Ch 12.9 Argumentation Samples

Sample Outline: Argumentative Essay—2008 Recession

Topic: An essay or research paper about the recession in 2008.

Thesis Statement/Major Claim: The Great Recession of 2008 resulted in companies from Fortune 500 companies to small businesses failing, causing unemployment and leaving many Americans facing an uncertain future.

1. Claim 1: Under the resulting economic conditions in 2008, many corporations either downsized or shut down operations altogether, leaving a growing class of unemployed Americans uncertain about where they would find themselves at retirement age.
    a. Companies downsized operations and laid off employees with little or no advance warning.
    b. Ultimately, Fortune 500 companies filed bankruptcy and totally shut down operations.
        i. “The biggest loser of them all: Insurance giant AIG. The company posted a $99.3 billion loss.”
        ii. “Thirty-eight companies disappeared from the Fortune 500 list altogether. Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers may be no surprise, but it was also the "last call" for brewer Anheuser Busch” (“2008 ‘Worst Year’”).
        iii. Records were broken: Eleven of the top 25 largest corporate losses in list history took place last year.
        iv. “No fewer than 25 federally insured U.S. banks failed in 2008” (“The Year in Bankruptcy”).
2. Claim 2: Rising unemployment rates and a dismal job market contributed to the increasing uncertainty that many newly unemployed and displaced Americans faced.
    a. “The hemorrhaging of American jobs accelerated at a record pace at the end of 2008, bringing the year's total job losses to 2.6 million or the highest level in more than six decades” (Goldman).
    b. Nearly four in five businesses have no employees at all, and they make an average of $45,000 per year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (Kavoussi).
    c. More than 170,000 small businesses in the U.S. closed between 2008 and 2010, according to an analysis by the Business Journals of U.S. Census Bureau (Thomas).
3. Claim 3: With the loss of employment and ballooning mortgage rates, foreclosures escalated, leaving many Americans uncertain about the future of their homes.

a. Americans had to deal with subprime rates, declining home values, and unsympathetic lenders while attempting to retain their homestead: the one remaining vestige of the American Dream.
b. More than 1 million U.S. homes were lost to foreclosure since the housing crisis began in August 2007, according to RealtyTrac, an online marketer of foreclosure properties (Christie).

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You can find an early version of this outline in Ch. 10.

Sample Outline: Argumentative Essay— Immunization

Below is an example of a possible outline for an argumentative essay. You can find the final version of this essay on the next page. (Note: This outline was not created by the student.)

Immunization

I. Introduction
- A. Hook: Inconsistencies in immunization policies
- B. Background information: How communities are affected by immunization rates
- C. Thesis: To prevent the spread of infectious diseases, it is vital to strengthen and make equal for each state immunization policies in order to elevate immunization rates and protect the health of each individual, especially those whose immune systems are weak.

II. Inconsistency in immunization policies at the state level
- A. CDC recommendations
- B. Hepatitis A immunization requirements
- C. Hepatitis B immunization requirements
- D. Difficulty of keeping the national immunization rate balanced

III. Exemptions
- A. Medical
  1. All states have medical exemptions
  2. Immunizing children protects not just themselves but those who can't due to medical reasons
- B. Religious
  1. First Amendment considerations
  2. Jacobsen vs. Massachusetts decision
  3. Beliefs must be sincere, and religious exemptions often require evidence
- C. Philosophical
  1. 17 states allow philosophical exemptions
  2. Often the result of poor education about immunization

IV. College and university requirements
- A. Not all states require immunization for college students
  1. Some states require immunization only for students living on campus
  2. Some states require immunization for all college students

V. Herd immunity
- A. Successes and problems globally in controlling measles
- B. Vulnerability of children who cannot be immunized due to medical reasons

VI. Conclusion
- A. Success of vaccines generally
- B. Legal implication: The importance of having consistent immunization laws

A Note about Student Samples

All student samples have been preserved in the form in which they were submitted in class; thus, they contain some errors. After all, papers are never truly done; they are just due.

Student Sample: Argumentative Essay—"Immunization" by Laura Vasquez

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ENC 1101
6 June 2015

Immunization

Immunization is required by law for children attending public school in all states of the U.S. On the other hand, private schools and universities do not always require immunization records. Students can be exempted from immunization for medical, religious, and philosophical reasons. These exemptions lead to a lack of immunization during childhood and youth having an impact on the immunization rates of each state. When immunization rates go down in a specific community, that community becomes a perfect environment for vaccine-preventable diseases (VPD's), which affects not only the young population but also the elderly population. Even though VPD's have been controlled in the U.S, the continuing migration of people to the states keeps bringing diseases into the country. These diseases, later, are transmitted among the population causing outbreaks. To prevent the spread of infectious diseases, it is vital to strengthen and make equal for each state immunization policies in order to elevate immunization rates and protect the health of each individual, especially of those whose immune systems are weak.

In the United States, each state decides which immunization plan is required for the enrollment and attendance at child care facilities, schools, and universities located in the pertinent state. Because of this, each state has its own immunization requirements which can be updated or changed regularly. Immunization requirements per state cover a series of vaccines for childcare, kindergarten, middle school, high school, and university/college.

The vaccines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)for children are Hepatitis A and B, DTaP (to fight Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis), Influenza,Chickenpox, MMR (to fight Measles, Mumps, and Rubella), MCV (Meningococcal), IPV (Polio), PCV (Pneumococcal), RV (Rotavirus), and the Whooping Cough vaccine. ("VFC"). Besides the recommendations, regulations for these vaccines are not the same for every state. Some states may require some of these vaccines for children entering kindergarten but not middle

school. Others require just the first dose of the vaccine, and in some cases there might be no requirements at all. For example, the Hepatitis A vaccine is not required for childcare and kindergarten in 44 states while in 11 states and/or territories of the U.S., including Oregon, Texas, and Wyoming, it is mandatory, with the exceptions of Nevada, West Virginia, Tennessee, North Dakota, New Mexico, and Georgia where the vaccine is just mandatory for child care and not for kindergarten ("School"). By contrast, the Hepatitis B vaccine is mandatory for every state and territory for childcare and/or kindergarten with the exception of Alabama ("School"). In the case of the TDP vaccine, 37 states do not require the vaccine at all ("School"). Due to the disparities in the regulation of immunization on each state, it is hard to keep the national immunization rate balanced.

The immunization records established by each state are mandatory for all children or students wanting to attend a public institution located in that state. However, exceptions are allowed by the law. These exceptions are given due to medical conditions, religious beliefs, and/or philosophical reasons. Just as regulations vary in every state, exceptions vary as well, with the exception of the medical condition exemption which is a granted by every state. Also, some states allow vaccination exemptions for certain diseases if medical documentation shows proof of immunity. Immunity can be proven if the child had the natural disease.

For medical exemptions, a written statement by a physician indicating that the child cannot receive the vaccine because the components can compromise his or her health is required. This permit can be temporary or permanent, and the definition in each state varies. All states have medical exemptions, either temporary, permanent, or both ("Medical"). Children that cannot be immunized due to medical conditions are usually the victims of VPD's because they do not have the same protection that immunized children have. The protection of unimmunized children is one of the reasons why other children (whose health is not compromised by getting vaccines) should get immunized. When children get immunized, they not only protect themselves from getting VPD's but protect other children that were not immunized as well.

Religious exemption is the one that exempts children from receiving vaccines because of religious beliefs. The religious exemption is granted based on the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment which gives the right to freely hold and exercise religious beliefs. "A state must have a 'compelling State interest' before this right can be taken away" ("Religious"). In the Supreme Court decision

Jacobsen v. Massachusetts (the right of the states to mandate smallpox vaccine was affirmed), the Court decided that limiting the spread of communicable diseases was a "compelling State interest." All states allow religious beliefs exemptions with the exception of Mississippi and West Virginia. Religious beliefs must be sincere, and some states might require proof of religious membership and others a signed affidavit from the spiritual advisor of the parent who wants the religious exemption ("Religious").

In the case of philosophical exemptions, the child is exempted from immunization due to personal beliefs. The use of philosophical exemption to avoid immunization tends to cluster geographically, making some communities at greater risk for outbreaks. There are currently 17 states with philosophical exemptions. "In some states parents or children old enough to give consent (usually age 12 or older) must object to all vaccines and not just one vaccine." ("Philosophical"). States like California, Washington, and Oregon require that the parent obtains a signature from a medical doctor or another health care provider in order to obtain a philosophical exemption. Also, in Oregon, parents are required to complete a state vaccine education program. ("Philosophical"). Philosophical exemptions are the result of poor education about immunization. When parents do not know how vaccines work and their importance, the parents are more likely to reject vaccines and avoid getting their children immunized.

Some states also have immunization laws for colleges and universities. College and university students, according to the CDC, should receive the Influenza vaccine and the HPV vaccine which protects against the human papillomavirus that causes most cervical cancers, anal cancers, and genital warts ("Vaccine"). Not all states require immunization for colleges and universities. Some states might require vaccines like Hepatitis B just for public universities, such as in Ohio, others just for entering students that plan on living on-campus, and others for students with more than 12 credits, like in New Jersey. And others states, like Florida, mandate immunization for all educational institutions. ("Hepatitis B"). In general, not many states require immunization for college and university students which expose these students to VPD's that can be easily transmitted among the students especially the ones who live on-campus.

Vaccinating people also contributes to the immunity of the community. Herd immunity or community immunity occurs when most members of a certain community have been immunized against an infectious disease. Because of the immunization, the disease is contained, offering protection to the people that cannot be immunized

at the time but live in the same area, people such as pregnant women, newborns, the elderly, and people that could not receive the vaccine due to medical conditions.

Importation of measles into the U.S. emphasizes the importance of sustaining and increasing vaccination coverage rates to prevent outbreaks of VPD's. Complications are more common in children younger than age five and in adults. Measles cases and outbreaks still occur in countries around the world. In fact, according to the CDC, about 20 million people get measles each year; about 146,000 die. Each year, unvaccinated people get infected while in other countries and bring the disease into the United States and spread it to others ("Measles"). Measles was declared eliminated from the U.S. in 2002. Since that year, the annual number of people reported to have measles ranged from a low of 37 people in 2004 to a high of 668 people in 2014. Most of these originated outside the country or were linked to a case that originated outside the country. Measles can be prevented with the MMR vaccine with almost 100 percent of effectiveness ("Measles").

VPD's are constantly affecting people who did not received vaccinations. With the possibility of being exempt from immunization laws, some parents do not vaccinate their children without thinking that their decisions will compromise the health of their child in the future, and perhaps, their child's life. Also, when these children do not get immunized and contract an infectious disease, they transmit the disease to other children that might have not been immunized due to medical conditions. These children later might encounter serious health complications. VPD's also have a costly impact, resulting in visits to the doctor, hospitalization, and other medical expenses. Looking from any perspective, lack of immunization has no favorable results. It affects the health of the person who contracts the infectious disease, the economy of that person or parents if the affected is a minor, and compromises the health of the people who live around the infected person.

In contrast of religious and philosophical beliefs, vaccines are the only proven way to protect people from getting infectious diseases. In some cases vaccines are the only option available to people to protect themselves from diseases that do not have a cure yet, like the HPV vaccine which fights human papillomavirus. For these reasons, states should reinforce immunization laws and reduce exemptions. It is important for the country and the health of its citizens to have equal immunization laws. People are in constant migration, traveling from one state to the other. If immunization laws are strong in one state, but not in the other; people won't be

protected against VPD's because they might contract them when moving to one state or from another person who traveled from that state to the other.

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Student Sample: Argumentative Essay—"Human Nature at its Worst" by Jo Neuman

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2 May 2011

Human Nature at its Worst

When Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1948, it struck a nerve with readers. "The story was incendiary; readers acted as if a bomb had blown up in their faces . . . Shirley struck a nerve in mid-twentieth-century America . . . She had told people a painful truth about themselves" (Oppenheimer 129). Interestingly, the story strikes that same nerve with readers today.

When my English class recently viewed a video production of the story, those students who had not previously read the story reacted quite strongly to the ending. I recall this same reaction when I was in high school. Our English teacher chose to show the video before any student had read the story. Almost every student in the class reacted with horror at the ending. Why do people react so strongly when they read the story or see the video? What is it about "The Lottery" that is so disturbing? To understand, one must examine the very nature of humankind.

Man's propensity for violence has been around since Cain killed Abel. In the Old Testament, the Bible speaks frequently of wars and killing. "And it came to pass . . . that all Israel returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. And all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand" (Josh. 8. 24-25). The ancient Romans were known for their bloodlust. "The ancient Romans loved gladiators. They loved the men, the weapons, the fighting and the bloodshed. They also loved the death" (Baker 2). While most people today would be horrified by "what the historian Michael Grant has called 'the nastiest blood-sport ever invented' [it] was much loved in ancient Rome" (Baker 3). It is also well known that over the years, various cultures have practiced human sacrifice. "The Aztecs probably offered up more sacrificial victims than any other people in recorded history. In this, they were enacting a Mesoamerican tradition that originated far back in the region's past" (Allan 19). Throughout more modern history, wars have been fought resulting in the deaths of millions. Murders and other violent crimes are inescapable. Throughout mankind's history, it can be shown that man's capacity for evil has no limits. But is this what troubled readers of Jackson's story?

"We cannot, in all honesty, make any serious claim that our own culture really abhors violence. . . . Modern society still feels the need to watch violent events, whether it be at a boxing match or spattered across the cinema screen" (Baker 5). Society today is bombarded with violence. There is graphic, and often gratuitous, violence in movies and video games. Most people do not give this type of violence a second thought. This may be because they know that the violence in the movies or games is not real, but "The Lottery" was just a story; it, too, was not real. So what is it about Jackson's story that hits readers so deeply? What makes "The Lottery" so disturbing?

For years, critics have been trying to answer these questions. Some have focused on the story's symbolism, while others have focused on its relationship to the horrors of World War II. Jay Yarmove

writes, “Coming after the revelation of the depths of depravity to which the Nazis sank in their eagerness to destroy other, ‘lesser’ peoples, ‘The Lottery’ upsets the reader’s sense of complacency” (242). He goes on to say that

> there were many Americans who, after the end of World War II . . . smugly asserted that such atrocities could happen in Nazi Germany but not in the United States. . . . Jackson’s story help[s] to create the specter of a holocaust in the United States. (Yarmove 245)

James Evans believes that

> since the story was written in the immediate aftermath of World War II and the holocaust, it raised (and can still raise) important questions concerning ‘the power of mass psychology, the possibility that blind adherence to tradition will forestall
> judgment, and the ease with which responsibility can be denied.’” (J. Stark qtd. in Evans 119)

Other critics simply focus on man’s inhumanity to man. Helen Nebeker notes:

> Numerous critics have carefully discussed Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery” . . . pointing out its obvious comment on the innate savagery of man lurking beneath his civilized trappings. Most acknowledge the power of the story, admitting that the psychological shock of the ritual murder in an atmosphere of modern, smalltown normality cannot be easily forgotten. (100)

Jackson herself once said,

> Explaining just what I had hoped the story to say is very difficult. I suppose, I hoped, by setting a particularly brutal ancient rite in the present and in my own village to shock the story’s readers with a graphic dramatization of the pointless violence and general inhumanity in their own lives. (Friedman 33-34)

While a case can be made for each of these interpretations, I believe there is more to the story.

Very subtly throughout the story, Jackson shows that the townspeople feel no individual responsibility in committing what can only be termed murder. The lottery was treated as just another social event. “The lottery was conducted–as were the square dances, the teenage club, the Halloween program–by Mr. Summers” (248). As people assembled on that day, the women “greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip” while the men spoke “of planting and rain, tractors and taxes” (247). As they begin the process, the people “only half listened to the directions” as they “had done it so many times”

(250). Old Man Warner, the oldest man in the town, makes it clear "there's always been a lottery" and that this is his "seventy-seventh time"
(250). It is apparent that at one time, long before the characters in the story were alive, the lottery held a deep significance to the people. According to Old Man Warner, there "used to be a saying that 'Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon'" (250), intimating that the ritual was born out of a desire to ensure prosperity for the town. Over the years, however, "much of the ritual had been forgotten or discarded" (248), indicating that the current townspeople really had no idea why they continued to conduct the lottery.

It is obvious at times that some of the villagers are uncomfortable with the whole process, but no one ever overtly criticizes or speaks out against the lottery. Mr. Adams tells Old Man Warner "that over in the north village they're talking of giving up the lottery," and Mrs. Adams adds that "some places have already quit lotteries" (250). Yet, neither of these two individuals had the courage to stand up and say, "Why are we still doing this? Perhaps we should stop, too." Many of the townspeople were obviously nervous during the process, fully comprehending what the end would bring. As Mr. Delacroix went to get his slip, Mrs. Delacroix "held her breath" and the men who had already selected their slips stood in the "crowd . . . holding the small folded papers in their large hands, turning them over and over nervously" (250). Yet again, no one dared to question, or better still, condemn the process. Even Tessie Hutchinson, after her husband drew the deadly slip of paper, did not condemn the lottery itself. She simply stated, "It wasn't fair. . . . I think we should start over" (251). She apparently had no issue with the lottery, just that her family was selected. This conjures up images of the German people during World War II or the 38 people who did nothing as they watched their neighbor, Kitty Genovese, brutally murdered (Darley 417). Readers are troubled by the fact that no one in the village had the courage to take a stand against the lottery. Readers believe that had they been in the village, they would have been willing to speak up. This begs the question as to whether or not readers today would have behaved any differently than the villages of the story.

Many psychologists have studied the effects of crowds, or mobs, on individuals. The fact that the entire town participates in the ritualistic murder allows individuals to abdicate their own responsibility. "Diffusion of responsibility . . . explain[s] that being in a group leads one to feel as if one is less responsible" (Garcia et al. 845). Graham Tyson, a South African psychologist,

> described the phenomenon of deindividuation (sic) and concluded . . . on the basis of [his] assessment of the psychological literature, that it is highly probable that an individual in a mob situation will experience deindividuation and that this . . . will lead to diminished responsibility. . . . The dense crowding . . . appeared to have caused some . . . to become deindividuated and therefore less aware than they normally were of their individual identity and accountability. (Colman 1072-3).

In other words, people do not feel responsible for their actions when they are in a group. Because everyone in the town, from young children to Old Man Warner, participated, the individual citizens felt no personal responsibility. Psychologist Jerry M. Burger notes the "absence of responsibility has often been cited by psychologists as a contributing factor to aggressive and abhorrent behavior" (3-4). When an individual perceives that someone or something else is responsible for a particular action, he is capable of doing things that he otherwise would not.

Part of what disturbs readers is that fact that no one wants to believe that an otherwise normal human being could commit a reprehensible and violent act like that depicted in "The Lottery." Burger, in talking about Stanley Milgram's obedience studies of the 1960s, states "most social psychologists appear to agree . . . [Milgram's] studies are a dramatic demonstration on how individuals typically underestimate the power of situational forces when explaining another person's behavior." Burger goes on to say that "our culture socializes individuals to obey certain authority figures" (3). It is likely that the townspeople in "The Lottery" viewed Mr. Summers as an authority figure. As the man who "ran the coal business" (248), Mr. Summers was probably the richest, most powerful man in the town. As such, individual townspeople would have been hesitant to speak out against the lottery as Mr. Summers, a man of authority, was in charge of it. Readers may dismiss this thought believing they would never succumb to this kind of pressure. In fact, Burger points out that there has been "a persistent question about Milgram's research" and whether his findings could be repeated today as people are "more aware of the dangers of blindly following authority" (4). But are people today really any different? Burger recently conducted a "partial replication of Milgram's procedure" and found that

> average Americans react to this laboratory situation today much the way they did 45 years ago. Although changes in societal attitudes can affect behavior, [Burger's] findings indicate

> that the same situational factors that affected obedience in Milgram's participants still operate today. (9)

The villagers in "The Lottery" not only had Mr. Summers as an authority figure, but they had the group dynamics of having the entire town involved, effectively absolving them of their personal responsibilities.

A phenomenon known as "bystander apathy" may also help to explain the townspeople (Garcia et al. 843). There are numerous contemporary news accounts of people witnessing a brutal act yet failing to help the victim. Most people are genuinely horrified to hear such accounts. But what is it that would make someone stand idly by and watch someone get murdered? It seems the more bystanders there are, the less likely any of them will be to act. "Even if a person defines an event as an emergency, the presence of other bystanders may still make him less likely to intervene. He feels that his responsibility is diffused and diluted" (Darley 420). This could explain why the townspeople in "The Lottery" were reluctant to speak out against the practice. Because the entire town was participating, they no longer felt any individual
responsibility for what was to occur.

> The responsibility-diluting effect of other people was so strong that single individuals were more than twice as likely to report the emergency as those who thought other people also knew about it . . . [an individual's] reactions are shaped by the reactions of others." (Darley 421)

When Mrs. Adams commented on the villages that have stopped the lottery, the only person to respond was Old Man Warner who exclaimed that those who had given up the lottery were a "pack of young fools" (250). No one else spoke in support of ending the lottery. While they did not speak up, it is quite possible that some of the townspeople, while present, did not actually participate in the stoning. This can be inferred from Mrs. Dunbar telling Mrs. Delacroix, "You'll have to go ahead and I'll catch up to you" (252). Readers can choose to believe that Mrs. Dunbar had no intention of catching up. "Marked by the loss of her son [to the lottery, Mrs. Dunbar] may still be a victim but she will not be a perpetrator" (Nebeker 105). Readers can also wonder where Mrs. Adams was at the time of the stoning. Jackson makes it very clear as the stoning begins, "Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers, with Mrs. Graves beside him" (252). Where was his wife? It is logical to conclude that because Mrs. Adams had commented earlier that "some places have already quit lotteries" (250), Jackson's exclusion of her at this point in the story is intentional. It is likely that while Mrs. Adams was certainly

present, she did not actually participate. This may be the only glimmer of hope in an otherwise dark and troubling tale.

What perplexes readers is, unlike most modern movies, there are no discernible good guys or bad guys in the story. The characters are regular people, just like those reading the story. Until the end, readers can picture themselves as one of the townspeople. Yet when these seemingly regular people commit a horrifying, heinous act, readers struggle to comprehend their actions. Readers are forced to ponder whether they would have acted any differently than the townspeople. Would they have gone against Mr. Summers' authority? Would they have had the courage to tell the group what they were doing was wrong? While most readers will tell themselves that they would have intervened, sadly, as we have seen, most would not.

As long as humans exist, Jackson's story will remain relevant.

> Man, [Jackson] says, is a victim of his unexamined and hence unchanged traditions . . . Until enough men are touched strongly enough by the horror of their ritualistic, irrational actions . . . man will never free himself from his primitive nature and is ultimately doomed. (Nebeker 107)

If the disturbing nature of "The Lottery" causes readers to look more closely at themselves, perhaps there will be a time when individuals will do what they know is right, regardless of who is in charge or how many people are around.

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Student Sample: Argumentative Essay—"The Yellow Wallpaper" by Laura Dilts

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3 December 2014

The Yellow Wallpaper

As early as 1900 BC, all the way up until the 19th century, it was widely stated by medical professionals that simply having a womb would drive a person to illness and insanity (Tasca). Physicians stated that the uterus would wander about inside the female body, causing trouble wherever it went. The clinical term for it was "wandering womb" or "hysteria" ("Hysteria"). Does this sound ridiculous? To us it may, but at the time Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper," it was still a common notion that women were somehow innately mentally ill for simply being female. They were encouraged to not exert themselves, were isolated whenever they showed signs of rebellion, and told they were mad for wanting to be less dainty and breakable (Tasca). This socially accepted notion gave a seemingly valid excuse to control, manipulate, and discredit all women, which led many to a breaking point, to fulfil that prophecy of madness bestowed upon them.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman tells a tale of this kind of fall to madness caused by the mistreatment of women. We can infer that it is the story of a woman named Jane who lived in the late 1800s and suffered from severe postpartum depression. The woman's husband, John, takes her to a large rental house away from her home and essentially imprisons her in her quarters until she behaves

again. Her husband is a doctor, and though modern medicine was transitioning to a better understanding of mental illness (Tasca), he seems to be of the opinion that Jane should be subdued to cure herself (Gilman).

One could argue that his actions seem less than "doctoral." We see what is being done to her through off-handed comments, like when she mentions that her husband sometimes strikes her. She is forbidden from seeing who she wants to see and only allowed certain interactions that he approves of. He is controlling and abusive, yet she still insists that she is being treated rather than mistreated and abused. He gives her infantilizing nicknames, calling her a "little girl" and "silly little goose." He demeans everything she says and asks her to behave for his sake and their child's sake (Gilman). These are classic signs of a manipulative abuser ("Abuser Tricks").

It is interesting to see the first person perspective in Gilman's story. It puts us inside of a mind that has been punished and oppressed. We can see her protagonist's attempts to defend her persecutors, to justify what is happening. Like many abused women who try to rationalize a controlling spouse's behavior as protective, she calls her husband "careful and loving" because he gives her "a schedule prescription for each hour in the day" (Gilman). Most would call that kind of micromanaging very domineering, and it is also a common sign of abuse ("Abuser Tricks").

And truly, one could argue that the whole idea of the diagnosis of female hysteria is really a controlling device. In medical literature, it has been described as

> a manifestation of everything from divine poetic inspiration and satanic possession to female unreason, radical degeneration and unconscious psychosexual conflict…a physical disease, a mental disorder, a spiritual malady, a behavioural [*sic*] maladjustment, a sociological communication, and as no illness at all. (Fairclough)

So basically, … everything? Everything a woman could do to displease society, or simply to be, is cast in a sickly light. Nothing she can do is truly right. In abusive relationships, we see abusers often convince the abused that there is something wrong with them; it makes them easier to manipulate at the whim of the abuser ("Abuser Tricks").

We can see Jane's descent into madness. The longer she is imprisoned, the more she is cowed, the more her frustration emerges as insanity (Gilman). Sadly, the author has divulged that this story is based on personal experience. A well-respected psychiatrist said

it was the best portrayal of that kind of illness that he'd ever read, and she admitted that it was because she had been there herself ("Why I Wrote Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman). And judging by the fact that a medical professional was so vividly reminded of the symptoms, many other women had been too.

Through other literature, we can see this theme of control causing distress, even to the point of death. In a short story by Kate Chopin, the protagonist, Mrs. Mallard, is ill in some way and her husband is implied to be overbearing and controlling. Yet the speaker still feels obligated to defend him. She does not betray that her silence and reclusion is borne of joy rather than mourning at his supposed death. Her dismay at her husband being alive, that the hope for freedom she'd kindled in that short time she thought him dead suddenly being snuffed, was enough to kill her. There seems to be no explicit indication of physical abuse in this story, but Mrs. Mallard still felt she was not allowed to live her own life or to feel free in the presence of her husband. Chopin says it well in a moment of clarity before Mrs. Mallard finds her husband to be alive:

> There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination (Chopin).

Her husband was not as bad as John from "The Yellow Wallpaper," but still, that pressure was there. We can postulate that it is within the relationship dynamics between men and women of the time where the true problem lies.

It is a subtle thing, to be oppressed, one hard to grasp in a meaningful and articulable way. As Betty Friedan said in *The Feminine Mystique*, what keeps a woman from feeling truly fulfilled was a "problem that has no name." Many women feel it, but few can concisely say what it is (Friedan 63). It creeps up, creeping like the woman in Jane's hallucinations (Gilman). To explain it, once it has festered for centuries and boiled over, well, it does make us look quite mad, no? It is difficult to say there is something wrong between men and women without seeming to shout blame at every man in existence, whether he is an abusive John, or a simply present Mr. Mallard. It is like trying to catch shadows to show proof that something is standing between you and the light. But that shadow is there, twisting and crying out from behind the yellow wallpaper in every woman's mind.

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Student Sample: Argumentative Essay—"Satire Squared" by Jo Neuman

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9 March 2011

Satire Squared

Upon first reading Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron," readers often interpret it solely as a satire on the evils of egalitarianism. Set in the future, the story begins by declaring that everyone was finally equal. "They were equal every which way. Nobody was any smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to . . . the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General" (216). The tone of the narration is immediately negative, leading readers to the natural conclusion that the author believes equalization is bad. But is that really what Vonnegut intends? Even a cursory review of his political leanings indicates that Kurt Vonnegut was a proponent of socialism. How can the seemingly anti-egalitarian message of "Harrison Bergeron" be reconciled with Vonnegut's personal feelings and beliefs?

On the surface, the story blatantly satirizes a time when

everyone is physically and mentally made to be exactly the same as everyone else. This interpretation has been used countless times as an argument against egalitarianism. Murray Rothbard, in *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature,* refers to "Harrison Bergeron" as "a pithy and . . . bitterly satirical short story depicting a comprehensively egalitarian society" (289) which he describes as "a world of
faceless and identical creatures, devoid of all individuality, variety, or special creativity" (6). This certainly describes the world of Harrison Bergeron, where the purpose of the Handicapper General is to ensure that no one is "better than anybody else" (216). Rothbard uses "Harrison Bergeron" to further his ideals that humans are "uniquely characterized by a high degree of variety, diversity, differentiation; in short, inequality" and that "the egalitarian goal is . . . evil" (8). Others use the story to combat the idea of one-size-fits-all education. Tracy Cross, in an article for *Gifted Child Today*, writes:

> In 1961 Kurt Vonnegut wrote the short story "Harrison Bergeron" about America's quest for equality that had gone so far as to create a position of Handicapper General. This person's role was to create ways in which society could equalize the natural human variations so that everyone would be the same. . . . Vonnegut's story can be instructive to those of us in gifted education. (14)

She uses the story to support her contention that "Our current conceptions of fairness and equity have led us to . . . harm many of our most able students" (Cross 15). Clare Fugate uses the story to denigrate the No Child Left Behind law. After referencing the opening paragraph of the story describing how everyone was finally equal, she asks:

> Any of this science fiction sound familiar? Currently, No Child Left Behind . . . decrees that . . . all students must be proficient for their grade level in reading and math. Who among us thinks that this is a reasonable, logical expectation? Who among us believes that each student has the same intellectual capabilities? Who among us believes that a one-size-fits all, cookie-cutter test actually measures an individual student's academic achievement? (71)

Both Cross and Fugate use Vonnegut's words to bolster the absurdness of trying to equalize students. Most Americans would agree, but would Vonnegut?

Some critics theorize that Vonnegut wrote the story simply to appeal to a particular audience. "Vonnegut wrote this piece in the

era of 'the Communist threat.' Magazines publish what people will read, and at that time, readers wanted to . . . feel superior and correct in their defense of democracy" (Stuckey 89). Darryl Hattenhauer, in "The Politics of Kurt Vonnegut's 'Harrison Bergeron,'" echoes this sentiment:

> As a struggling writer, Vonnegut had to put a surface on this story that would appeal to his audience. And it did. More specifically, it did so because it appeared to rehearse central tenets of the dominant culture's ideology. It appealed to the literal-minded with such accuracy that William F. Buckley's National Review reprinted it as a morality tale about the dangers of forsaking private enterprise. (2)

Having written the story in 1961 when the Cold War was in full swing, it may be that Vonnegut was simply capitalizing on the fears the American people had of communism and socialism. It is also quite probable, as Hattenhauer concluded, that the depiction of the forced equality in the story was written as a means of exposing America's misunderstanding of what equality really means (2). In other words, embedded in the blatant satire of an unrealistic egalitarian society is the hidden satire of what Vonnegut perceived Americans erroneously believed about socialism. What Vonnegut created was a satire within a satire; one written for the masses and another for those willing to look a little deeper. Vonnegut himself said, "As I get older . . . I say what I really think. I don't hide ideas like Easter eggs for people to find" (*Playboy*). Since "Harrison Bergeron" was written early in his career, it is logical to conclude that the secondary satire hidden in the story was intentional. The blatant satire of what equality means is so over-the-top, it is reasonable to conclude, as Hattenhauer did, that Vonnegut is intentionally poking fun at the American people through the story.

This is clearly shown through his depiction of Hazel, who "had a perfectly average intelligence" (216). Hazel may have been average in the made-up world of Harrison Bergeron, but she would not be average today, nor would she have been average back in 1961 when the story was written. An average person is capable of remembering things from one moment to the next; an average person is capable of understanding death and mourning the loss of a loved one. Hazel "couldn't think about anything except in short bursts" (216). When she sees her son, Harrison, killed, she cries, but just moments later, is unable to recall why. Consider the dialog between Hazel and her husband right after their son was killed:

"You've been crying," he said to Hazel.

"Yup," she said.

"What about?" he said.

"I forget," she said. "Something real sad on television."

"What was it?" he said.

"It's kind of mixed up in my mind," said Hazel. (219)

This is not representative of the average person. By equalizing everyone to Hazel's level, a below-average level, Vonnegut was clearly showing the absurdness of the story, as well as what he considered were the erroneous beliefs of the American people.

While readers tend to choose one interpretation over the other, I believe both are valid and do not contradict Vonnegut's beliefs. Vonnegut's idea of socialism was very different from what he perceived the majority of Americans believed. He did not believe that everyone should be the same but that those who are more capable should take care of those who are not. He confirmed this when he said "thousands of people in our society found out they were too stupid or too unattractive or too ignorant to rise. They realized they couldn't get a nice car or a nice house or a nice job. Not everybody can do that, you know" (*Playboy*). He went on to say, "I just know that there are plenty of people who are in terrible trouble and can't get out. And so I'm impatient with those who think that it's easy for people to get out of trouble. I think there are some people who really need a lot of help. I worry about stupid people, dumb people. Somebody has to take care of them because they can't hack it" (*Playboy*). He worried about people with less ability and felt those with greater ability should help them. He did not believe that those with ability should be
brought down to the same level as those without. As a writer, an artist, I believe he appreciated individuality and respected talent. In talking about the "big money and . . . heavy praise some of [his] contemporaries were getting for their books," Vonnegut stated, "I'm going to have to study writing harder, because I think what I'm doing is pretty good, too" (*Playboy*). He did not think those other writers should be handicapped to equal him; he was going to have to work harder to improve himself.

Vonnegut's idea of a perfect society would not be what he portrays in "Harrison Bergeron." I contend it would include people with varying abilities and talents, but those with more ability would assist those with less ability simply for the purpose of making the society as a whole better. He confirmed this in an article he wrote later in life where he stated, "Many years ago, I was so innocent I still considered it possible that we could become the humane and

reasonable America so many members of my generation used to dream of" (Cold Turkey). His perfect society was not one in which there was no variation, as in "Harrison Bergeron," but one where people cared for one another.

Through "Harrison Bergeron," Vonnegut very cleverly disguised his satire of what he believed was most Americans' misguided perception of socialism by wrapping it in the blatant satire of totally unrealistic egalitarianism. Both messages are consistent with Vonnegut's core philosophy. While he felt most Americans misunderstand socialism, he also valued individuality. Those who only see one side of this coin will never be able to appreciate the mixed satire Vonnegut skillfully hid among his words like "Easter eggs" for people to find (*Playboy*).

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Student Sample: Argumentative Essay—"Hjönk: Dadaism's Reflection in Millennials and Gen Z's" by Xye Borg

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30 Oct. 2019

Hjönk: Dadaism's Reflection in Millennials and Gen Z's

A teenage girl at a park can be seen looking down at her phone, as most young people are commonly seen doing. An elderly couple gazes at her with discontent, disparaging thoughts flooding their minds while they whisper of disapproval to one another. Unbeknownst to the couple, the girl is busy planning a peaceful sit-in with her associates to protest the Trump Administration's stance on the Green New Deal. Negative generalizations like this are continuously pinned on younger generations by their older counterparts, despite the reality that contradicts the immediate assumptions. Weighty stressors unfamiliar to many older individuals are imposed upon newer generations, but almost never taken into consideration because of a trend of immediate dismissal. Millennials and Gen Z's are often seen as shallow and apathetic by older generations, but their striking resemblance to the politically and socially charged Dadaist art movement shows that younger people have a culture of compassionate awareness that inspires activism and change.

Political and social environments of early twentieth-century Europe are similar to political and social environments of contemporary times, placing levels of stress on the Millennials and Gen Z's that are comparable to those that were placed on the Dadaists. Witnessed by the Dadaists of Europe during the infancy of the 1900's, a blight of nationalism and militarism plagued the continent's front. According to William Eckhardt and Alan G. Newcombe, militarism is defined as "the belief in military deterrence, or the reliance on military strength to defend one's nation and its values, or aggressive foreign policy in general" (210). After the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, militarism become prominent throughout Europe. "Causes of World War I" explains how "Militarism in particular helped to transform Europe into a tense, hostile environment, with millions of troops and newly industrialized warfare ready to be mobilized in the event of war" (7). Toxic nationalist mindsets present at the time were the motivation behind the assassination

of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, which sparked the beginning of World War I (Shen 8). What followed was a horrendous war fueled by the vast militaristic powers within Europe. Today, a resurgence of nationalist ideals is being observed. Pazzanese, a Harvard Staff Writer, identifies the growth of nationalist-based politics in Europe: "Trump's surprise election has proved a political windfall and an inspirational template to far-right candidates in Europe… These rightist groups predate Trump politically and tie themselves more tightly to nationalism, but they are also happy to ride on the coattails of his victory." As seen many times in the past, most notably with WWI and the Cold War, the culmination of nationalistic and militaristic aspects within a country can, and usually does, have severe consequences on the mental wellbeing of the country's populous. At the front lines of this mental assault in today's times are the youngest generations, adding just one more added stressor to their already disadvantaged lives. The subjugation of Millennials and Gen Z's to modern nationalist and militaristic political environments mirrors the experiences of the Dadaists in early twentieth-century Europe.

The manner in which Millennials and Gen Z's views have been molded in response to the plights in their environments exemplifies the generations' connection to the nature of Dada. The practitioners of Dada in the early 1900's were notably liberal and often supported socialistic ideals. As described by "Police, Politics, and Anti-Art," political and social beliefs of the Dadaists were embedded into the aspects of Dada culture, making Dada into a politically fueled, avant-garde movement: "…The First International Dada Fair of 1920 opposed military and capitalistic institutions that inflicted violence upon minorities" (Alonso 106). Today, Millennials and Gen Z's in the U.S. and Europe are following the same path of opinions on the same subjects. Studies on political stances of different generations in the U.S. say, "…majorities in Gen Z and the Millennial generation say government should do more to solve problems, rather than that government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals…" (Parker). Even separated by decades, younger modern generations and the Dadaists hold concurring opinions.

Absurdist themes are present in Dadaism in the same way that Absurdist themes are present in Millennial and Gen Z humor: as a method to cope with the distressing state of society, which usually generates awareness about the issue being addressed in the art piece or joke. Confronted with a bloody, violent war, Dadaists sought to call out the poor justifications for such death and destruction created by the established powers at the time. According to Hans Arp, "Dada wanted to destroy the deceptions of reason and discover an irrational order" (Elger 9). The Dadaists wanted to display the horrors promoted and carried out by institutions in Europe as unbelievably nonsensical and monstrous; a savagery that would only be allowed to thrive under a system just as nonsensical and monstrous as the acts within the war itself. Millennials and Gen Z's seek to find an outlet for their stress under their current societal pressures as well, but they do so through their humor. TheDalekHater, a user of the website *Reddit*, created a meme based off struggles with mental illness – an adversity tragically familiar to Millennials and Gen Z's (Hoffower and Akhtar; Wasserman):

Fig. 1. An edited screenshot of a notification screen. TheDalekHater. "Hjönk hjönk." Reddit, r/memes, 13 Feb. 2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/memes/comments/aqcdh7/hj%C3%B6nk_hj%C3%

B6nk/

In the meme, the two messages from “Anxiety” and “Depression” represent the doubts an individual with the two illnesses frequently experience. The “Scandinavian Clown” message is the joke of the meme. A disheartening atmosphere is built up by the first two messages and then subsequently interrupted by the meaningless nature of “Hjönk.” While the nonsensical, lazy essence of a Scandinavian Clown saying “Hjönk” as a joke is an example of absurdist humor on its own, combining the joke with a preexisting theme of authentic despair is signature to Millennials and Gen Z’s. Through grouping major tribulations with meaningless statements or visuals in a humorous format, they reduce the mental impacts inflicted on them caused by living under harrowing circumstances. All the unnecessary pain resulting from broken or corrupt systems is painted as outrageous for any human to undergo, thus subtly encouraging the reformation of systems that enable human anguish. Young people’s access to the internet nowadays has made them painfully aware of the devastation and suffering that fills the world. They are constantly reminded of a bleak present with even bleaker prospects for the future. Absurd humor is their way of coping with the despair they experience from an unrelenting awareness of illogical, but seemingly unstoppable doom (Mercado).

Older generations, however, connect the Millennial and Gen Z culture surrounding electronics and unconventional humor to superficial values and apathy. They claim that the perceived decline of face-to-face human communication reduces younger people’s ability to empathize with others. Participation in social media creates a self-centered generation of youth that are driven by a shallow desire for attention in the eyes of many older individuals. Being exposed to all the barbarity of the world is affirmed to cause desensitization in the youth, adding to their seemingly inherent quality of selfishness. Contrary to these beliefs, younger generations are exhibited as more politically active. Their exposure to the world’s atrocities instead breeds a determination to fight injustice. Millennials and Gen Z’s recognize that it’s their future and the future of

humans yet to be born that's at stake. They are fully capable of comprehending the reality of the world, and desensitization worries them more than it prevents them from empathizing. They are educated about what is happening in the word, too; "Gen Zers' views about climate change are virtually identical to those of Millennials and not markedly different from Gen Xers. About half in all three generations say the earth is getting warmer due to human activity" (Parker et al.). Activism is prominent among younger people; they are driven to change the future for the better since it will directly impact their quality of life.

Millennials and Gen Z's nature and response to their circumstances are comparative to the Dadaists of early twentieth-century Europe. Political aspects of modern day that Millennials and Gen Z's live under mirror the political state of early twentieth-century Europe. Dadaists share the need to cope with the ridiculously depressing condition of society, only this reveals itself within the Dada art itself. Younger generations are a bit different in this department, employing dark and absurdist humor to deal with the despondent future they see ahead of them. They share general ideals with the Dadaists, corresponding opinions on the role of government and economic handling relate the groups together. Regardless of the negative assumptions held by older generations, Millennials and Gen Z's are working towards fixing a world they discern as being broken by those before them and by established powers. Their awareness stretches past many of the generations before them, and they chose to use that awareness for the greater good.

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Questions for Consideration

1. What is the thesis statement of each essay?
2. Explain some of the strengths of these essays.
3. Identify specific ways these essays could be improved. Consider each essay's focus, organization, development, style, and grammar.