

EDITORIAL UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Must an editorial focus mainly on one position, or is it acceptable to fully develop both sides of the argument?
2. Which type of news story should an opinion piece bear a resemblance to: a soft news story or a hard news story?
3. Is it acceptable to include a conclusion in an editorial? Explain why or why not?
4. How does a typical editorial's organizational style compare or contrast to that of a hard news story?
- 4a. Why is this type of order advocated and beneficial for writing an editorial?
5. Explain why it is vital for a writer to know who his/her audience is before writing an editorial? Why?
6. Should an author begin his/her editorial with the thesis or position statement? Explain.

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS (READ ATTACHED)

7. What is the thesis or position of the editorial.
8. List two of the author's main arguments.
9. (7 pts.) Briefly summarize what you believe to be the author's strongest argument (despite its order), and explain why you think it's the most persuasive (write on back).

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How schools are destroying the joy of reading

By Patrick Welsh

The recent news hasn't been too good for English teachers like me.

In July, the results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a congressionally mandated standardized test, showed the reading skills of high school students haven't improved since 1999.

And last week, the Pew Research Center's Internet Project reported that for today's teenagers, "the Internet and cell phones have become a central force that fuels the rhythm of daily life." Eighty-seven percent of America's kids ages 12 to 17 spend time online. E-mail is no longer fast enough for most teens who are using instant messenger and text messaging to keep up with their friends.

Faced with declining literacy and the ever-growing distractions of the electronic media, faced with the fact that — Harry Potter fans aside — so few kids curl up with a book and read for pleasure anymore, what do we teachers do? We saddle students with textbooks that would turn off even the most passionate reader.

Just before the school year ended in June, my colleagues in the English department at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Va., and central office administrators discussed which textbook to adopt for the 9th- and 10th-grade World Literature course for next year.

Of the four texts that the state approved, the choices came down to two: the Elements of Literature: World Literature from Holt, Rinehart and Winston and The Language of Literature: World Literature from McDougal Littell.

The problems with these two tomes are similar to the problems with high school textbooks in most subjects.

First, there's the well-documented weight problem. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons has said that an increase in back injuries among children might be attributed to the enormous textbooks they lug around in their backpacks. Injuries aside, what kid is going to sit in a chair and relax with a heavy hardcover, 9-inch-by-11-inch compendium?

Worse is the fact that for all their bulk, the textbooks are feather-weight intellectually.

Substance lacking

Take the McDougal Littell text that we finally adopted for 9th- and 10th-graders. It starts off with a unit titled "Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Hebrew Literature," followed by sections on the literature of Ancient India, Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Ancient

China and Japan. Then comes "Persian and Arabic Literature" and "West African Oral Literature" — and that's only the first third of the book. There are still more than 800 pages to plough through, but it's the same drill — short excerpts from long works — a little Dante here, a little Goethe there and two whole pages dedicated to Shakespeare's plays. One even has a picture of a poster from the film Shakespeare in Love with Joseph Fiennes kissing Gwyneth Paltrow. The other includes the following (which is sure to turn teens on to the Bard):

"Notice the insight about human life that the following lines from *The Tempest* convey:

We are such stuff

As dreams are made on; and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.

Shakespeare's plays are treasures of the English language."

Both books are full of obtrusive directions, comments, questions and pictures that would hinder even the attentive readers from becoming absorbed in the readings. Both also "are not reader-friendly. There is no narrative coherence that a student can follow and get excited about. It's a little bit of this and a little bit of that," says T.C. Williams reading specialist Chris Gutierrez, who teaches a course in reading strategies at Shenandoah University in Virginia. For kids who get books and reading opportunities only at school, these types of textbooks will drive them away from reading — perhaps for life.

Such texts bastardize literature and history, reducing authors and their works to historical facts to be memorized — what Alfie Kohn, author of *The Schools Our Children Deserve*, calls "the bunch o' facts" theory of learning. Students are jerked from one excerpt of literature to another, given no chance for the kind of sustained reading that stimulates the imagination.

One of the most popular books I teach is *Night*, Elie Wiesel's powerful remembrance about Nazi concentration camps. Even the most reluctant readers are enthralled by the 109-page narrative. The Holt, Rinehart and Winston World Literature text throws in seven pages of *Night*, cheating students out of the experience of reading the whole work and giving them the illusion that they know the book.

With my subject, English, special problems exist — any literature that has a whiff of controversy is kept out of texts to appease the moralists on the right, while second-rate "multicultural" literature is put in to appease the politically correct on the left.

Quality is 'secondary'

As researcher Diane Ravitch, author of *The Language Police*, wrote in the summer 2003 issue of *American*

Educator, “Literary quality became secondary to representational issues.” You will never see John Updike’s A&P or Toni Cade Bambara’s The Lesson - great short stories that kids can easily relate to – in these tomes because they might offend groups on either side of the political spectrum.

No matter how highly esteemed poet Denise Levertov is in academia, The Mutes— her poem that evokes intense discussion about sexual harassment – will never make its way into the bland 1,000-plus pages of a high school textbook. The McDougal Littell text proudly lists its 10-member “Multicultural Advisory Board” in its introduction.

A similar problem exists with math and science books.

A study of textbooks by the American Association for the Advancement of Science concluded: “Today’s textbooks cover too many topics without developing any of them well. Central concepts are not covered in enough depth to give students a chance to truly understand them.”

‘Teacher-proofing’

Teachers who didn’t major in science tend to “use textbooks – lean on them – more than better-qualified teachers do,” Arthur Eisenkraft, former president of the National Science Teachers Association, told Science News in 2001.

The desire of school officials to make courses teacher-proof – to put more faith in bland compendiums than in the skill of teachers – is only getting stronger with the spread of high-stakes state exams.

Textbook companies now get state approval by boasting that their wares cover every possible skill demanded on state tests. The safe thing for school systems to do is to limit themselves to the state-approved books; if a school district adopts its own materials and its test scores go down, administrators could take the fall.

The fact is that for all the anxiety schools have about state exams, with the exception of science and math, those exams have turned into nothing more than minimum competency tests that any average student can pass with little preparation. And no decent teacher needs a 1,500-page text to prepare below-average students for these dumbed-down tests.

It’s time for states and school districts to kick the mega-textbook habit that four or five big corporations control and start spending money on the kind of books that will make kids want to do sustained reading, to get lost in the written word. For English classes, that’s paperback novels (whole novels) and collections of short stories (complete short stories) and poetry.

Source: www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials

Just read, read, read, read and please make it nonfiction so that it is all facts, more knowledge, more things to know so that we can test you on it. After all, facts is what makes a great problem solver, right? I hate the bastardization of reading that is happening here. I hate how reading becomes quantified through logs, broken down into data pieces, smothered through a heavy-handed focus on nonfiction rather than just reading. Reading for the love of it. Reading for the sake of it. Reading for the joy of it. I hope Scholastic comes out with a catalogue that says, "Parents: Reading leads to Excellent review of how school is damaging to so many students, how it destroys creativity, drive and sense of self. Classroom tested ways to restore some sense of joy in school, joy in becoming educated, give one a small sense of hope. flag 3 likes · Like · see review. Aug 18, 2018 Michael Kleen rated it it was ok." After reading this book, I now realize that my son has been severely wounded by school.[return][return]The main point behind this book is the fact that our world has changed dramatically over the years. The nearly instantaneous information gathering capabilities we now have should make learning even easier.