amount of guns in society to their availability stating, “There is no social benefit in decreasing the availability of guns if the result is only to

increase the use of other means of suicide and murder, resulting in more or less the same amount of death” (Kates and Mauser, par. 19). Thus, Kates and Mauser explain, “The determinants of murder and suicide are basic social, economic, and cultural factors, not the prevalence of some form of deadly mechanism” (par. 21). Finally, the professors conclude that gun control “does not suppress crime, for banning guns cannot alleviate the socio-cultural and economic factors that are the real determinants of violence and crime rates” (Kates and Mauser, par. 21).

Another reason gun control is ineffective at reducing violent crime is because gun control restricts gun possession by some ordinary law-abiding citizens who aren't murderous criminals and use guns for self-defense. Evidence from several scientific studies shows that these ordinary law-abiding citizens aren't producers of violent crime because most criminals have a long history of violence, mental illness, or other types of hazardous behavior. Through examination of school shootings, Jeffrey Jenson found a correlation between violence and mental illness as he states in his article: “Profiles of the perpetrators of school shootings in the past decade reveal that many shooters experienced mental health problems before their decisions to engage in violence” (par. 8). Jenson confirms this association through the example of the Virginia Tech University shootings in which “the shooter, Seung-Hui Cho, lived a troubled life characterized by social isolation, alienation, and depression”; however, “Mr. Cho's victims were, by all accounts, normal students going about their daily routines” (par. 1). In their article, Kates and Mauser also found evidence of a connection between criminals and psychological problems as they argue, “Almost all murderers are extremely aberrant individuals with life histories of violence, psychopathology, substance abuse, and other dangerous behaviors” (par. 27).

In addition, the professors explain that “studies [. . .] show that neither a majority, nor many, nor virtually any murderers are ordinary ‘law-abiding citizens’” (Kates and Mauser, par. 27). Consequently, they affirm, “there is no reason for laws prohibiting gun possession by ordinary, law-abiding responsible adults because such people virtually never murder” (Kates and Mauser, par. 32). Lastly, Kates and Mauser deduce that “if one accepts that such adults are far more likely to be victims of violent crime than to commit it, disarming them becomes not just unproductive but counter-productive” (par. 32).

Gun control actually increases violent crime by reducing widespread gun ownership and availability, which can lead to a decline in violent crime. Data from numerous surveys and studies on gun possession prove that it can reduce violent crime by deterring criminals from committing crimes. In their 2006 article from the Cato Journal, John C. Moorhouse and Brent Wanner review several gun control studies, one of which, conducted by John Lott and David Mustard, concentrates on concealed carry laws to determine their influence on crime. Moorhouse and Wanner state, “The authors find that right-to-carry laws reduce violent crime rates” since concealed carry laws make “criminals substitute non-confrontational crimes such as burglary, auto theft, and larceny for robbery and assault” (par. 19). In addition, they explain that “the latter crimes involve an increased probability of confronting an armed private citizen [. . .] thus, [right-to-carry] laws increase the risk to criminals of being injured or killed during a crime and thus generate a deterrent effect” (Moorhouse and Wanner, par. 19). In their article, Kates and Mauser also argue that “widespread firearm ownership reduces violence by deterring criminals from confrontation crimes and making more attractive such nonconfrontation crimes as theft from unoccupied commercial or residential premises”

(par. 33). Additionally, the professors examine National Institute of Justice surveys taken among prison inmates and report that the “felons most frightened ‘about confronting an armed victim’ were those from states with the greatest relative number of privately owned firearms” (Kates and Mauser, par. 34). Thus, Kates and Mauser reason that “high crime nations that ban guns to reduce crime end up having both high crime and stringent gun laws, while [. . .] low crime nations that do not significantly restrict guns continue to have low violence rates” (par. 38).

Another reason gun control increases violent crime is because it aids criminals by disarming law-abiding citizens who use guns for self-defense. In his 2007 article in The New American, Kurt Williamsen examines gun control laws and states that “strict gun-control laws, including banning guns, will likely lead to an increase in murders and other violent crime [. . .] because the law-abiding would then be largely disarmed” (par. 31). Furthermore, Williamsen explains that because criminals exist, “taking away guns from the law-abiding [. . .] will not change what’s in our hearts, but will make us more vulnerable” (par. 35). Similarly, John R. Lott Jr. in his 2000 article in the National Forum explores statistics surrounding gun control laws and finds that “few realize that Americans use guns defensively about 2 million times each year five times as frequently as the 430,000 times guns were used to commit crimes in 1997” (par. 3). Also, Lott asserts, “Having a gun has been proven to be by far the safest course of action when one is confronted by a criminal” as well as “up to ninety-eight percent of the time, simply brandishing the weapon is sufficient to stop an attack” (pars. 3-4). Thus, Lott affirms, “The biggest problem with gun-control laws is that those individuals who are intent on harming others are the least likely to obey them” (par. 7). Linda Gorman and David B.

Kopel also inspect gun control laws in their 2000 article in the Forum for Applied Research and Public Policy and claim that “banning firearms reduces the risk and thus the cost to the perpetrator of the crime” (par. 62). As a result, Gorman and Kopel conclude that “because gun control applies only to the law-abiding, governments who institute it deprive their productive citizens of the means to defend themselves effectively [and] indirectly become the accomplice of murderers, rapists, and thugs” (par. 64).

Local law enforcement initiatives intended to reduce criminal violence should be given additional funding for expansion and implementation since their methods, unlike gun control, suppress social conditions and factors of violent crime without infringing upon the rights of law-abiding citizens. In his 2001 article in The Lancet, Jonathan Shepherd considers criminal deterrence as a public health strategy and explains that “there is convincing evidence that focused police interventions and pre-emptive policing are effective” (par. 25). In addition, Shepherd states that “studies [. . .] have concluded that falls in violence have been affected by changes in police practice” as “aggressive targeting of guns and street-drug markets deterred young adults from using hard drugs and being drawn into the associated violent lifestyle” (par. 26). Similarly, Richard Rosenfield, Robert Fornango, and Eric Baumer in their 2005 article in Criminology & Public Policy evaluate the effectiveness of three widely publicized local law enforcement initiatives: Boston’s Operation Ceasefire, New York’s Compstat, and Richmond Virginia’s Project Exile. First, the researchers inspect Boston’s Operation Ceasefire, whose “central objective was to deter youth firearm violence through direct communication to gang youth that firearm possession and use would not be tolerated, and all available levers would be pulled to ensure swift and tough punishment of violators” (Rosenfield,

Fornango, and Baumer, par. 9). Next, the scholars turn to New York's Compstat which "sought to restore order on the streets and accountability for crime in the police department" by ordering "the police [. . .] no longer to tolerate minor offenses" since "minor crimes and disorder invite more serious offending by signaling that the police and community have lost control of the streets" (Rosenfield, Fornango, and Baumer, par. 10). Lastly, the investigators examine Richmond Virginia's Project Exile which "entails sentence enhancements through federal prosecution for violent or drug crimes involving firearms [because] by increasing the expected penalty for firearm-related offenses, the program is intended to deter firearm carrying and criminal use" (Rosenfield, Fornango, and Baumer, par. 13). From the results, the inspectors conclude, "Richmond's firearm homicide rate fell more rapidly than the average firearm homicide rate among large U.S. cities," but as a whole "the programs increased state prison sentences that, in turn, reduced homicide rates" (Rosenfield, Fornango, and Baumer, pars. 40-48).

Another reason local law enforcement initiatives that reduce violent crime should receive increased funding for development and execution is that the costs of violent crime are significant, and many American cities have an insufficient amount of police officers to control violent crime. In his 2005 article in Criminology & Public Policy, Jens Ludwig examines Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), which is the federal government's major initiative to combat gun violence based on existing gun laws from programs like Richmond Virginia's Project Exile and Boston's Operation Ceasefire. First, Ludwig inspects the correlation between the policies and funding of PSN and states that there is "an efficiency argument for increased funding for even a reconfigured and more effective version of PSN" (par. 11). Furthermore, Ludwig explains, "Given the substantial costs of



gun violence to society, on order of \$1 million per injury, targeted patrol may produce benefits that are much larger than the program's costs" (par. 11). Consequently, Ludwig deduces that "given the considerable costs of gun violence to American society, there is a strong argument for at the very least continuing PSN funding at previous levels in addition to modifying the program's priorities" (par. 73). Likewise, William Stuntz in his 2009 article in The Weekly Standard makes a case for a police surge due to the important costs of violent crime and shortage of police officers in American cities. Stuntz argues that even this year "in the face of record-breaking federal spending, one uncommonly good spending idea has gotten short shrift: Use federal budget dollars to pay for more cops on high-crime city streets" (par. 2). Stuntz justifies this point by showing that "most American cities are underpoliced, many of them seriously so [since] the United States has sought to control crime by using small police forces to punish as many criminals as possible" (par. 9). In addition, Stuntz states that "the social cost of that crime, and of the criminal punishment that seeks to hold it in check, is colossal, measured in families never formed and investments unmade, lives ended murderously and other lives slowly crushed by long prison terms" (par. 15). Thus, Stuntz concludes that "policing surges free residents to take control of their neighborhoods and build the street cultures the locals want [which will] do more to control crime than any government-tailored incentives" (par. 31).

Because gun control is based on the belief that more guns in society cause more deaths, and it attempts to ban these guns to reduce violent crime, gun control increases violent crime instead of decreasing it. Gun control focuses on the availability and quantity of guns in society rather than on the social, economic, and cultural issues that

truly cause violent crime. Additionally, gun control prohibits ordinary law-abiding citizens from owning guns for self-defense instead of concentrating on the criminals who use guns with dangerous consequences. Finally, gun control attempts to reduce widespread gun ownership that can actually decrease the amount of violent crime in society by acting as a deterrent to criminal activity. Consequently, gun control laws should be relaxed, and local law enforcement initiatives intended to reduce violent crime should be allotted more funding for expansion and implementation. These local law enforcement programs should be given an increased amount of funding since their tactics, unlike gun control, curb violent crime without violating law-abiding citizens' rights. Lastly, local law enforcement projects should receive additional funding to expand and function more efficiently because the costs of violent crime are significant, and many American cities have an insufficient amount of police officers to control violent crime.

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## “Educating Hispanic Students in America or Bust”

This researched persuasive essay asserts a claim of policy about what our country needs to do to educate Hispanic children. The range of support is quite broad, drawing on Thigpen Library’s subscription databases, national and government websites, and a personal interview. The tone is consistently strong and energetic, so despite the length of this essay, it is a pleasure to read. The writer is adept at MLA style documentation, including the correct handling of indirect sources (qtd in...) and integrating quotes. Even better, this writer seems passionately involved in the topic from beginning to end.

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31 July 2008

### Educating Hispanic Students in America or Bust

The U.S. Department of Education has its hands full trying to educate the largest number of Hispanic K-12 students to date. This historic increase in Hispanic enrollment affects the U.S. Department of Education in many ways, but none more deeply than with educational costs and language problems in the classroom. Aside from the fact that these educational expenses are spiking record budget costs, and the English language barriers are slowing the academic progress of the Hispanic student, the U.S. Department of Education maintains the nation’s spirit of humanitarianism by assuming the responsibility to educate the influx of Hispanic students. This charitable attitude inherently avows that contending with the language and budget obstacles is noble because America instinctively deems education as the key to future prosperity for all children and for American society. However, despite the good intentions, the nation needs to ask this question concerning the Hispanic students’ academic success: Is it really possible to effectively educate the vast number of Hispanic students, given their specific language needs and the limitations in

the education budget, without both restructuring the internal management of the U.S. school system and reaching outside of it for supplemental assistance? In light of this question, if the U.S. Department of Education is to provide all Hispanic students with a quality education and equip them to be successful individuals and societal contributors, then the “No Child Left Behind” Act must be put in detention, and corporate America needs to come to school with some money to help carry out these educational goals.

¿Yo no puedo leer inglés, pero puede leer usted español? In English, this says, “I can’t read English, but can you read Spanish?” For the majority of English-speaking Americans, reading the above sentence in Spanish with any understanding is perplexing, and yes, foreign. This same language disorientation is commonplace for many Hispanic students as they attempt to read English and assimilate into American culture. These language impediments are the most difficult part of their assimilation and present many struggles for teachers, Hispanic students and their parents. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, an official data bureau for the federal government, 6.9 million Hispanic pupils had limitations in English proficiency in 2005, and this presents significant challenges for English-speaking teachers whose mission is to help educate every Hispanic student (United States, par. 10). Out of all elementary and secondary teachers, only 50,000 qualify as having bilingual fluency, which hardly keeps up with the millions of enrolled Spanish-speaking Hispanic students (Zhao, par. 2). Furthermore, according to Dr. Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, a Harvard education professor and expert on immigrant children, there will have to be an additional employment of “up to 290,000 [bilingual] teachers” to meet the current language needs of Hispanic students (qtd. in Zhao, par. 3).

With the ratio between English-speaking teachers and Spanish-speaking students being so out of balance, there is a correlation linking the language differences among teachers and Hispanic students with the students' poor academic performances. The team effort between teacher and Hispanic pupil typically falls short of reaching curriculum standards, which produces poor grades, and in due course, translates into frustration for all concerned. Jay Winfrey, an English-speaking American father, who knows all too well how this can happen, says of his two adopted Hispanic kids, ages five and seven, "Katrina and Julio are bright and eager to learn, but falling desperately behind in school because they cannot understand their English-speaking teacher. It is a real challenge" (Personal interview). Like Winfrey's children, the lack of intelligence is not to blame, but rather the language challenges. It is safe to say that the results of these poor academic performances deflate and discourage confidence in the Hispanic student.

Having a lack of self-confidence is not uncommon among Hispanic students because they are unable to communicate with their American classmates, which frequently leads to social withdrawal and isolation. This emotional anguish seems almost inescapable as the Hispanic student typically has a home life that is also facing similar social challenges adjusting to mainstream America, which leaves the family unable to really help the child acclimate. To complicate matters even more, the parents of Hispanic students cannot communicate with teachers, which oftentimes cause a disengagement of parental involvement in the child's education. Coincidentally, this disengagement also has an indirect link to the parents' own lack of education which fosters an air of unfamiliarity with the whole education process. This disconnect can be

intimidating for Hispanic parents when confronting any facet of their child's school experience. Moreover, according to the Educational Resources Information Center, in Hispanic culture, it is ethically insulting for a parent to question school authority; therefore, Hispanic parents view the U.S. educational system as "a bureaucracy governed by educated non-Hispanics whom they have no right to question" (qtd. in Inger, par. 3). For each of these reasons, Hispanic parents avoid teachers and faculty, while at the same time, they feel unable to help their children achieve academically, which is discouraging. Therefore, when combining the Hispanic students' poor academic performances with their social rejection, plus receiving little to no support from home it is easy to understand why the Hispanic student considers giving up and dropping out of school. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that Hispanic students drop out at a rate of 41%, the highest percentage of any minority group (par. 33).

Despite the disheartening statistics, there are those exceptional Hispanic students proving the statistics wrong. Take the case of Maria Gonzalez, a twenty-one-year-old legal Hispanic immigrant who migrated to the U.S. at age five. Her completion of high school reflects twelve challenging years in the U.S. public school system, and her sheer determination to overcome the obstacles that many Hispanic students face is paying off, as she is now a junior at Westminster College in Missouri, majoring in Political Science (Kiely, par. 21). Her achievements show that educating Hispanic immigrants can be done. Maria reinforces and sends the message that most Hispanic students can flourish if they are willing to conquer the language and cultural barriers. In the meantime, the



inspiring stories like Maria's motivate the U.S. Department of Education, whose vision is to be an ally to all Hispanic students.

If the U.S. Department of Education is to be an educational ally, then the department's goals must be to invest in the education of every child in hopes of producing contributors to American society and yielding returns on taxpayers' money. However, due to the precarious economic climate in the U.S. right now, talk of any additional spending with taxpayers' money raises eyebrows. Despite this volatility, the "No Child Left Behind" program is forging ahead and boosting its financial commitment to education by raising the collective expenditure totals between the local, state, and federal governments to \$626 billion a year, or \$9,992 per child, which is a historical price tag for the U.S. Department of Education (United States, Education Department Facts 1). However, when you step back and gain perspective on another set of record-breaking figures, which is the number of incoming Hispanic students, then doing the math is eye-opening. When multiplying \$9,992, the cost per child, by the 11.4 million Hispanic 2007 K-12 enrollments, this totals \$113.9 billion, or nearly 20% of the entire budget, just for basic educational expenses for this minority group alone (United States, Education Department Facts 1).

Spending of this size for Hispanic education represents an economic pill so big that the taxpayers might find it hard to swallow, not to mention risking unfavorable side-effects. However, the U.S. Department of Education wants the taxpayers to believe that this "economic pill" has medicinal benefits for all Hispanic students in the "No Child Left Behind" program, but if this is so, then why are Hispanic dropout rates so high and a lack

of successful English and curriculum adaptation still creating problematic side-effects? Consequently, the U.S. Department of Education and the American taxpayers must soon decide if these side-effects necessitate more spending or if a major re-haul needs to occur in the U.S. education system.

Without doubt, the costs pertaining to Hispanic education are attention-getting, but despite the massive spending for this minority group, maintaining a determination to successfully educate the Hispanic student must remain strong. Looking on the bright side of this issue, if Hispanic students can receive a solid education, this will allow them to hold better opportunities in the work force and eventually help pay for these educational costs. However, the bright side turns a little dim as a continual and consistent rush of Hispanic immigrants enters the U.S., putting further strains on the costs to educate the Hispanic children within this influx. Incurring these additional costs could burst the educational budget dams, which are already showing stress-cracks. This economic threat is especially true if the U.S. education system cannot adequately equip and educate the incoming Hispanic immigrants to participate as taxpayers in the American job market. Therefore, if the U.S. Department of Education fails to sufficiently meet the current and future Hispanics' language needs, jobs for these Hispanic immigrants will be few, and the taxpayers can then expect to wade in some serious debt as the budget dams break.

The current and potential concerns surrounding the costs of Hispanic education are relative to and swayed by the numbers of Hispanic immigrants, which has consequences on the size of school enrollment. There is an enormous trend in the U.S.

right now regarding Hispanic immigration, and from all accounts, it is accelerating with great momentum at a startling one million Hispanic immigrants a year. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by the year 2050, there will be nearly 100 million Hispanic immigrants living in the U.S (Facts for Features, par. 5). Likewise, if the United States is to receive Hispanic immigrant numbers of this magnitude for the next several decades, then the country will need to plan on riding a tidal wave of federal spending, and this is particularly true in the area of education. Therefore, if the U.S. Census Bureau is correct with projections, the U.S. educational system cannot make the mistake of abandoning what could approximately be a third of the nation's future population. Therefore, new proposals and solutions must be put on the table to address current and future needs for educating all Hispanic students. While keeping the best interest of the Hispanic student in mind, the U.S. Department of Education must first consider changing the "No Child Left Behind" Act.

The U.S. Department of Education needs to reexamine the infrastructure of the current "No Child Left Behind" law, also known as NCLB, and either reconfigure its terms or eliminate it altogether. To begin, the NCLB operates under the premise that all students, regardless of race, income, or special need, can and should achieve high standards. Given these goals, the former U.S. Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, spoke specifically about the significance of educating Hispanic students by the NCLB guidelines, when she said, "One in every five children under 18 is of Hispanic origin. We must work together to ensure all these children stay in school and have the chance to achieve their potential" (United States, How No Child par. 1). The NCLB law believes

that this potential is achieved by setting high expectations and establishing measurable goals for all teachers and students, which can improve individual outcomes in education. These high expectations hold individual states accountable by demanding that each school system within the state meet curriculum goals in return for federal funding. Essentially, the law requires a measurement of these goals through testing procedures, and depending on a school's overall proficiency test scores, an appropriation of federal funding will tie-in with those scores. Allegedly, the scores are to serve as a "report card" of how well the schools are performing; thus, the higher the test scores, the stronger the financial reward provisions for the school. It may both sound good and look good on paper, but for the many Hispanic students struggling to learn English, it is wreaking havoc with the language programs that benefit them. Some critics of the NCLB, like the National Education Association (NEA) agree and plead the case that "the law is not working" ("No Child Left Behind," par. 2).

The NEA criticizes the viability of the NCLB law and claims that it unfairly points fingers and withdraws funding from those schools that are not meeting NCLB standards (NEA, "NEA's" par 2). Unfortunately, the individual schools that are falling short of the NCLB expectations are usually the ones inheriting large numbers of students who have issues such as economic or language disadvantages. These disadvantaged students then enter into the mandated testing sessions with little to no mastery of concepts and are ultimately unable to show curriculum proficiency. Tragically, when these specific schools fail to meet the NCLB curriculum goals because of low proficiency test scores, then federal funding is cut. Ironically, this budget cutting triggers a catch-22 by initiating the

removal of certain entitlement offerings, like the Language English Proficiency program (NEA, “NEA’s” par 8). Therefore, removing the various language programs from schools leaves the Hispanic students without any help in learning English, which is their academic life support. Clearly, this will create a chain reaction by hindering the Hispanic students’ ability to acclimate to an English-centered education system, which in turn slows academic process and eventually decreases the chances that these students will show any improvement by the next testing session, or “report card,” and the vicious cycle repeats itself. The tone is now set for one of the biggest drawbacks to the NCLB program.

The NCLB program wants to put the anthem of accountability front and center on the education stage, but behind the curtain, the program’s progress is in question. In a 2007 New York Times article, current New Mexico governor, Bill Richardson, boldly challenges the progress that the NCLB is making with all students, but maintains a particular interest in the Hispanic minority achievement, which represents a large constituency within his border state, as he writes, “Just look at the facts. The National Assessment of Educational Progress shows a slight narrowing of the racial achievement gap over the past three years [2004-2007]. This narrowing, however, is due to a decline in overall reading scores [by all students], not to improvements in minority student performance. This is not progress” (“NCLB Fails,” par. 3). In a nutshell, the NCLB program is abandoning the Hispanic child that our government supposedly did not want to leave behind.

By and large, it does cost more to educate Hispanic students because of their special language needs, and anything “special” in the U.S. Department of Education

takes extra money. However, when money is being taken away from helpful programs, it worsens the existing challenges of educating those who need them the most. That is why the U.S. Department of Education needs to push a little harder for additional corporate support, to ensure that the heartbeat of various projects such as the language programs and other educational expenses stays in rhythm. Local and national corporations with special interest in the Hispanic community can financially contribute to individual school districts or nationwide programs and make a difference for the future of many Hispanic students. Perhaps corporate money could purchase school supplies that a Hispanic student might not be able to afford, or it could start a fund or a program to help teachers learn Spanish; the possibilities are endless. Since donations can be a corporate write-off, this plan makes it feasible and inviting for them to financially participate, not to mention the positive marketing position in the community, which can be of benefit to the corporation's image.

Next, corporate sponsorship can support Hispanic students through tangible and creative endeavors. Take IBM, for instance; this corporation is offering a software program that will enable parents to interact with teachers. Through email, parents and teachers can correspond with each other, and the software automatically converts the language for each in their respective languages (IBM, par. 1-2). This could bring about more parent involvement, which is critically absent, yet if mom and dad show interest in education, maybe the Hispanic student will too.

In contrast, there are others who oppose corporate sponsorship involvement saying that corporate motives are purely greedy and self-serving. Deron Boyles, an

education professor at Georgia State University observes, "Schools have become integral to the marketing plans of a vast array of corporations. What we have now is an ingrained idea that public schools exist for private profit" (qtd. in Molar, par. 6). Still, there are others that feel corporate sponsorship educates kids to be consumers instead of producers. However, without education, Hispanic students cannot be either.

Obviously, the checkbook will have to stay open if the U.S. Department of Education wants more success stories like that of Maria Gonzalez, but she is the exception and not the rule. Sadly, the rule represents a high number of drop outs and those who are intelligent and making efforts, but struggling uphill to learn English in order to get by in the classroom and in the future. What is alarming are the predictions that Hispanic enrollment is going to stampede the classroom over the next few years, and if this is true, should taxpayers continue to pay more and more money to get the same results from this minority group? Are these results fair to them or to the American taxpayers? Is the "No Child Left Behind" program to blame for not being as efficient at providing them with an education they deserve and need? Furthermore, if the NCLB law is going to hold all students and teachers accountable for succeeding, then the American people have the right to do the same with the U.S. Department of Education, do they not? Or should taxpayers forgive the NCLB mismanagement and defend the U.S. Department of Education, claiming a shock and awe effect by the large Hispanic enrollment, and assume the system is doing the best it can, considering this enrollment influx? Meanwhile, corporate America could help rescue both language and money problems, but is the U.S. educational system willing to attract them?

Rectifying the “No Child Left Behind” Act or inviting more corporate involvement may not provide all the answers in effectively educating Hispanic students, but it is at least a start. And unless other options are put on the table, American citizens will eventually reach a point where they will say, “enough is enough” and force the U.S. government to grab some chalk and jot down viable ideas on the blackboard to produce more Marias because that is what taxpayers want; in fact, having Hispanic students be successful individuals and contributors to American society is what all concerned want, and getting an education is the only way to make this happen.



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**SECTION 3:**  
**LITERARY ANALYSIS**

## Researched Argument about Literature

Reading and writing about literature is a way for students to understand and connect not only to the immediate culture in which they live, but also to past cultural histories that have shaped the present without their knowledge. Because delving into our cultural background through reading and writing about literature can be overwhelming and, many times, intimidating, college students have a difficult time grasping the importance of these practices. Classroom discussion of literary works, their historical importance, and their relevance to our present-day world can help students to realize that literature is something that does not exist in a vacuum; it is not static, and even though they are first-time college students, they can continue to shape the meaning and relevance of these works in our world by discussing them with others, doing research to expand the scope of their own knowledge, and writing to share their thoughts and ideas with others, making themselves a part of the ongoing discussion about literature.

When students do research to support their interpretation of literature, they enter the world of literary criticism. Whether they realize it or not, usually students are looking for critical pieces which support their own interpretation of a work of literature, yet they likely will find some that do not. At this point, students will find that classroom discussions about the role of “opinion” and “aesthetics” in literary criticism will help them not to be intimidated by so-called experts whose ideas differ greatly from their own. Another important discussion for the classroom prior to writing and research is the role of research in shaping students’ interpretations of what they read and, consequently, the importance of thoroughly citing sources to avoid the semblance of plagiarism.

Once students understand the role of research in supporting their own ideas and interpretations, they can enjoy the experience of forming their own hypotheses about the meaning of the literary works, working as detectives by looking for clues in the literature that lead the reader to a final interpretation. Each hypothesis can and will be different depending on the reader and his or her background, knowledge and interests because we each bring to literature a wealth of experience and interests: in history, in biography, in personal exploration, in psychology, in film, etc. The most wonderful thing about literary analysis is that we can find and share ourselves and our interests with others through the act of reading and writing about literature.

#### Quick Tips for Students:

1. Take some time before going out to do research to jot down your own original thoughts and ideas about the literary work so it will be clear to you, before you do your research, the ideas that you formed upon your own reading of the text versus the ideas that you encountered when reading others' criticism of the works. This practice will help you avoid plagiarism.
2. Literary criticism does not lose validity with the passage of time as do other forms of interpretive writing, but students should find sources published as recently as possible to ensure they are encountering the most current information, a best practice in the case of any researched essay.
3. Don't be afraid to offer creative ways of interpreting the text. As long as you can find evidence in the text to support your interpretation, your ideas will always have validity. That is part of the subjective nature of literary analysis.

“Two Men Respond to Tradition in Frost’s ‘Mending Wall’” – **Prize Winner**

This fresh beginning-to-end analysis of Robert Frost’s well-known poem establishes a dialectic between the speaker in the poem and the neighbor who participates in the inspection of the stone wall between their two properties. This dialectic between, on the one hand, preserving traditions without question and, on the other, questioning traditions for relevance is surprisingly balanced. Both men are deriving pleasure from their questioning/unquestioning postures, and the writer ends by pointing out that on this lovely spring day the two men are spending time together at the wall and are, therefore, the “good neighbors” that the adage claims good walls produce. Throughout the essay, we see a medley of critical commentary from Thigpen Library’s e-resources database trove, editorial comments and lines of Frost’s poem woven evenly and easily into the text, producing bursts of surprising insight that never feels ponderous. The whimsy and impishness that this writer finds in Frost’s speaker is mirrored in his/her own delight at an ironic conclusion.

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Susan Doyka

Mrs. Bobbie Kilbane

Intro to Poetry & Drama

April 7, 2008

Two Men Respond to Tradition in Frost’s “Mending Wall”

The poem “Mending Wall” by Robert Frost, written in 1914, is a poem about nature and human nature. These two themes—man and nature—complement and enhance the portraiture of the other. The setting of nature imagery appeals to our romantic notions, opening a path into the picturesque and poetic. In this fanciful mood, the reader is introduced to two men who have outdoor work of a traditional nature to do. It is a rite of spring to mend the rock wall, which has been broken down by various mysterious villains—“ ‘something there is that doesn’t love a wall, / that wants it down’” (Frost lines 35-36). The backdrop of the wall-mending job sets a stage upon which we view the actors who teach us about human nature. In particular, in “Mending Wall,” Frost reveals how two different men view a particular societal convention

expressed in the proverb “‘good fences make good neighbors’” (27). The attitudes of the men reveal the diverse human outlook concerning traditions in general—whereas one man looks upon traditions as set in foundations of timeless wisdom to be submitted to without question, another man studies the tradition and adapts its truth in the context of changed circumstances.

The title of the poem, “Mending Wall,” suggests that an event is taking place in the present. The poem is written in *blank verse*, which, resembling the rhythms of ordinary English speech, aids in its narration (Kirszner and Mandell 973). The action is being performed by two men of quite different makeup. According to Clark Griffith, “Like the romantics...Frost tends to center upon Man and Nature as the two prime realities [and] ...he is fond of joining these realities in a dramatic encounter” (21). In the encounter, one man is pragmatic and the other poetic. This dichotomy of personality is unveiled under the canopy of nature as the men are working on opposite sides of their rock boundary wall. The speaker is indeed one of the wall menders, the romantic one. Right away we hear his fantasy take flight—“something there is that doesn’t love a wall.” This personification of “frost” exemplifies the imaginative mind of the speaker. “The artful vagueness of the phrase ‘something there is’ is enchanting and magical. His fun lies in not naming it...” (Lentricchia par.2). The alliterative use of the letter “s” (*something, sends, swell, sun, gaps, pass, abreast*) adds to the playful, teasing tone of the speaker, as well.

This fun-loving imaginative type is not averse to work. He sets up the rendezvous with his neighbor so they can “walk the line/And set the wall between us once again” (13-14). But even in the work, he is playing “just another outdoor game,/ One on a side”

(22-23), using spells to make the rounded rocks—stated metaphorically as “loaves” and “balls”—stay in place (17). And yet, they are working hard, these two very different men.

Suddenly, he takes up a new thought in which he questions the tradition:

There where it is we do not need the wall:

He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

My apple trees will never get across

And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him. (23-26)

At this point we hear from the neighbor for the first time: “He only says, ‘Good fences make good neighbors’” (27). Bruce Meyer writes concerning the neighbor, “He is a man of few words and many actions” (par. 2). Our speaker’s fanciful attitude will not be put off so easily. The speaker here uses the metaphor “Spring is the mischief in me,” (28) to justify his lively desire to debate. Sounding childlike, he probes his neighbor’s psyche:

---I wonder

If I could put a notion in his head:

*Why* do they make good neighbors? Isn’t it

Where there are cows? But here there are no cows. (28-31)

His philosophizing seems to take a slightly serious turn as he employs irony in a discussion of walls and their faculty for “walling in or walling out” (33). This conveys us to the realm of complex human relationships in which there is, as Caroline Westerhoff states, an “irresolvable tension between boundary and hospitality” (qtd. in Mieder 157). He understands that there are more sides to the *wall* issue, for obviously *something*



“wants it down” (36). Other views should be considered lest he be guilty of giving *offense* (here his fertile mind and impetuous nature cannot help but play the punster)!

His whimsy turns to even more imaginative realms—elves may be those who want the wall down! He doesn't speak this, for he knows that however much he would like the neighbor to let go of convention and consider these imaginings, in the end he is likened to an “an old-stone savage.../ He moves in darkness” (40-41). The neighbor is devoid of all those fancies and imaginings and thoughts of elves. He sees no purpose in all that analysis, and “[h]e will not go behind his father's saying” (43). The purpose of the boundary wall has been established of old. His use of a proverb reflects the idea that “proverbs are used to free complex situations from ambiguity” (Mieder 155). As such, this neighbor may not be the type of “free spirit” as his imaginative co-worker, but he is content and satisfied with the simplicity of the adage. It frees his mind from abstracts. In fact, we are told, “he likes having thought of it so well / He says it again, ‘Good fences make good neighbors’” (44-45).

The proverb is the last word in “Mending Wall.” We are left with one last ironic picture: two very different men came together to make a “good fence.” It was precisely this resultant “good fence” that brought them together for an afternoon of work and “play.” Therefore the proverb *did* pan out to be true—a good fence did make good neighbors. The rock wall that divided them brought them together.

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