

## Student Sample: Grade 10, Argument

This argument was produced by a student who was asked to write a persuasive essay that required research. The student generated the topic and had an opportunity to revise.

### \_\_\_\_\_ School Bond Levy

The \_\_\_\_\_ School Board has recently proposed a bond levy to add new facilities as well as conduct some major repairs to the school. The bond includes building a new gymnasium, a new science room and lab, a new Media Center/Library, new Chapter 1 and Special Education classrooms, and other facilities such as more parking space, an increase in storage area, and new locker rooms. Along with new construction, the board is proposing to remodel facilities such as the drama/music areas, the entire roof, the heating system, the school kitchen, and present gym as well. This bond allowing \_\_\_\_\_ School to add more facilities should be passed in order for young students to be provided with a better education.

Several arguments have been brought up concerning the levy since it failed in the March election. Some say that the school doesn't need to have brand new facilities and better classrooms, but it does. Just this year the school had to shut down for days at a time as a result of a malfunction of the heating system. The roof of the library also had a leaking problem all winter long. The leaking has actually caused the ceiling tiles to rot to the point where they are having to be removed. It isn't safe to sit underneath them because, in fact, they have fallen to tables where students had been working only minutes before.

Another issue that people may be concerned with is the money that taxpayers have to put up for the building. The cost of the project in its entirety will be 2.9 million dollars, meaning that for the next 25 years, taxpayers would pay 40 cents more per thousand dollars in property tax than they do this year. The project does cost a significant amount of money, but the school needs it. If something isn't done now, then the facilities such as the library, the science room and others will continue to grow steadily worse. The construction and remodeling needs to be done eventually, so why not now, when interest rates are low and expenses are also low. Superintendent \_\_\_\_\_ commented that it would cost the taxpayers much less money now than ten years from now. Another reason that this is a good time to pass this bond is that the results of Ballot Measure 5 are going into effect at the same time as the levy. As it stands now, property tax rates will go down another \$2.50 by next year; however, if taxpayers don't mind paying what they do now and can handle a 40 cent increase, then the school can be that much better.

Many other good reasons we exist for funding this construction now. For one, better facilities will be made available to everyone: staff members, students, and community members. The new gym will allow student athletes to have earlier practices and more time for homework. With only one gym in a K-12 school system, the junior high has to practice in the morning before school, starting at 6:30 A.M., meaning that both the girls and boys teams had to practice at the same time, with half of the court for the girls half for the boys. After school, the high school girls would practice from 3:30 to 5:30 P.M. The varsity boys would then start at 5:30 or 6:00 and go until 7:30. After that, the junior varsity boys would come in for an hour and a half. It's absurd to think that student athletes can make good use of their time with a schedule like that. If the bond were to pass, both the new gym and the present gym would be used for practices and athletes wouldn't have to wait so long to practice every day.

Another reason that the gym should be built is that it is no longer adequate. The bleachers are too close to the court and so there is no room to walk by without getting in the way during a game. The gym also poses a problem for the cheerleaders. As it is now, there is no room for them to cheer. They have to stand on one of the ends which, of course, is right in the way of people walking by. If a new gym were built, enough room would be provided surrounding the court that there wouldn't be any of the problems there are now.

Another advantage to the bond proposed is that it would provide more space in the school. The school has always been small, which is in some ways nice, but it needs to expand. The lack of space is a problem because everyone is crammed into one little hallway trying to make it around from class to class. As it is, there isn't enough room for the library to just be a library or the kitchen to just be a kitchen. Students can't even go to the library when they need to because Health, Media, and other classes are held there. The Satellite Learning classroom, which shares a space with the kitchen, usually has a difficult learning atmosphere each day people prepare food for the hot lunch program. Another problem area is the current science room and lab. Lab facilities are outdated and cannot be

replaced for a variety of reasons related to the plumbing and electrical systems. Both science teachers have said publicly that the chemical storage room is inadequate and unsafe. The science curriculum is a core part of students' education and they deserve good facilities.

It is clear then, that \_\_\_\_\_ School needs significant improvements in which case the bond must be passed. As a community, education is an essential part of the future. In the past, \_\_\_\_\_ has relied in the timber industry for employment, but times are changing and the younger generations need to be better prepared to meet the challenges that arise. For example, they need to be able to take part in a variety of activities and be able to achieve in many different areas. If the school is inadequate, how can the younger generations be provided with the education and training they need to be successful in the future?

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## Annotation

The writer of this argument

- establishes a substantive claim and distinguishes it from alternate or opposing claims.
  - *This bond allowing \_\_\_\_\_ School to add more facilities should be passed in order for young students to be provided with a better education.*
  - *Some say that the school doesn't need to have brand new facilities and better classrooms, but it does.*
  - *Another issue that people may be concerned with is the money that taxpayers have to put up for the building.*
- points out the weaknesses of the counterclaims.
  - *Just this year the school had to shut down for days.*
  - *. . . it would cost the taxpayers much less money now than ten years from now.*
- supports claims with logical reasons.
  - *. . . brand new facilities and better classrooms [are needed] . . .*
  - *. . . better facilities will be made available to everyone: staff members, students, and community members.*
  - *. . . [the gym] is no longer adequate.*
  - *The school has always been small . . . [and] it needs to expand.*
- provides relevant and sufficient evidence in support of his reasons.
  - Details about the malfunction of the heating system and the falling ceiling tiles in the library support the reason (claim) that *brand new facilities and better classrooms* are needed.
  - Details about the scheduling of classes in the library support the reason (claim) that the school *needs to expand*.
- explains how the evidence links to his reasons.
  - The writer relates that *just this year the school had to shut down for days at a time as a result of a malfunction of the heating system* and that *it isn't safe to sit underneath the rotted ceiling tiles in the library*.
  - The writer relates that students can't even go to the library when they need to *because Health, Media, and other classes are held there*.
- develops the argument in part based on knowledge of the audience.
  - The content of the essay is shaped in part for an audience of adults concerned with accelerative tax levels. For example, the third paragraph deals with costs by detailing the actual dollar amount needed. The writer also argues that acting now will prevent greater, more expensive deterioration

later and that current low interest rates and expenses make additions and repairs more cost effective today than they would be in the future.

- conveys relationships between reasons and signals shifts in claims using transition words, phrases, and clauses.
  - *Another issue that people may be concerned with . . . Many other good reasons . . . Another reason . . .*
  - *The project does cost a significant amount of money, but the school needs it.*
- maintains a formal style that is appropriate for the topic and audience.
  - *Another advantage to the bond proposed is that it would provide more space in the school.*
- enhances the reliability of his argument by paraphrasing from a credible, authoritative source.
  - *Superintendent \_\_\_\_\_ commented that it would cost the taxpayers much less money now than ten years from now.*
  - *Both science teachers have said publicly that the chemical storage room is inadequate and unsafe.*
- provides a concluding section that enhances the argument by articulating consequences if the school bond levy should fail.
  - *If the school is inadequate, how can the younger generations be provided with the education and training they need to be successful in the future?*
- demonstrates a very good command of the conventions of standard written English.

## Student Sample: Grade 10, Informational/Explanatory

This essay was produced for an on-demand assessment. Students were told to write about a character in a work of literature whose pride or selfishness creates problems. The abbreviated time frame of the assessment situation (and the consequent lack of opportunity to revise) explains the absence of information and quotations from researched sources and perhaps the occasional spelling errors as well.

### Animal Farm

In the novel, Animal Farm, by George Orwell, there is one very particular character whose pride and selfishness creates problems. This character had just merely good ideas in the beginning. However, as time went on, his true self-interest began to shine through. This character started a free republic of animals and turned it into a plantation that used animals as slaves. He never did have enough and always wanted more, regardless of the price that others had to pay. This character whose pride and selfishness creates problems, is none other than the great leader of Animal Farm himself, comrade Napoleon [Napoleon], the pig.

Comrade Napoleon is a powerful authority on Animal Farm. In fact he is the leader of Animal Farm and a high strung leader at that. After Old Major died, Napoleon lived upon Old Major's ideas. Napoleon lead all the animals to rebellion so that Manor Farm ceased to exist, and Animal Farm was born. In the first year, he even worked the fields and helped bring in their biggest harvest ever. Little did the animals know, but he would soon change. Eventually the animals started receiving less food because Napoleon needed more food to power his "large" brain. Later, he goes and runs off his successor, Snowball, so he can have the whole farm to himself. Then he stopped working the fields. He started taking young animals and selling them or using them for his own use. He stopped sleeping in the hay and slept in the farm house instead. Finally, he took away half the grain fields so he could plant barely to make himself beer. This Napoleon was a power hungry, selfish individual for sure.

Being power hungry, always causes problems, and boy did Napoleon cause problems. The animals had received so little food that many were starving, you could see their bones, and some even died of starvation. Nopoleans's lack of work meant the animals had to work harder, and it wasn't easy on an empty stomach. Many animals would break their legs or hoofs but would continue to work. The lack of new workers due to Napoleon's selling them off, meant that nobody could retire, and one old animal even died in the fields. Snowball was a great teacher for the animals, and now that he was gone, they lacked education. Then with finally only half of the fields being productive for food, the animals starved even more and worked harder to make beer that they never saw. Not to mention that they had to sleep on a dirt floor while the lazy Napoleon slept in his nice comfortable bed. His selfishness had deffinitely created problems.

Napoleon's experience had changed the farm drastically. He thought things were getting better while the animals knew they were only getting worse. After the rebellion, many humans disliked Animal Farm and the animals disliked humans. Nopoleans's selfish ways were much like those of a farmer. So eventually as Napoleon became more "human," the town's people began to like him. Napoleon could care less about his animals, just so long as he was on good terms with the humans. By the novel's end, Napoleon is great friends with every human in town. However, his animal slaves are no longer happy as they once were. They still hate humans which means now, they hate Napoleon. So due to Napoleon's pride, the story has changed its ways from start to finish. He has turned friends into foe and foe into friends, but at great cost.

In the novel, Animal Farm, by George Orwell, Comrade Napoleon is a character whose pride and selfishness creates problems. The starving animals have suffered greatly because of their leader's pride. On the other hand, Napoleon has gained great success through his selfishness. Unfortunately, that's just the way it is. You can't have pride without problems. Even if they are little problems, it's still due to pride. Now, if Napoleon had pride in his farm rather than in himself, well then maybe the humans would've hated him, but he'd still has his true friends of four legs. However, he chose to follow a different path and he burned those bridges along the way. So for now, Comrade Napoleon's

pride and selfishness has created problems for the animals, but someday, it will create problems for himself.

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## Annotation

The writer of this explanation

- provides a clear and coherent introduction that establishes the subject and conveys a knowledgeable stance.
  - The writer introduces a character (Comrade Napoleon the pig) and conveys a knowledgeable stance when providing background about the role Napoleon plays in the novel.
- develops a complex subject through relevant and specific details and examples.
  - Details: *In the first year, [Napoleon] even worked the fields and helped bring in their biggest harvest ever. . . . Not to mention that they had to sleep on a dirt floor while the lazy Napoleon slept in his nice comfortable bed.*
  - Examples: *. . . nobody could retire, and one old animal even died in the fields.*
- organizes complex information.
  - The organization of the explanation is mostly chronological because the writer focuses on how Napoleon changes over time, how he becomes *power hungry, selfish, and more “human.”* The writer also describes the problems that Napoleon’s changed nature creates.
- maintains a formal, objective style, with the following notable exception.
  - *. . . and boy did Napoleon cause problems.*
- uses strategies appropriate to informational and explanatory texts.
  - Cause/effect: *The animals had received so little food that many were starving . . . The lack of new workers due to Napoleon’s selling them off, meant that nobody could retire . . .*
  - Comparison/contrast: *He thought things were getting better while the animals knew they were only getting worse.*
- uses appropriate links and varies sentence structures to express relationships between ideas and to create cohesion.
  - *In the novel . . . In fact . . . In the first year . . . Eventually . . . Being power hungry . . . Not to mention . . . On the other hand . . .*
  - *In the novel, Animal Farm, by George Orwell, there is one very particular character whose pride and selfishness creates problems. This character had just merely good ideas in the beginning.*
- provides only accurate and relevant information, such as in the following example.
  - *. . . they [the other animals] had to sleep on a dirt floor while the lazy Napoleon slept in his nice comfortable bed.*
- provides a conclusion that follows logically from the explanation presented.
  - The writer’s conclusion sums up the main points of the explanation and reflects on the link between pride and the problems it creates (*You can’t have pride without problems*).

- demonstrates a marginal command of the conventions of standard written English, having made several distracting errors in spelling and other mechanics.
  - *The character whose pride and selfishness creates problems, is none other than the great leader of Animal Farm himself, comrade Napoleon, the pig.*
  - . . . ceized [seized] . . .
  - . . . barely [barley] . . .
  - . . . deffinately [definitely] . . .

## Student Sample: Grade 12, Informational/Explanatory

The essay that follows was written for an Advanced Placement U.S. History class. The student had unlimited time to write and likely received feedback and instructional support while creating the essay.

### **In the Wake of the Spanish Lady: American Economic Resilience in the Aftermath of the Influenza Epidemic of 1918**

Whatever does not kill me makes me stronger.<sup>1</sup>

—Friedrich Nietzsche

America in the years leading up to 1918 was as confident in its medical ability as it had ever been. In only one century, it had seen the successful vaccination, containment, or cure for the notorious menaces of smallpox, anthrax, rabies, meningitis, typhoid, malaria, yellow fever, diphtheria, cholera, and tetanus.<sup>2</sup> Due to the new strides in bacteriology, germ theory, and sanitation, as well as new methods devised to control food-, water-, and insect-borne diseases, Americans were experiencing an era of unprecedented health. Whereas in all previous wars, more American soldiers were lost to disease than in action, American troops in World War I saw an all-time low in the number of deaths due to disease. Army camp inspections, carried out by William Henry Welch, the respected doctor and assistant to the Army Surgeon General, revealed that, though camps were overcrowded, “the health of the army proved to be as good as any reasonable doctor could expect.”<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the new light that had been shed on disease control did not apply to air-borne viruses. Because neither antibiotics nor a way to control the spread of air-borne diseases had been invented yet, America was as vulnerable to the deadly grip of influenza that would befall it in 1918 as Medieval Europe had been to the Bubonic Plague of the 14th century.

More people died of the Spanish Flu in the 10 months that it devastated the world than had died of any other disease or war in history. A commonly cited estimate of deaths is 21 million worldwide, yet prominent demographer Kingsley Davis estimates that the disease killed approximately 20 million in the Indian subcontinent alone.<sup>4</sup> The actual number of deaths will never be known, but the modern estimate is somewhere between 50 and 100 million.<sup>5</sup> If an equal percentage of the world population died today, that would be close to 2 billion victims.<sup>6</sup> A bare minimum of 550,000 Americans, or .5 percent of the American population, died in the apocalyptic pandemic.<sup>7</sup> Yet, due to some historical and demographic particulars of the 1918 flu, the American economy—which nearly collapsed in some areas during the outbreak—was not crippled in any lasting way.

The flu is not generally thought of as a killer. Instead, it is perceived as a pesky annual virus, slightly more troublesome than the common cold, but nothing serious. In reality, the average yearly flu is an extremely virulent disease, infecting anywhere from 30 to 60 million Americans annually, of whom about 36,000 die (usually the very old or the very young).<sup>8</sup> It mutates so frequently that humans are never fully immune to it, so a yearly vaccine must be produced to counteract it, whereas most viruses require only one vaccination in a lifetime.<sup>9</sup> The killer flu of 1918, dubbed the Spanish Flu or the Spanish Lady, was a particularly deadly mutation of this influenza virus.<sup>10</sup> In comparison to the .1 percent of infected who die of the annual flu, it killed 2.5 percent of those who contracted it.<sup>11</sup> This mutation had a propensity to cause pneumonia, untreatable at the time, and clogged its victims’ lungs with bloody sputum until their faces turned dark purple and they died of suffocation.<sup>12</sup>

The origins of the Spanish Flu are uncertain, but most experts believe that the first wave in the U.S. emerged in Fort Riley, Kansas, on March 11, 1918, when one of the men came down with a milder form of the mysterious illness.<sup>13</sup> As of the next day, 414 soldiers had contracted the virus, and by the end of the week at least 500 were sick.<sup>14</sup> In total, 48 men died from the first influenza-pneumonia strain by the time it had run its course in the camp—too low a number to merit any concern in the medical community in 1918.<sup>15</sup> Even though the virus struck at least 13 other military camps, there was sparse evidence that civilians were similarly affected, and, besides, disease was a fact of life in any military camp.<sup>16</sup> So, little attention was directed to the budding pandemic. America instead

focused on the new draft calls, the war in Europe, the suffragette movement, and the Bolshevik tumult in Russia, while ignoring the mild outbreak of a hard-to-identify flu.<sup>17</sup>

As expected, the flu subsided quickly with a forgettable number of casualties. Unforeseen, however, was the deadlier second wave that would emerge that August to explode in September with unprecedented virulence. Influenza viruses thrive in cold, dry weather, which is why flu season tends to be during the winter.<sup>18</sup> The fact that it exploded like it did in August, which is neither cold nor dry, makes this flu remarkable. The epidemic first struck Camp Devens, an overcrowded military camp thirty miles from Boston, on September 8 after brewing in Europe for about a month.<sup>19</sup> From there, it spread to the rest of the United States in an unsettlingly erratic manner, hitting most of the East coast, then some of the Midwest and the Gulf Coast region, then the West coast, and ultimately striking the interior.<sup>20</sup> Although at times slow in reaching certain regions, the Spanish Flu was horrifyingly thorough in its damages.

Nearly every city in the United States was affected economically by the flu in the short-term. In many places, the workforce was paralyzed because 21-to-29-year-olds suffered the greatest casualties.<sup>21</sup> So many people died at uncommonly young ages that the average life expectancy dropped 12 years, from 51 in 1917 to 39 in 1918.<sup>22</sup> Whether or not the infected had been young, healthy, and robust prior to contracting the flu was of little consequence. The military, which consisted of a particularly young, healthy, and robust demographic, was hit the hardest of any social group in America: 40 percent of the Navy and 36 percent of the Army developed the flu in 1918.<sup>23</sup> With victims' average age being 33, the volume of death claims by flu victims blind-sided the life insurance companies.<sup>24</sup> One life insurance company handled \$24 million worth of unanticipated death claims for 68,000 deaths.<sup>25</sup> The fact that the majority of victims were in the prime of their lives defied actuarial projections, confusing insurance companies, destroying families, and disrupting the economy at large.

In the most severe stages of the flu, the “essential services” of cities verged on collapse as policemen, firemen, garbage collectors, telephone operators, and even the doctors, nurses, and social workers who were struggling to fight the flu, were absent from work.<sup>26</sup> The Bureau of Child Hygiene strove to handle an overwhelming population of orphans as the fathers and mothers of America, those in the most vulnerable age-range, were decimated by influenza.<sup>27</sup> Employment standards plummeted, the only requirement in some places being “two hands and willingness to work.”<sup>28</sup> Worst off of any “essential service” were the processors of the dead. As morgues filled up, in some places with bodies stacked three and four high, corpses accumulated in the streets, spreading bacteria and the residual influenza virus.<sup>29</sup> In some situations, the dead were left untended, festering in their homes for days.<sup>30</sup> The primary emergency during the flu was in these “essential services,” which could not have held out much longer than they did. While those services continued functioning, even at a minimal level, the rest of the economy was able to rebound to normal capacity within three years, the “Roaring Twenties” as evidence of this resilience. Despite the chaos, the nation persisted.

In *The Review of Economic Statistics* of December 1919, the year 1919 was deemed a “year of readjustment,” one in which the United States was healing from the tensions of 1918.<sup>31</sup> According to the article, in 1918, “industries were straining their energies to meet the unusual demands occasioned by the war,” yet it should be noted that the strain was also partially due to the Spanish Flu.<sup>32</sup> In one county in West Virginia, during the fall of 1918, the three months of flu had left 6,000 ill, of whom 500 died.<sup>33</sup> This sapped the county economy to near-collapse as 80 percent of the labor force fell ill.<sup>34</sup> Coupled with the large population overseas for the war, situations like this compromised cities across the nation, especially with Surgeon General of the Army William Crawford Gorgas shipping thousands of America’s fittest young doctors and nurses to Europe, where he believed they were most necessary.<sup>35</sup> The doctors and nurses who continued to serve at home, like many of the civilians who remained, were generally too old, or too young, or too disabled to adequately respond to the Spanish Flu.<sup>36</sup>

When the epidemic reached cities with a deficient work force and incompetent, sparse medical care, the critical damage to the economy was compounded by restrictive public health ordinances. In an effort to restrict exposure to the virus, the Surgeon General had issued public health ordinances that prohibited most public gatherings



and required gauze masks to be worn at all times.<sup>37</sup> In Philadelphia alone, it is estimated that theaters, cinemas, and hotels lost \$2 million to the flu from the ordinances, while saloons lost \$350,000.<sup>38</sup> These ordinances turned out to be fairly pointless: even in places that strictly adhered to the recommendations of the Surgeon General the case and death rates were no lower than those in lenient cities.<sup>39</sup> On a smaller scale, tobacco sales dropped off about 50 percent in places that strictly required cotton face masks because men could not smoke while wearing masks.<sup>40</sup> These masks turned out to be completely ineffective, because the weave of the gauze proved too porous to stop a virus, usually a tiny sphere with a diameter of about 1/10,000 of a millimeter.<sup>41</sup> The futile public health ordinances and gauze masks temporarily damaged business during the flu crisis, yet the economy rebounded.

When contagious diseases attack a society, it tends to hit the poorest sector of economy the hardest. One of the reasons for this is that they are more prone to infect people who have cramped living quarters, poor hygiene, inadequate water and food supplies, and exposure to parasites—some of the consequences of poverty.<sup>42</sup> Because the working class would be disproportionately affected by disease, the work force would be disproportionately affected by disease, the work force would be disproportionately diminished in the lowest-paying, most essential jobs during an epidemic. By contrast, the Spanish Flu, being an air-borne disease (and thus not preventable through good hygiene and health), affected all sectors of the economy equally. It killed vast numbers of people, but, as noted by historian Alfred W. Crosby, it “ignored the differences between rural and urban, patrician and peasant, capitalist and proletarian, and struck them all down in similar proportions.”<sup>43</sup> Because it was so unbiased in its selection, no social hierarchies were overturned, nor were any particular divisions of employment gutted of laborers. Influenza’s only prejudice was that it ravaged the young, healthy age-range—something fairly irrelevant to economic status—and thus the only long-term economic imbalance was proportional: there were fewer people to work and fewer people sharing in the wealth.

Although the Spanish Flu killed a lower percentage of the population than it affected and lasted for a shorter period of time, the economic benefits of the epidemic can be compared to those of the Black Death. One of the peculiar positive effects of the Black Death, according to historian Norman Davies, was that it marked “the decisive point in the decline of the feudal system in Western Europe.”<sup>44</sup> Although social upheaval may have already been gaining momentum, the deadly epidemic that killed approximately one-third of Europe allowed formerly impoverished and powerless serfs to assert their independence.<sup>45</sup> With an absence of competition in the work force and a high demand for menial labor, serfs were able to gain comparative economic freedom with rising pay.<sup>46</sup> This escalation of the price of labor and goods during the plague is echoed in the aftermath of the Spanish Flu epidemic. *The Review of Economic Statistics* of December 1919 observes the post-influenza wage inflation, noting that the “efficiency of labor, unfortunately, has not materially improved and is still generally below the pre-war level,” yet “rates of wages have remained high during 1919 and have continued to rise rather than decline.”<sup>47</sup> *The Review* also remarks on the oddity that “unemployment has not developed, in spite of the demobilization of the army; and in many sections labor is still reported to be scarce.”<sup>48</sup> The unusually high wages and low labor supply despite the re-absorption of troops into the work force could be attributed to the fact that so many people had succumbed to the pandemic on the home front that the re-entry of troops had normalized, rather than overwhelmed, the labor market.

In the years following 1918, the influenza pandemic, though surely seared in the memories of those it personally affected, quickly subsided from national consciousness.<sup>49</sup> Even during the epidemic, the flu was rarely mentioned in the papers or truly noticed on a national level. As noted by Crosby, “*The Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature*, 1919-1921 has 13 inches of column space devoted to citations of articles about baseball, 20 inches to Bolshevism, 47 to Prohibition, and 8 inches to the flu.”<sup>50</sup> As the United States emerged victorious from the devastations of World War I, the brief but deadly nightmare of the Spanish Flu was lost to the national memory. The war had put pressure on Americans to sacrifice as much as possible: the government urging people to grow what food they could, eat less meat and fewer luxury foods, buy war bonds, and serve in the army as required by the draft. Wartime America was dealing with death on a regular basis as the war casualties continued to grow, ultimately reaching approximately 117,000 deaths—about 53,000 in battle, the remainder due to disease.<sup>51</sup> With such a high proportion of war losses due to disease and the influenza deaths accompanying the hardships on the home front, the flu must have seemed so intricately enmeshed in the reality of war that it became unremarkable.

After the war had ended and the flu had essentially run its course in most places, the thrifty attitudes about consumption enforced by the war effort and the strict public health ordinances were immediately discarded. Americans had a brief attention span for such restrictions—they were only heeded during the war for patriotic reasons or in the midst of a deadly, dramatic pandemic. *The Review of Economic Statistics* of December 1919 remarked that “extravagant expenditure, both public and private, is found on every hand.”<sup>52</sup> San Franciscans—who endured the worst hit of the Spanish Flu on the West Coast—had complied with the October-November 1918 masking ordinance that had required gauze masks be worn at all times.<sup>53</sup> Yet, a mid-December masking recommendation of that same year met the fierce opposition of 90 percent of the city and was struck down by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.<sup>54</sup> The intolerance for what were thought at the time to be potentially life-saving health measures reflects the prevalent mood at the time of impatience with inconvenience that trumped even fear of death.

Perhaps the Spanish Flu would have drawn more attention if only it had left the scar of a long depression in its wake. Yet, after the crippling 10 months of the flu, the American economy was not only undamaged, but booming. Following the “year of readjustment” of 1919, the United States experienced a sunny era of unprecedented prosperity.<sup>55</sup> The national income, which had remained stagnant from 1890 to 1918, rose more than \$200 per capita and laborers enjoyed a workday diminished from 12 to eight hours, as well as a paid annual vacation.<sup>56</sup> With the advent of mass-production due to the innovations of the assembly line and expanded industrial exploitation of electricity, productivity soared to unheard-of levels.<sup>57</sup> In the mere 30 years between 1899 and 1929, industrial production expanded by 264 percent.<sup>58</sup> All of this was accomplished by a manufacturing labor pool that, according to historian William E. Leuchtenburg in his book *The Perils of Prosperity*, contained “precisely the same number of men in 1929 as it had in 1919.”<sup>59</sup> The workforce to attain these new heights was the same workforce that been described in 1919 as generally sufficient, yet which was in many sectors “still reported to be scarce.”<sup>60</sup> In the same way that the Renaissance thrived in the wake of the Black Plague by benefiting from capital redistribution to a greater demographic, the destruction of the Spanish Flu had opened up a decade of culture and materialism to a population that benefited from the resulting availability of jobs and higher wages.

With thousands of the fittest soldiers, doctors, and nurses overseas and the stress of coping with wartime and its strict economic regulations, a flu epidemic was the last thing that Americans of 1918 needed, or expected. It was especially traumatic when even the enormous strides that had been made in recent years in the medical community were insufficient to control this epidemic of a traditionally unobtrusive disease. Disturbingly, young, healthy adults were the most likely to succumb to the virus and die of a violent, delirious pneumonia. With the backbone of the economy debilitated and inept medical care, U.S. society could have collapsed. However, the flu lasted for a short enough time that it did not permanently disable the workforce. Also, because the primary target was an age-group rather than a class, the virus infected different socioeconomic sectors evenly. As a consequence, though in many places the workforce was reduced to the point of near-collapse, the population retained its socioeconomic balance. Finally, because the flu took place for 10 months during and after World War I, the most devastated demographic was replaced by the return of soldiers who could then be reabsorbed easily into society, thereby alleviating the labor-pool crisis. From the perspective of its victims and their loved ones, the 1918 influenza was a tragedy; however, viewed within an economic paradigm, the Spanish Lady smoothed the transition from the turbulence of the 19th and early 20th centuries into the prosperity of the 1920s.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 5, [http://books.google.com/books?id-oH4q25gwkOgC&pg=PR3&dq=twilight+of+the+idols&sig=6sr5p PhV2ST 4tHWj\\_CbRqJ-5Ty4#PPA5,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id-oH4q25gwkOgC&pg=PR3&dq=twilight+of+the+idols&sig=6sr5p PhV2ST 4tHWj_CbRqJ-5Ty4#PPA5,M1)

<sup>2</sup> Alfred W. Crosby. *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 10; *The American Experience: Influenza 1918*, Program Transcript, PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/influenza/filmmore/transcript/transcript1.html>

<sup>3</sup> Crosby, p. 3

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 206, 207

<sup>5</sup> Sverren-Erik Mamelund, "Can the Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918 Explain the Baby Boom of 1920 in Neutral Norway? Population English Edition, 2002) Vol 59, No. 2 (March-April, 2004) p. 232, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1634-2941%28200403%2F04%2959%3A2%3C229%3ACTSIPO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Z>

<sup>6</sup> John M. Barry, Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History (New York: Penguin Group, 2004) p. 238

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 238

<sup>8</sup> Tim Appenzeller, "Tracking the Next Killer Flu," National Geographic (October 2005) p. 12

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 12

<sup>10</sup> It is generally thought that the Spanish flu got its name because Spain, being a neutral country in the World War I, did not censor its newspapers, so the mortality rates were exposed to the world. It is certain that the flu did not originate in Spain, though it is not certain where it did originate. Most experts agree that it probably began in America. Ibid., p. 12

<sup>11</sup> Gina Kolata, Flu: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus That Caused It (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999) p. 7

<sup>12</sup> Barry, p. 243

<sup>13</sup> Mary Ellen Snodgrass, World Epidemics: A Cultural Chronology of Disease from Prehistory to the Era of SARS (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Incorporated, 2003) p. 272

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 272

<sup>15</sup> Crosby, p. 19

<sup>16</sup> The flu was not made a reportable disease in many cities until the second wave of the epidemic was already in full swing because the medical community was reluctant to accept that influenza had reached such proportions. This partially accounts for the incomplete civilian records concerning the flu, in contrast to the records of controlled populations, like the military and prisons, which kept strict medical records of any and all diseases in the community. Kolata, Flu, p. 10

<sup>17</sup> Crosby, pp. 17, 18

<sup>18</sup> Gina Kolata, "Why winter for the flu? A virus has its reasons; [4 edition]," International Herald Tribune (December 6, 2007) p. 5 <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=1&did=1393874091&SrchMod=e=1&sid=2&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1197252984&clientId=14764>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 4

<sup>20</sup> The American Experience: Influenza 1918, Maps, PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/influenza/maps/index.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Crosby, p. 21

<sup>22</sup> Laura B. Shrestha, "CRS Report for Congress: Life Expectancy in the United States," (Domestic Social Policy Division, 2006) p. 31, <http://www.ncseonline.org/NLE/CRSreports/06Sep/RL32792.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Kolata, Flu, pp. 6, 7

<sup>24</sup> Crosby, p. 312

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 312

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 75

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 75

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 75

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 76

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 76

<sup>31</sup> Joseph S. Davis, "Economic Conditions Since the Armistice," The Review of Economic Statistics Vol 1, Monthly Supplement (December 1919) p. 9, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00346535%28191912%291%3C9%3A1ROTY%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>33</sup> Snodgrass, p. 276

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 276

- <sup>35</sup> Barry, pp. 142, 143
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 143
- <sup>37</sup> Crosby, p. 74
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 87
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 74
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 104
- <sup>41</sup> Barry, pp. 359, 103
- <sup>42</sup> Kolata, Flu, p. 47
- <sup>43</sup> Crosby, p. 323
- <sup>44</sup> Norman Davies, Europe: A History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 412
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 412
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 412
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 412; Davis, p. 10
- <sup>48</sup> Davis, p. 10
- <sup>49</sup> Crosby, p. 314
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 314
- <sup>51</sup> The Great War: Resources, WWI Casualty and Death Tables, PBS, [http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath\\_pop.html](http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html)
- <sup>52</sup> Davis, p. 9
- <sup>53</sup> Crosby, pp. 70, 108-110
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 70, 108-110
- <sup>55</sup> Davis, p. 10; William E. Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity: 1914-32 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) p. 178
- <sup>56</sup> Leuchtenburg, pp. 178-179
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 179
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 180
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 179
- <sup>60</sup> Davis, p. 10

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## Annotation

The writer of this explanation

- provides a clear and coherent introduction that establishes the subject and conveys a knowledgeable stance.
  - *More people died of the Spanish Flu in the 10 months that it devastated the world than had died of any other disease or war in history. . . . Yet, due to some historical and demographic particulars of the 1918 flu, the American economy—which nearly collapsed in some areas during the outbreak—was not crippled in any lasting way.*
- develops a complex subject through judicious use of relevant and specific facts, details, examples, and quotations.
  - Details: *In only one century, it had seen the successful vaccination, containment, or cure for the notorious menaces of smallpox, anthrax, rabies, meningitis, typhoid, malaria, yellow fever, diphtheria, cholera, and tetanus.<sup>2</sup> . . . The war had put pressure on Americans to sacrifice as much as possible: the government urging people to grow what food they could, eat less meat and fewer luxury foods, buy war bonds, and serve in the army as required by the draft.*
  - Facts: *Following the “year of readjustment” of 1919, the United States experienced a sunny era of unprecedented prosperity.<sup>55</sup> The national income, which had remained stagnant from 1890 to 1918, rose more than \$200 per capita and laborers enjoyed a workday diminished from 12 to eight hours, as well as a paid annual vacation.<sup>56</sup>*
  - Examples: *It mutates so frequently that humans are never fully immune to it . . . The killer flu of 1918, dubbed the Spanish Flu or the Spanish Lady, was a particularly deadly mutation of this influenza virus.<sup>10</sup>*

- Quotations: *As noted by Crosby, “The Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature, 1919-1921 has 13 inches of column space devoted to citations of articles about baseball, 20 inches to Bolshevism, 47 to Prohibition, and 8 inches to the flu.”<sup>60</sup> . . . All of this was accomplished by a manufacturing labor pool that, according to historian William E. Leuchtenburg in his book *The Perils of Prosperity*, contained “precisely the same number of men in 1929 as it had in 1919.”<sup>69</sup>*
- makes discriminating use of researched information, incorporating it effectively into the text.
  - The writer incorporates information effectively to show how devastating the flu was as well as the historical and demographic particulars that allowed the economy to escape lasting damage (e.g., *By contrast, the Spanish Flu, being an air-borne disease . . . affected all sectors of the economy equally. . . . Because it was so unbiased in its selection, no social hierarchies were overturned, nor were any particular divisions of employment gutted of laborers*).
- organizes and presents information so that each new piece of information builds on what precedes it to create a unified whole.
  - The information is organized logically (and, in places, chronologically). The introduction previews the content. The piece then moves through several carefully sequenced categories of information: background details; information about the number of deaths the flu caused; the progress of the pandemic; the immediate effect on young workers, the military, and service workers; the impact of restrictive public health ordinances; the way the “egalitarian” infection attacked all strata of society; the ironic economic benefit of the flu; the resurgence of materialism; and the rapid growth of prosperity. The conclusion summarizes the main points of the explanation.
- demonstrates a command of discipline-specific and technical vocabulary and maintains a formal, objective style.
  - . . . bacteriology . . . diphtheria . . . sanitation . . . suffragette movement . . . pandemic . . . virulent disease . . . influenza viruses . . .
  - *In an effort to restrict exposure to the virus, the Surgeon General had issued public health ordinances that prohibited most public gatherings and required gauze masks to be worn at all times.*<sup>37</sup>
- demonstrates control of a range of strategies to present complex information or explanations and employs them effectively to manage the complexity of the topic.
  - Cause/effect: . . . *there was sparse evidence that civilians were similarly affected, and, besides, disease was a fact of life in any military camp.*<sup>16</sup> *So, little attention was directed to the budding pandemic . . . With an absence of competition in the work force and a high demand for menial labor, serfs were able to gain comparative economic freedom with rising pay.*<sup>45</sup>
  - Compare/contrast: *More people died of the Spanish Flu in the 10 months that it devastated the world than had died of any other disease or war in history. . . . The flu is not generally thought of as a killer. Instead, it is perceived as a pesky annual virus, slightly more troublesome than the common cold, but nothing serious . . . . When contagious diseases attack a society, it tends to hit the poorest sector of the economy the hardest. . . . By contrast, the Spanish Flu, being an air-borne disease (and thus not preventable through good hygiene and health) affected all sectors of the economy equally.*
- uses various sentence structures to enhance ideas and reinforce the relationships among them.
  - *Due to the new strides . . . Whereas in all previous wars . . . Yet, due to some historical and demographic particulars . . . Instead, it is perceived . . . As expected, the flu subsided quickly . . . Nearly every city . . . In many places . . . In the most severe stages . . . When the epidemic reached cities . . .*
- emphasizes the most significant information and confirms the accuracy of key points.

- The writer quotes appropriately, paraphrases and cites works, and documents facts and sources (e.g., *The epidemic first struck Camp Devens, an overcrowded military camp thirty miles from Boston, on September 8 after brewing in Europe for about a month.*<sup>19</sup>).
- demonstrates a very good command of the conventions of standard written English, although the work may have been edited for publication.

## Student Sample: Grade 12, Informational/Explanatory

This essay was one of a portfolio of four submitted by a high school student for placement in a college composition course sequence. The student had unlimited time to write and likely received feedback and instructional support while creating the portfolio.

### Fact vs. Fiction and All the Grey Space in Between

The modern world is full of problems and issues—disagreements between peoples that stem from today’s wide array of perceptions, ideas, and values. Issues that could never have been foreseen are often identified and made known today because of technology. Once, there were scatterings of people who had the same idea, yet never took any action because none knew of the others; now, given our complex forms of modern communication, there are millions who have been connected. Today, when a new and arguable idea surfaces, the debate spreads across the global community like wildfire. Topics that the general public might never have become aware of are instantly made into news that can be discussed at the evening dinner table. One such matter, which has sparked the curiosity of millions, is the recent interest in the classification of literature as fiction or nonfiction.

A number of questions have arisen: What sparked the booming interest? Where exactly is the line that separates fiction from nonfiction, and how far can the line be stretched until one becomes the other? Are there intermediaries between the two, or must we classify each piece of literature as one or the other? Do authors do this purposefully, or with no intent? The answers to these questions are often circular and simply lead to further dispute. In modern times, the line between the classification of literature as either fiction or nonfiction has become blurred and unclear; the outdated definitions and qualifications have sparked the development of new genres and challenged the world’s idea on the differences between the two.

#### *The Spark Which Lit the Fire*

Though it had been a fairly relevant and known topic to members of the literary world, the idea that a book is not always completely fiction or nonfiction seemed to be an obscure and unnecessary subject for the public to ponder. However, the average Monday morning watercooler conversation was forever changed when what has become known as the “Million Little Lies Scandal” broke out in early 2006. It started on October 26, 2005 when author James Frey appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. He was the only guest of the day, there to promote and discuss his book entitled *A Million Little Pieces*. The book, a nonfiction memoir, recounts Frey’s experience as an alcoholic, drug addict, and criminal, and the heroic story of his overcoming of every obstacle in his path to getting clean. After his appearance on the show and addition into Oprah’s highly esteemed and publicized book club, the novel skyrocketed to the top of the charts, eventually becoming a number one best seller. But his success was short lived; in the months that followed, *The Smoking Gun*, a Web site that posts legal documents, arrest records, and investigates celebrity police dealings, unearthed some discrepancies between Frey’s story and the police documents that should have supported his claims.

Though the Web site had originally only been searching for Frey’s mugshot, one small inconsistency soon led to another, and after a six-week investigation, the site released its findings. Investigators had taken any parts of Frey’s story that could be verified by a police record, matched it with his actual records, and were shocked by what they found; nearly all of Frey’s memoir was either highly embellished or flat out fabricated. Huge discrepancies between the truth and what was stated in Frey’s book became headline news; instances like Frey claiming to be in jail for eighty-seven days when in reality he was incarcerated for a mere four hours, or the serious drug charges that he claimed were filed against him that were never found on any record.

Frey was caught, and on January 8, 2006, *The Smoking Gun* published an article called “A Million Little Lies,” which took an in-depth look at every provable inconsistency in the novel. By comparing direct quotes from the book to police records—or rather, the lack of police records—Frey’s entire novel was pieced apart until there was nothing remaining. Completely discredited, yet still somehow maintaining the entire situation was a misunderstanding, Frey



attempted to salvage his namesake by reappearing on *Oprah*; in the end, this proved to be more damaging than helpful. He had his reasons for what he'd done, he tried to explain.

Reasons that were valid and legitimate according to him, as he stated that he would not have been able to get the book signed unless he was willing to sell it as nonfiction. Details had been slightly exaggerated, he conceded, but this was only to allow the novel to fluctuate and flow in a way that would not have been possible had he stuck to the bare facts.

Regardless, in the end, it was proved beyond anyone's reasonable doubt that James Frey's novel landed dead center in the proverbial grey area between black and white—his novel was partially fiction and partially nonfiction. And so started the media frenzy; the scandal covered newsstands for weeks, people took sides with either Frey or his critics, and similarly themed novels were called into question. Suddenly the world *cared* about a novel's validity; they no longer assumed that the words fiction and nonfiction could themselves define the amount of fact that stood behind a piece of literature. People also realized, simultaneously, that they might not exactly know what defined and separated fiction and nonfiction, or if, in more modern times, the two might mesh together a bit more than in the literature of old.

#### *With Difficulty, the Line is Drawn*

Fiction and nonfiction: they're two words that are surprisingly hard to define. It's difficult to ascertain what the words have meant in the past, what they each encompass today, and how past and present definitions have been molded and shaped by the literature of the time. Traditionally, fiction is 'a tale drawn from the imagination' and nonfiction is 'a statement of fact'; however, the two are so much more complex than that. For many, the word 'fiction' is associable with the word 'story,' as if the two are equal or interchangeable. Subgenres of fiction often contribute to this perception; novels, short stories, fairy tales, comics, films, animation, and even video games help the mind classify fiction as a substance completely fabricated in the mind. Fiction is largely assumed to be a form of art or entertainment, and in many cases this is true—science fiction and romance novels are two examples of how we are entertained by a good book. But frequently, stories are told to educate—to raise awareness regarding a certain topic about which the author is concerned.

Stories like Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, George Orwell's *1984*, and Ayn Rand's *Anthem* all warn us about terrible futures that may arise as the result of the choices of humanity. Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* is a short work of fiction based entirely around fact; while it tells the tale of a fictional little African boy thrown into a bloody civil uprising, his story of being a recruited child soldier is happening to hundreds of similar boys to this very day. Fables and parables are other, more subliminal examples of educational, moral-based fiction.

In the same way, nonfiction is surrounded by many presumptions; people assume that anything read in a nonfiction book is true, otherwise the literature would be labeled as fiction. Nonfiction literature *is* factual literature, but there is one important note to make. Nonfiction is literature that is *presented* as fact. This presentation may be accurate or inaccurate; in other words, the author is presumed to be writing what he or she believes to be the truth, or what he or she has been led to believe is the truth. Examples of nonfiction include essays, documentaries, scientific papers, textbooks, and journals. Nonfiction differs from fiction, however, in the areas regarding how the literature is presented and used. Directness, simplicity, and clarity are all aims of nonfiction literature.

Providing straight, accessible, understandable information to the reader is the purpose of nonfiction, and the ability to communicate well to the audience is what defines a skilled writer of the field. And despite the truth behind nonfiction writing, it is often necessary to persuade the reader to agree with the ideas being presented; therefore, a balanced, coherent and informed argument is also vital.

#### *More Than Simply Black or White*

The line between fiction and nonfiction starts to blur, however, when one considers genres that seem to mesh the two; historical fiction, new journalism, and biographies/autobiographies. These are only three of the defined new

genres encompassed by what has become the intermediary between fiction and nonfiction— literary nonfiction. When one explores these three genres, it becomes blaringly obvious how easily fiction and nonfiction can blur into one.

Historical fiction is the product when an author takes real people and real events and tells the story of what actually happened to them, but inserts characters of their own creation and a plot line that they invent in order to tie the entire novel together. This idea is perfectly exemplified in Ann Rinaldi's *An Acquaintance with Darkness*. This novel takes real historical aspects (the assassination of President Lincoln; the trial of the only woman associated with his murder; the society of Washington, D.C., at the time of his death; the history behind the practice of grave robbing) and inserts the character of a young girl and her dying mother who, between the two of them, manage to tell the historical side of the story along with their own imagined one. All the pieces of history are told completely as they happened; so on some level, this novel *is* nonfiction. Yet it is also blatantly fiction—it has *characters*.

New journalism, biographies, and autobiographies, however, blur the lines in a slightly different way; they call into question people's ability to relay information truthfully and with no bias. New journalism is the term coined in the 1960s to describe the then unconventional journalism techniques that brought the reader inside the life and mind of the story. It's a practice very common today; just watch any network investigation series. The journalist attempts to get inside the mind of whomever is being investigated; he or she digs up information regarding that person's past, present, and potential future. The author then takes all the factual background information they've collected and pairs it with the emotions, memories, and feelings described to them by the person, and writes the complete story. If the complete work is to be published as a book rather than a news article or made into a television script, it often ends up being sold as a fiction novel. Yet is this the correct classification, given that all the information is true?

One excellent example of new journalism is Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. When asked about it, Capote himself even called it "unclassifiable." Capote traveled to Kansas to investigate the murder of a family of four; he ended up staying there for years, befriending the people of the town, discovering what he could about the murders from them, and piecing together his book from interviews and information he gained during his stay. When it was published, the novel became a best seller and also one of the first highly noted pieces of literature to border the line between fiction and nonfiction; it was the first of its kind to bring the idea of the blurring line to households across the United States.

Biographies and autobiographies are often questioned in the same way. Though not always thought of as controversial and previously considered nonfiction, biographies and autobiographies don't appear to fit into today's definition of fiction or nonfiction. The authors of both are simply telling the story of their own life or of someone else's life, but that begs an obvious question; is a highly detailed, written record of a person's feelings and perceptions able to be considered nonfiction? How can we classify people's emotions and memories as fact? An outstanding example of an autobiographical piece that cannot be defined is Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. His self-proclaimed 'nonfiction novel' is a collection of stories stemming from both his imagination and his personal experience in Vietnam during the war. O'Brien feels that the idea of creating a story that is technically false yet truthfully portrays a situation—as opposed to just stating the facts and stirring no emotion within the reader—is the correct way to educate the public in a meaningful, everlasting way. He, like many others, believes that biographies and autobiographies should be left as their own separate being; a genre where the reader may classify for himself or herself what truth and what fiction might lie within the literature. All of the issues mentioned above are shrouded in debate; there are no straightforward answers.

Fiction and nonfiction are two polar opposites on a scale that today offers little to no gradient. In years past, these two words have been definition enough and have managed to encompass all types of written word. Times change, however, and in the modern day, authors have begun to push the boundaries and discover the furthest extent of where literature can take us. Since they feel as if their literature does not fit into the classifications of fiction or nonfiction, authors are creating *new* genres where their novels and books can be properly sorted and defined. An update is long overdue—both an update to the definitions currently used to classify books, and an update in which we create new areas into which books can be classified.

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## Annotation

The writer of this explanation

- provides a clear and coherent introduction that establishes the subject and conveys a knowledgeable stance.
  - *In modern times, the line between the classification of literature as either fiction or nonfiction has become blurred and unclear; the outdated definitions and qualifications have sparked the development of new genres and challenged the world's idea on the differences between the two.*
- develops a complex subject through judicious use of facts, details, examples, and other information.
  - *Frey was caught, and on January 8, 2006, The Smoking Gun published an article called "A Million Little Lies," which took an in-depth look at every provable inconsistency in the novel. By comparing direct quotes from the book to police records—or rather, the lack of police records—Frey's entire novel was pieced apart until there was nothing remaining.*
  - *Stories like Cormac McCarthy's The Road, George Orwell's 1984, and Ayn Rand's Anthem all warn us about terrible futures that may arise as the result of the choices of humanity.*
- organizes and presents information so that each new piece builds on what precedes it to create a unified whole.
  - *The writer uses headers to help organize sections and uses cohesion devices to link sentences (The Spark Which Lit the Fire; With Difficulty, the Line is Drawn; More Than Simply Black or White).*
  - *However, the average Monday morning watercooler conversation was forever changed when what has become known as the "Million Little Lies Scandal" broke out in early 2006.*
  - *Regardless, in the end, it was proved beyond anyone's reasonable doubt that James Frey's novel landed dead center in the proverbial grey area between black and white—his novel was partially fiction and partially nonfiction.*
  - *Fiction and nonfiction: they're two words that are surprisingly hard to define. It's difficult to ascertain what the words have meant in the past, what they each encompass today, and how past and present definitions have been molded and shaped by the literature of the time.*
  - *Fiction and nonfiction are two polar opposites on a scale that today offers little to no gradient.*
- demonstrates control of strategies and uses discipline-specific vocabulary.
  - *Fiction and nonfiction: they're two words that are surprisingly hard to define.*
  - *The line between fiction and nonfiction starts to blur, however, when one considers genres that seem to mesh the two; historical fiction, new journalism, and biographies / autobiographies.*
- links ideas by varying sentence structures to express the precise relationship among ideas and to create cohesion.
  - *All the pieces of history are told completely as they happened; so on some level, this novel is nonfiction. Yet it is also blatantly fiction—it has characters.*
  - *Where exactly is the line that separates fiction from nonfiction, and how far can the line be stretched until one becomes the other? Are there intermediaries between the two, or must we classify each piece of literature as one or the other?*
- provides a conclusion that articulates the significance of the information.
  - *Since they feel as if their literature does not fit into the classifications of fiction or nonfiction, authors are creating new genres where their novels and books can be properly sorted and defined.*

- demonstrates a good command of the conventions of standard written English, although there are some errors in the essay, such as the following.
  - . . . The Smoking Gun, a Web site that posts legal documents, arrest records, and investigates celebrity police dealings . . .
  - By comparing direct quotes from the book to police records—or rather, the lack of police records—Frey’s entire novel was pieced apart until there was nothing remaining.

#### ***Note on Narrative Writing***

The writer has used narrative—the recounting of James Frey’s troubles—to add interest and lend concreteness to his essay. He presents vivid and relevant details in his narrative and crafts a structure that reveals the significance of the story within the more philosophical explanation that surrounds it.

## Student Sample: Grade 12, Informational/Explanatory

The essay that follows was one of a portfolio of four essays submitted by a high school student for placement in a college composition course sequence. The student had unlimited time to write and likely received feedback and instructional support while creating the portfolio.

### **The Making of a Human Voice and How to Use It**

The violin is arguably the most cherished and well-known orchestral instrument in the world. Many are moved by its unique quality of sound; it is known as the only instrument close to the sound of a human voice. Maybe the violin is so revered because “humans in all times and places are powerfully moved, or threatened, by the possibility that with our hands and minds we can create something that is perfect” (Ebert). But the sound of this instrument was not magically created overnight; the creation of the very first violin took many years and has been a product of much experimentation. This is the reason that every beginning violinist should learn to appreciate the art of making a violin and the process of holding and bowing his instrument so that he will have the knowledge to play it well.

The process of constructing a violin is an age-old tradition that has been developed and refined for centuries. Each step is crucial to the quality of the instrument’s sound. The violin’s body consists of a rib structure, which is made from six thin maple ribs that are bent to shape by applying dry heat. The ribs are reinforced at the joints by wood blocks that are located in each of the four outward curving corners, one at the top rib, and one at the lower rib. To reinforce the glue-joints between the ribs and the table and back of the violin, strips of willow or pine are glued along the inside edges of the ribs to create the lining. The back plate of the violin is made from either one or two matched pieces of maple. The wood chosen for these pieces is very important and affects the sound production of the violin. The outline of the plate is drawn onto the maple and sawn out, and the arching (the outward bulge) is then painstakingly carved to a thickness of about five millimeters. The front plate of the violin, or table, has two soundholes carved from it on either side of the bridge. These soundholes are [shaped like the letter f] and are made to project the sound. Purfling is done by inlaying thin strips of wood around the top and back of the violin a short distance from the rim. Purfling strengthens the delicate edgework and produces a beautiful frame around the instrument’s outline (Gusset).

The bridge is cut from a thin sliver of maple. Intricate shapes are carved from it, known as the “heart,” “ears,” and the two “feet” that allow it to stand on the violin table. The bridge is placed directly between the small nicks cut in the middle of each [soundhole]. The top of the bridge is curved to conform to the arch of the violin table, which allows the player to play each string individually (Skinner). The bridge is held onto the instrument by as much as seventeen pounds of pressure exerted from the four strings, which makes it a very delicate piece that must be checked periodically for leaning or warping. A bass-bar is fitted to the underside of the table underneath the left foot of the bridge. Underneath the right foot of the bridge, a soundpost is wedged between the front and back panel. The soundpost is made of spruce or pine and resists the downward pressure of the strings and improves the sound.

A neck is fitted to the top rib and is made to hold the fingerboard above the table. The fingerboard is a piece of ebony that extends beyond the neck and gradually widens towards the bridge. At the top of the neck is a pegbox that has holes drilled into each side in which the pegs are held. The pegs are used for a wide range of tuning. The pegbox slopes slightly backwards, which tensions the strings across the ebony nut at the top of the fingerboard and keeps them raised above the fingerboard. At the top of the pegbox is a scroll, added during the baroque period as an artistic flourish to provide an aesthetic touch to its already pleasing appearance (Vienna Online Magazine). The strings are wrapped around the pegs, stretched across the bridge, and held by an ebony or boxwood tailpiece. Anywhere from one to four fine tuners can be attached to the tailpiece; these are used to tighten or loosen the string to change its pitch for fine-tuning. The tailpiece is held into place by a loop of gut or nylon that is wrapped around an ebony end button located in the middle of the bottom rib.

After gluing is done, the violin must be exposed to air and sun for several days to a few weeks to darken the wood through the process of oxidation (Gusset). A protective varnish is brushed onto the surface of the violin, which has a slight dampening effect to the sound, but it is primarily used to protect the wood from perspiration, dust, dirt, and humidity (Kolneder 21). “The classical Italian makers appear to have used different formulations for the ground coat, which seals and protects the wood and does much to bring out its natural beauty, and the top coats, which were tinted with rich red, yellow and golden-brown colours . . . Recent research suggests that walnut or linseed oil may have been an important constituent of the finest old Italian varnish, later supplanted by recipes based on shellac and alcohol” (Stowell 5).

Both the construction of the violin and the way it is played are equally important to its sound production. This is very critical to learn early so that a bad habit does not need correcting later on. The modern violin is held between the chin and the left shoulder, with the scroll angling towards the left. Violin teachers will have varying ideas of the correct position to hold a violin, but many great violinists have held their instruments in different ways and have been successful. Some will hold a violin directly under the chin, and others believe that the highest position on the shoulder is best. A chinrest is usually attached to the left side of the tailpiece to make it more comfortable for the violinist to hold. Sometimes a shoulder rest can be attached to the back of the violin which can be taken off after playing. The shoulder rest can be made of various materials and provides height and padding to the violinist’s shoulder.

The left hand gently moves along the neck and fingerboard of the violin. The left fingers press down upon the string, shortening its length, which creates a higher pitch. The right hand holds the bow, which consists of a long stick of wood and a gathering of horsehair stretched from one end of the bow to the other. “In the bowing area, two C-shaped indentations (the waist) accommodate the bow’s motion across the strings” (Kolneder 13). The four strings can be bowed with the horsehair, plucked, or bounced with the stick of the bow to produce vastly different colors of sound. “Bowing across the string is the normal manner of tone production, but the process is actually extremely complicated and in its most minute details not yet entirely understood . . . The strings’ basic pitch depends on its length, thickness, material . . . and tension. These factors determine the frequency, that is, the number of vibrations . . . per second” (Kolneder 16). The bow must be rosined frequently to allow the strings to vibrate to create the fullest sound.

Even if a luthier, or stringed instrument maker, takes years to complete a violin, it can only produce its best sound if every step of its construction and every piece is made with is of the best quality. The same is true of the time needed for a musician to play the violin well. A player must learn that what counts is not how much time is spent practicing, but the quality of practice. A private teacher is also required, so proper instruction will be given. A musician must also fully understand and appreciate the skill required for constructing a violin. Not until then will a violinist be able to use his knowledge to bring forth their instrument’s fullest and most beautiful sound.

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## Annotation

The writer of this explanatory essay

- provides a clear and coherent introduction that establishes the subject, and conveys a knowledgeable stance.
  - *The violin is arguably the most cherished and well-known orchestral instrument in the world. Many are moved by its unique quality of sound; it is known as the only instrument close to the sound of a human voice. . . . the sound of this instrument was not magically created overnight; the creation of the very first violin took many years and has been a product of much experimentation. This is the reason that every beginning violinist should learn to appreciate the art of making a violin and the process of holding and bowing his instrument so that he will have the knowledge to play it well.*
- develops a complex subject (the making of a violin) through judicious use of relevant and specific facts, details, quotations, and examples.
  - Facts: *. . . the creation of the very first violin took many years and has been a product of much experimentation.*
  - Details: *The four strings can be bowed with the horsehair, plucked, or bounced with the stick of the bow to produce vastly different colors of sound.*
  - Quotations: *“Bowing across the string is the normal manner of tone production, but the process is actually extremely complicated and in its most minute details not yet entirely understood . . . The strings’ basic pitch depends on its length, thickness, material . . . and tension. These factors determine the frequency, that is, the number of vibrations . . . per second” (Kolneder 16).*
  - Examples: *. . . many great violinists have held their instruments in different ways and have been successful. Some will hold a violin directly under the chin, and others believe that the highest position on the shoulder is best.*
- represents and cites accurately the data, conclusions, and opinions of others, effectively incorporating them into her own work while avoiding plagiarism.
  - *At the top of the pegbox is a scroll, added during the baroque period as an artistic flourish to provide an aesthetic touch to its already pleasing appearance (Vienna Online Magazine).*
  - *“The classical Italian makers appear to have used different formulations for the ground coat, which seals and protects the wood and does much to bring out its natural beauty, and the top coats, which were tinted with rich red, yellow and golden-brown colours . . . Recent research suggests that walnut or linseed oil may have been an important constituent of the finest old Italian varnish, later supplanted by recipes based on shellac and alcohol” (Stowell 5).*
- organizes and presents information so that each new piece builds on what precedes it to create a unified whole.
  - The information is sequenced logically. The writer provides a carefully sequenced explanation of how a violin is made. Her explanation conveys detailed descriptions of the various parts of a violin and their purposes, what a violin is made of, how it is played, and the steps in the process of building one.
- demonstrates a command of discipline-specific and technical vocabulary and maintains a formal, objective style.
  - *. . . a rib structure . . . glue-joints . . . back plate . . . soundholes . . . tuning . . .*
  - *Purfling is done by inlaying thin strips of wood around the top and back of the violin a short distance from the rim. . . . a luthier, or stringed instrument maker . . .*

- demonstrates control of a range of strategies to present complex information.
  - If/then (with an embedded definition): *Even if a luthier, or stringed instrument maker, takes years to complete a violin, it can only produce its best sound if every step of its construction and every piece is made with is of the best quality.*
  - Definition: *The fingerboard is a piece of ebony that extends beyond the neck and gradually widens towards the bridge.*
- links ideas with transitions and by varying sentence structures to express the precise relationships among ideas and to create cohesion.
  - *This is the reason . . . At the top of the neck . . . After gluing is done . . . Even if a luthier . . .*
  - *But the sound of this instrument was not magically created overnight; the creation of the very first violin took many years and has been a product of much experimentation. This is the reason that every beginning violinist should learn to appreciate the art of making a violin . . .*
- emphasizes the most significant information and confirms the accuracy of key points by quoting appropriately and citing works.
  - *“... Recent research suggests that walnut or linseed oil may have been an important constituent of the finest old Italian varnish, later supplanted by recipes based on shellac and alcohol” (Stowell 5).*
- provides a conclusion that articulates the implications and significance of the explanation.
  - *A musician must . . . fully understand and appreciate the skill required for constructing a violin. Not until then will a violinist be able to use his knowledge to bring forth their instrument’s fullest and most beautiful sound.*
- demonstrates a very good command of the conventions of standard written English, although there are a few errors and weak constructions in the essay, such as the following.
  - *. . . the creation of the very first violin took many years and has been a product of much experimentation.*
  - *The soundpost is made of spruce or pine and resists the downward pressure of the strings and improves the sound.*



## Student Sample: Grade 12, Argument

This essay on dress codes was written for a university/college placement assessment. Two different perspectives on an issue (whether or not dress codes should be adopted in school) were provided in the prompt, and students were advised to either support one of the two points of view given or present a different point of view on the issue. The students were allowed thirty minutes to write.

I believe that it would be beneficial for our schools to adopt dress codes. Although some may argue that this action would restrict the individual student's freedom of expression, I do not agree. Our right to express ourselves is important, but in our society none of us has unrestricted freedom to do as we like at all times. We must all learn discipline, respect the feelings of others, and learn how to operate in the real world in order to be successful. Dress codes would not only create a better learning environment, but would also help prepare students for their futures.

Perhaps the most important benefit of adopting dress codes would be creating a better learning environment. Inappropriate clothing can be distracting to fellow students who are trying to concentrate. Short skirts, skimpy tops, and low pants are fine for after school, but not for the classroom. T-shirts with risky images or profanity may be offensive to certain groups. Students should express themselves through art or creative writing, not clothing. With fewer distractions, students can concentrate on getting a good education which can help them later on.

Another benefit of having a dress code is that it will prepare students to dress properly for different places. When you go to a party you do not wear the same clothes you wear to church. Likewise, when you dress for work you do not wear the same clothes you wear at the beach. Many professions even require uniforms. Having a dress code in high school will help students adjust to the real world.

Lastly, with all the peer pressure in school, many students worry about fitting in. If a dress code (or even uniforms) were required, there would be less emphasis on how you look, and more emphasis on learning.

In conclusion, there are many important reasons our schools should adopt dress codes. Getting an education is hard enough without being distracted by inappropriate t-shirts or tight pants. Learning to dress for particular occasions prepares us for the real world. And teens have enough pressure already without having to worry about what they are wearing.

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### Annotation

The writer of this argument

- establishes the importance of the issue and, makes a precise claim.
  - *I believe that it would be beneficial for our schools to adopt dress codes.*
- distinguishes the claim from a counterclaim and points out its weaknesses but does not adequately develop the counterclaim.
  - *Although some may argue that this action would restrict the individual student's freedom of expression, I do not agree. Our right to express ourselves is important, but in our society none of us has unrestricted freedom to do as we like at all times. We must all learn discipline, respect the feelings of others, and learn how to operate in the real world in order to be successful.*
- supports claims with logical reasoning but generally fails to provide specific evidence. (If this piece had not been produced during an on-demand assessment, the student might have gathered and incorporated evidence to strengthen the argument.)
  - *Perhaps the most important benefit of adopting dress codes would be creating a better learning environment. Inappropriate clothing can be distracting to fellow students who are trying to concentrate.*
  - *Another benefit of having a dress code is that it will prepare students to dress properly for different places. When you go to a party you do not wear the same clothes you wear to church.*

- *If a dress code (or even uniforms) were required, there would be less emphasis on how you look, and more emphasis on learning.*
- develops the argument in part based on an awareness of the audience's likely values.
  - The writer addresses an unknown adult audience likely to appreciate values such as *discipline, respect [for] the feelings of others*, and the creation of *a better learning environment*.
- conveys relationships between reasons and signals alternative claims using words, phrases, and complex syntax.
  - *Although some may argue . . . Perhaps the most important benefit . . . With fewer distractions . . . Another benefit . . . When . . . Likewise . . . If a dress code (or even uniforms) were required....Lastly . . . In conclusion . . .*
- maintains a formal style appropriate for the topic and the assessment situation.
- demonstrates a fairly good command of the conventions of standard written English, although there are some errors in the essay, such as the following.
  - *T-shirts with risky [risqué] images . . .*
  - *. . . espress themselves . . .*