

The Guide To

Original Oratory

Created by
Mr. Tony Figliola

Compiled and Edited by
Sarah Weinflash

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What is Original Oratory?

Original: YOU!

- You have to write it (it's the rule)
- You're sharing your point of view with your audience

Oratory:

Definition 1: The art of public speaking; Eloquence/Skill in making speeches to the public/Public speaking marked by the use of overblown rhetoric

Rhetoric: the language you use to persuade your audience

Definition 2: A place for prayer, such as a small private chapel

*Both definitions are important because they both emphasize:

- Personal beliefs and ideas
- Considering an audience (it's not an oratory without an audience)

History:

- First developed by the Ancient Greeks
- Used to pass on ideas, history, to tell stories and connect with one another
- Asks the audience to feel something
- Americans love oratory (especially in politics, religion, and self-help)

Examples: FDR's inauguration speech ("Nothing to fear but fear itself"), JFK's inauguration speech ("Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country"), Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, sermons, commencement addresses, etc.

*Meant to change your ideas

- The NFL was founded in 1925 and Original Oratory was the first event. This is the foundation of forensics, so orators are "The Original Forensicators"

General Oratory Information:

- 7-10 Minutes
- Has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion
- Meant to interest, evoke, spark an emotional/practical change
- True, backed up, speaks from the heart

Topic Selection

There is nothing original about topics; everything has been done—don't try to impress judges, do what matters to you

Subject: vague, general

Speech topic: specific, usually takes a stance

What to look for in a topic:

Relevance: can apply to the audience

Researchable

Significance: why it's important

Personal connection: use it to make your speech unique/fresh

Start with the 3 P's:

Persuasive: Your speech should be persuading your audience to believe the way that you do.

Personal: You should have a reason for writing about this topic.

Provable: Will you be able to obtain all of the necessary evidence? You may not find this out until pre-searching and outlining.

Next, make sure that the topic is both RELEVANT and UNIVERSAL.

Meaning, everyone will be able to understand and relate to it.

Other ways to pick a topic:

Do some research and ask yourself: What is the point of this article/study/statistic?—This may lead you to look beyond the obvious towards the subpoints the writer is attempting to convey.

Turn an axiom on its head—take an accepted idea and advocate its opposite (example: strike while the iron is cold)

Not so trivial pursuit: take a pet peeve and while the minor problem might not merit an entire oratory topic, if pursued to its origins may represent a larger, more general issue (example: fully able people parking in handicapped spots → taking advantage of the less fortunate)

Shakespeare didn't write the first *Hamlet*, just the best one.

Personal Inventory: movies, songs, books, passions, bad habits, pet peeves, politics, quotes, etc. can inspire a topic

Example: Carly Rae Jepsen's "Call Me Maybe" can be about risks, decision-making, and/or poor grammar, which can be translated into the topics: We don't take enough risks, we value practicality over passion, and we've lost our sense of language

Example: "The Dark Knight" is about Batman, who protects morality. A topic you can derive from that is that heroism is its own reward

Sources: NPR, NY Times, UTNE reader, Story Corp, Alternet, Salon.com → an article can spark an idea

Examples: TED.com, Op-Ed articles → speeches or articles with a topic already can be a basis for a speech

Symbols/Objects: What do they stand for? What is their function? → Create a topic from that

Important questions to ask about a topic:

WHERE is this relevant?

WHAT sources might back you up?

WHO can relate?

Sample topics from NFL finals speeches:

- “And ultimately we as a society are finding more and more ways to turn off internal ears. As Tennessee Williams once commented, ‘Man has an extraordinary ability to create endless ways to avoid listening to his fellow man. And while there may be many ways, we can group most of them into one of two troublesome behavior patterns. We will listen in either a) a selective manner or b) a neglectful manner.’”
- “He later said, ‘It is the artist’s task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.’ That is a lesson we all need to learn. Whatever gifts we’ve been given, whatever strings we have left, we must play on. So, let us wave our bows and our expectations. As we examine how we choose to play our own strings, we begin with the D string—desire. Clearly, too many people lead lives without desire. They do what they don’t care about, and they don’t care about what they do. Especially when it comes to saying ‘I do.’”
- “We have become a sex-obsessed society, and the sizzle of sex is sometimes sparking where it shouldn’t. Our obsession is revealed in two ways. First, we fixate on sex and become desensitized in the process. And secondly, we legitimize sex and make it acceptable in areas where it doesn’t belong.”
- “So the industry posed itself the question of how best to keep us occupied with matters of small intrinsic value and came up with the following solution: anywhere that the public turns to keep itself entertained, we will reintroduce the freaks that kept them so enthralled at school when they were younger. So, they did. And they did it in such a pervasive manner it led journalist Carl Bernstein to proclaim, “The media is a freak show.” So, today we will examine three kinds of freaks inherent in the media: jock rash, the rock and fuzzy mirrors. Welcome to the freak show. Please try not to point, star, or throw anything at me while I’m speaking.”
- “No, jerkaphobia is not the fear of running into Howard Stern in a dark alley. Jerkaphobia is the fear of failure. The reality is nobody wants to be seen as a failure. And although it is debatable where our fear of failure comes from, we do know this. It causes us either to recreate our reality or to simply avoid it.”

Research

Systematically searching for information and knowledge

Why research is important:

- Supports your argument
- Used to inform yourself and others
- Improves credibility
- Keeps you from embarrassing yourself
- Gives you more choices
- Gives good reason to trust you
- Aids with confidence

Dailies: find details

Magazines: justification (gives more background, a wider scope)

Books: fiction & nonfiction

Expert: expertise

*use a variety of sources

*research is NOT plagiarism

How to research:

First, do a presearch brainstorm (ask yourself: What am I looking for, Where can I find it)

Once you have selected your topic, conduct broader, topic-based research (example: History) and use your research to help you decide where you want to go with the topic.

Once you have formulated the arguments, conduct claim-based research (example: People do not appreciate history) to find research that proves your claim.

Google: also includes Google scholar, books, trends (*how many people are searching the topic at a given time*), and news (*with Google news, you can subscribe to alerts for a keyword in the news*)

Databases: LexisNexis, Ebsco, and findarticles.com can lead you to some very valid research

Boolean Phrase: helps you research more accurately

Bookmark or save *everything!* (You never know where you are going to go with your oratory throughout the year, and it's better to be safe than sorry!)

Read, highlight, and take notes on your articles (This will make your job a lot easier when you go back looking through your research)

Figure out the fit (How does this apply to your topic/where in your outline might you put it—the problems, causes, effects, impacts, solutions, intro, conclusion, etc.)

Ask yourself: What is the point of this article/study/statistic?

Citing Research:

Stats/Facts: Publication title + date

Journal/Magazine: Publication title + issue

Book: Author + Book title + release date

Person: Name + Credibility + date

*Always cite your research

Hard Evidence: stats/facts	Soft Evidence: anecdotes/quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washington Post • NY Times • Scientific American • NPR • Christian Science Monitor • LA Times • Gallup • Google News • Google Scholars • Lexis Nexis • Pew Center • University-Sponsored Studies • Factiva • The Drudge Report • Newsmap.jp • AlterNet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This American Life • Oprah.com • UTNE Reader • Psychology Today • Story Corp • Mindbodygreen.com • TED • Chicken Soup for the Soul • Mother Jones • Slate • ODE Reader • Questia

*You can also use the sources at the bottom of the Wikipedia pages to find research.

Types of credibility:

Pathos: emotional credibility (narratives/stories)

Logos: logical credibility (stats/data → watch out for certain sources that might be skewed due to opinions)

Ethos: personal credibility (nonverbal)

Types of Evidence

The Funny Example: often absurd, far-fetched, but nonetheless real. It loosens up the audience, gets them on your side, “sneaks up on them” in terms of getting them to at least identify the problem you are addressing

The Hypothetical Example: not from real life, often exaggerated for effect or for the sake of making the point. Use sparingly and never without acknowledging it as hypothetical. If you do not supplement this with real examples, your speech will remain hypothetical

Level One Example: the real example that is not funny. It clarifies your point and alerts the audience to the possible problem

Level Two Example: the real example that shows serious consequences

Level Three Example: the real example that shows tragic or disastrous consequences

Story: an extended example which involves real people and gives us insight into their lives at a meaningful, perhaps critical moment. Stories must be chosen carefully and used sparingly because they take up precious time. They allow an audience to build an emotional connection with specific people and make the problem more real

Statistics: Sources must be credible and cited. Statistics appeal to the person who needs hard facts to be persuaded. They establish significance and commonality. It removes the problem from the realm of the personal. However, a statistic that says 20% of Americans are obese does NOT say that 80% of Americans are in shape

Testimony: citations of research studies, expert opinions, etc. via quotations and paraphrases. Sources must be credible and cited. Testimonies appeal to the person who feels more comfortable having some authority support what you are saying. They enable listeners to be sure that they are not just listening to a speaker’s take. However, the use of authorities is not a substitute for the speaker’s own thoughts, but reinforcements, reassurances, and clarification for the audience.

There are four kinds of learners/thinkers/listeners—none of whom you want to alienate

1. Concrete random listeners

- a. Makes intuitive leaps; likes open possibilities and rich environment
- b. Wants to know what it means in the long term
- c. Wants to hear the effects, illustrations-humorous or serious; wants rich language
- d. 30% of I.E. coaches thought and listened this way; 21% of debate coaches

2. Abstract random listeners

- a. People-people who evaluate experiences and are concerned with feelings
- b. Want to know why they should care about the problem
- c. Want humor and stories, personal examples and involvement
- d. 42% of I.E. coaches thought and listened this way; 10% of debate coaches

3. Concrete sequential listeners

- a. Prefer hands on approaches and practical material; they like an easy process
- b. Want to know how the solutions will work
- c. Want practical applications, solid solutions, and tight organizations
- d. 17% of I.E. coaches thought and listened this way; 33% of debate coaches

4. Abstract sequential listeners

- a. Prefer what is substantive and rational; looks for organization; fosters the intellect
- b. Want to know what the evidence says
- c. Want facts and stats, expert opinion, logical order, and exact language
- d. 1% of I.E. coaches thought and listened this way; 36% of debate coaches

Structures

Oratory is a very structured event. You don't have to follow one of these basic methods of organization, but you do need some form of organization, and these are widely used structures. The structure is important so that an audience can more easily follow your oratory.

Cause-Effect-Solution (CES)

Include 2 causes, effects, and solutions that correlate. (For example: the first cause is the cause of the first effect, which can be solved by the first solution). You would use this if you had a somewhat self-explanatory topic and want to go into more depth of the roots of the issue and its impacts.

Outline:

Cause

C1

C2

Effect

E1 (of C1)

E2

Solution

S1 (for C1)

S2

1. Problem-Cause-Solution (PCS)

Explain the problem and its impact, at least 2 causes, and solutions that parallel these problems (like in the CES method). You would choose to use this method if your topic was somewhat hard to explain, and you felt the need to go into more depth about what you're proving.

Outline:

Problem

P1

P2

Cause

C1 (of P1)

C2

Solution

S1 (for C1)

S2

***solve for the cause, not the problem*

2. Two-Pronged/Apple Valley Method

Here, you would simply take the first cause and effect, or problem and cause, and group them together into their own point. So it would go: Cause & Problem/Effect, Cause & Problem/Effect, Impactful Story (otherwise known as a “Just Talk” section), and Solutions. You might use this method if your problem had two clear facets.

Outline:

Analysis A: Addresses key area

Analysis B: Addresses another key area

7 minute summary (usually through a pathos- driven example)—a lot of times this story addresses the impacts of the problem

Solutions: Solve for both aspects of the problem

Cause-Effect-Solution Example:

“What I Learned from the 2008 Election” by Kristina Mani, Stuyvesant HS, 2011-2012

I am such a go-getter that as a freshman, I ran to be vice president *in the 2008 student government election*. But like the state of Alaska, nobody knew anything about me. So, I did a few things to get noticed. I started my own reality show, got a tour bus, and lots of red suits. My campaign slogan? KRISTINA MANI: MILF FOR PRESIDENT. Miraculously intelligent little freshman. My foreign policy? That I could see New Jersey from my home. As New Yorkers, we have to keep an eye on them. And while I was getting plenty of attention, the school’s Gallup polls had me in 2nd place behind a foreign exchange student from Hawaii. So like any tech-savvy maverick, I got on Facebook and gathered enough dirt on his political interests, extracurricular activities, and friendship with Joe, the high school plumber. By lunch the next day, our Hawaiian friend was on the first flight back to his home country and I was on top.

Then the next morning, I picked up the school’s newspaper only to discover I had lost the election. But like *any* speech girl in a red suit with a fierce up-do, my attempt to win the election was hardly unique. Our culture applauds success in such a way, that we will go to almost any lengths to achieve it. Now, don’t get me wrong. Put a girl in a red suit and she will take over the world and it is important to strive towards our full potential. But the problem comes when hunger for success compromises our values, our integrity. As evidenced by the Enron CEO scandal, author of *A Million Little Pieces*, James Frey, and culture icon Rebecca Black, *achievement is losing value*. So why do we do it? Well, let’s first discuss the causes of our compromising nature and take a look at how our values get lost. Then we can finally find out how to make success something worth respecting.

Wanna know a secret? The current student government president has 127 Facebook friends. I have 3000! Let’s face it. The evolution of social media has skewed our understanding of achievement. You won first place at last week’s

tournament? Great, but how many people liked your Facebook status about it? How many congratulatory tweets did you get? Internet memes? Does Forensics Fox even know who you are? No? Well too bad because according to Web Entrepreneur Dave Pell, the internet measures everything. And we are all slaves to those measurements. In his article titled *I Don't Care if You Read this Article*, Pell contends (and with that much sass) that while a large audience or readership is certainly an accomplishment, it doesn't necessarily reflect the worthiness of anyone's work. Sadly, in the age of social media, quantity always trumps quality.

Which is odd, considering that from a young age, our teachers, role models, and parents constantly assure us "just do your best" – but if you don't become a doctor...we won't love you. As we eventually learn, our "best" isn't always good enough. Because in order for our efforts to be validated, there must be a clear winner and a clear loser in the end. As Dr. Wayne Goldsmith explains in his book *Winning*, "we live in an intensely driven society that strongly believes in the 'fairness' of unequal outcomes." And as a result, we have to come to conflate winning with success. Need proof? Just turn on your television. You only really succeeded as a singer if you have *The Voice*. You only really lost weight if you are the *Biggest Loser*. But would you say your entire forensics experience was a waste even if you didn't get the 1 today? If you learned a lesson, found your confidence, formed new friendships over four years of competing, then I'd say you were pretty successful.

In his aforementioned book *Winning*, Goldsmith contends that while we view winning and losing as end points or final destinations, they are actually gateways to an obsessive relationship to competition that can have negative effects. For example, as seen in the Georgia State Testing Scandal, when we place more value on product over process we undermine the value of ethics and integrity. Atlanta public school teachers were changing answers on statewide tests. 82 educators admitted to cheating over the past ten years. On one math test alone, 27 out of 70 answers were corrected by the teachers from wrong to right. And as test scores rose, guess what else did? Teachers' paychecks. Hope you enjoyed that trip to Cancun, Mr. Wilson. Billy still thinks a ninety degree angle...is just really warm. Ultimately, the only thing

we've learned from the teachers in Atlanta is just how damaging a false sense of success can be for both students and themselves.

Additionally, as a result of equating winning with success, smart and talented people often fall prey to foolish dangerous actions. Early one cold, winter morning, I walked into English class, tired, stressed, and feeling overwhelmed, I collapsed into my desk—right next to Cathy. Cathy had straight, shiny blond hair and wore perfectly coordinated outfits. She was so together and I felt ridiculous in my sweatpants and messy bun. As I ranted about my headache and SAT preps, Cathy, without hesitation, reached into her bag and pulled out the ADHD medication, Adderall. But unlike those prescribed the drug, Cathy abuses it, to stay up, to study all night, to reach her dream: getting into Yale. As the year went on, the medicine killed her appetite, causing her to lose weight until she looked like a skeleton. Her skin took on a strange, grayish tone and her eyes turned blood red. This classmate that I put on a pedestal, the picture perfect teenage girl, deteriorated before my eyes. Sadly, Cathy continues to compromise her health and safety for her dreams of success.

With such an intense focus on succeeding, we not only lose sight of what we really want, but who we are.

So, how can we restore the value of success? We have to change the way we think about success. We must learn to recognize even the most seemingly ordinary of accomplishments. If what we do makes us proud, it should be called success. Baking cookies that don't burn? Success. Beating my sister at Wii tennis? Success. Persuading my sister to eat the cookies I did burn and beating her at Wii tennis? Success. The point is define success on your own terms.

Finally, success might mean something different to each of us, but our commitment to integrity should be universal. An honest and fair approach to achieving your goals might require more effort and believing in the power of hard work might sound too cliché to actually do, but we must not forget the old adage: anything that is easy to get is not worth having. So, make an effort to ignore short-cuts because success is soul-nourishing when honestly earned. Let's reach great heights with our integrity intact.

While we should make something of ourselves, we sometimes go to extremes to reach success. There seems to be no limit to how far we'll go. But if we lose sight of who we are, our accomplishments are worth less. So, earn your way to the top, and do it with dignity. That way, when you accept that Oscar, or get a million hits on Youtube, or even become Student Body Vice President, you can proudly accept success with integrity.

Problem-Cause-Solution Example:

“Pardon Me: You’re Sitting on My Schadenfreude” by Michael Murray, Holy Ghost Prep, 2005-2006

Picture me in the sixth grade: eight inches shorter and 60 pounds heavier with glasses—thick black ones. No ladies mistook me for Chad Michael Murray. I had friends...one... his name was Patrick. Patrick and I had an interesting relationship. I hung out with him at lunch and recess. He sat behind me in class and punched my arm. It was tough love. Or at least that’s what I told myself it was. And that’s because what was really going on is that I was getting picked on, bullied—call it what you want. The bottom line is that I was taking the punches to make him feel batter.

I remember this past December, while surfing hardcore bodybuilding websites, I came across a contest for the world’s strongest man. It read in bright, bold, flashing letters, “The weak get eaten.” Patrick and his bullying embody this philosophy. The weak get eaten by the strong so the strong can get stronger. Patrick destroyed my self-confidence and built up his own. Even if his report card wasn’t great, at least he wasn’t me. In those days, I didn’t really know the word for what was going on—other than thinking that Patrick was a jerk. Today I do. It’s called schadenfreude—no, not Sigmund Freud, schadenfreude—rejoicing in the misfortunes of others and even, maybe just a little, helping those misfortunes along. Unfortunately, it’s more common than we realize and, even more unfortunately, it’s something that we ourselves sometimes engage in. Each of us has his own “inner Patrick” which can damage the quality not only of another person’s life, but even our own. So, today, I’d like to dismiss this idea that in order to lift ourselves up we need to put others down. First, we’ll see some of the ways we get a boost at another person’s expense and how this causes harm not only to them, but to ourselves as well. Then, we’ll look at a better alternative—lifting people up. If you can do this and follow my advice I promise you’ll find it within yourselves to truly become the world’s strongest person.

Poet Robinson Jeffers states, “Cruelty is a part of human nature,” and boy ain’t dat the truth, people love to put others down. But, psychologist G. Jeffrey MacDonald explains why. In his article, “Why Are They Smiling” he states, “When it seems beneficial for a person to be cruel, the cruelty of an action becomes hidden by the benefit.” In other words, who cares who gets hurt? After all, the weak get eaten, right? And if it pumps you up—go for it, right? That’s what we mean by schadenfreude.

We see this in the kind of reality television, which Brad Waite and Sara Booker, two university psychologists, have renamed “Humilitainment.” Here’s the deal: put someone on a show and make him or her look stupid, incompetent, or cheesy. But let’s face it. From skating and Dancing With the Stars, who can neither skate nor dance, nor star, to any person ever on Jerry Springer, to Trading Spouses: meet your new mommy, “humilitainment” sells. As a New York Times editorial pointed out this month, even American Idol banks on the embarrassment of starry eyed and musically challenged people. Even Simon Cowell quips, “I love the idea of giving someone 15 minutes of fame and then taking it away.”

It gets worse when we see it in our own lives. It happens whenever we spread rumors, however innocent they might seem, or when we ourselves take on the bully persona and belittle another for any reason, just to feel some senseless gratification. We feel better when we can slander another person to make ourselves look better, but really what is that saying about us? We need to bring them down to our level. If that’s the case, how far down are we? This occurs whether or not we even realize it. Subconsciously, we feel better when we get “one-up” on another person. Now even if we aren’t the ones who are putting others down, we might be guilty of enjoying their misery.

The word schadenfreude has become so pronounced (and mispronounced) in our society that it appeared in over 400 articles in 2004, author John Portman wrote a book about it entitled “When Bad Things Happen to Other People” and the award winning Broadway musical Avenue Q has a song about it, “Straight A students getting Bs, exes getting STDs, football players getting tackled, CEOs getting shackled,

schadenfreude.” And in our own forensics world, does this phrase sound familiar? “Oops, the superstar forgot her intro, at least I have a chance to make finals.”

You see, the problem comes to focus when we derive a false sense of “I feel good” or “I’m on top of the world” when others are brought down low. Take for example the story of the Houston Astro pitcher Russ Springer who hit the who hit the heavily jeered and heavily juiced Barry Bonds with a fastball, only to leave the stadium to a standing ovation of nearly 30,000. Those 30,000 are joining so many others in taking pleasure of a star brought low. Or most tragic of all might have been the story of an elderly man, already burdened with a heart condition, who went on a hunting trip. His eyesight must have failed him when he mistook one of his companions for a bird, and shot him.

Okay, we laugh when someone spills coffee on himself, trips and drops everything, or when the Vice President of the United States shoots someone. The truth is it’s funny, but a problem arises when we start to desensitize ourselves to the pain of other people to the point where we not only begin to ignore their pain, but even to inflict it.

At its worst, Steven Reiss in his recent study of the impact of schadenfreude, warns that because society today feels it is so okay to humiliate and to be humiliated, a passive enjoyment of tragedy can lead even to worse cases of aggression. Such is the case where a few months ago, three Fort Lauderdale teens stooped so low as to attack Florida’s homeless, with baseball bats, for what Scott Russell, a Fort Lauderdale police officer, described as “a senseless sport,” sending two to the hospital and one to the morgue. “It looked like they were laughing and finding great joy in what they were doing, which made it more horrific.” These kids preyed on those who were already humiliated by society, for what? For a few laughs.

Now I know that no one in this room is likely to take a baseball bat to anyone. And I know simply feeling relief at not being the victim of misfortune is part of being human. But when we feel good about ourselves compared to the humiliated American Idols or the picked-on kid—when we give in to the gratification of a senseless chuckle—all of our little concessions at best, leave us unfulfilled, and at worst, can lead to moments as terrible as the Florida violence.

So what do we do about our schenproblem? Well after realizing that we sometimes take part in it—we first, need to think twice before somehow feeling entertained when bad things happen to other people; be honest, if the tables were turned, would you want someone to get a boost because of your bad luck? I don't think so. Second—realize that another's loss is never our gain; you know, my muscles do not get bigger if drop a weight on his foot. It doesn't work lie that. They only get bigger if I reach down and pick it up. One of the best ways to experience an emotion is to do just that, to raise people up. As the Talmud tells us, "Kindness is the highest form of wisdom."

Sure, Patrick, the All American pain in the butt, was a jerk. But despite some of my traumatic flashbacks to the sixth grade, I owe him the fact that I realize that I, too, have an inner Patrick that sometimes raises his ugly head. After all, I still think Dick Cheney's shooting someone is funny. Come on, you laughed too. And yes, on that web site, the weak still "get eaten." But we must realize that what may be an advertising catchphrase that works for bodybuilding does not work for person building. We should understand that the best weightlifting that we can do is not in the gym but lifting up the people around us—not building muscles, but building spirits And that's the kind of building that can make you and me the strongest person in the world.

Two-Pronged Example:

“No Doubt About It” by Sarah Weinflash, Montville Township HS, 2009-2010

Remember that kid in your first grade class? The one who announced to everyone that wasn't physically possible for Santa Claus to travel around the whole world in just one night? The Jewish kid? Hi. It just didn't make sense to me. How could somebody believe something so unrealistic? And how could there be .7 of a house? The tooth fairy, on the other hand, was serious business. Until one day when my cousin told me that the tooth fairy wasn't real, and I was traumatized. And it was probably the most devastating for me because it was then that I realized that I had to figure out what to believe and what to be skeptical about. By becoming open to the act of doubting, we find ourselves able to question whether the truth is absolute and if everyone is to be trusted. Because you have to know that your big brother is lying when he tells you that gullible isn't actually a word in the dictionary. Because it is, I checked. So today, we will first examine how our lack of doubt can keep us close-minded and next, how it leaves us too vulnerable. Then we will examine the impacts and solutions to get our doubt on. Because if adults still believed in the tooth fairy, my grampie would be super steamed he wasn't rich.

The night after I lost my first tooth, I was a tiny bit skeptical of whether or not the tooth fairy would really come. But, that next morning when I looked under my pillow, and somehow magically my tooth was gone and one *whole shiny quarter* was in its place, I was *sure* she was real. There was *proof!* Just like my seven-year-old self, once we see one explanation, we stop questioning other possibilities. We view a little proof as absolute. Thomas Kuhn explains in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, that our educational system treats science as fact, and not something to be questioned or modified. And how could we have advanced if we hadn't doubted what we thought to be fact? For a long, long time, there was no doubt that the universe revolved around the earth, which was flat... clearly. And, if it weren't for Abraham Lincoln and the rest of the Union doubting the conventions of

their culture, who knows where our country would be in terms of racial equality. In 1899, the US Patent Office released announced that, “Everything that can be invented, has been invented.” Good thing Valdemar Poulsen (among others) didn’t listen, because a year later he was granted a US Patent for the first sound recording device—revolutionizing the way that we communicate forever. I mean really, where would we as a society be without artists like Miley Cyrus. If I could only imagine taking The Climb to such a wonderful world where I am not forced to call her an 'artist'. Viewing truth as absolute leaves little room for doubt, and thus, little room for progress.

As I said, when I found out that the tooth fairy wasn’t real, I was in shock. Who was stealing my teeth? And what were they doing with them? If we don’t allow doubt into our lives, we leave room for others to take advantage of us. David Smolin and his wife provide a heartbreaking example. The two of them were fortunate enough to be able to adopt two orphaned girls from India. But what they didn't know, was that these girls were not really orphans—they were stolen from their families, and sold on the black market for a large profit. Nobody has ever thought to doubt an agency that does such charitable work. But as you can see, we have a *lot* of reasons to doubt, and it just gets worse. According AMFOR.net, every year 5,000 babies are adopted illegally throughout the United States. A Spanish proverb articulates, “El que sabe nada de duda nada”. “He who knows nothing, doubts nothing”. Though I know that these cases may be a little bit extreme, this concept is not only apparent in extreme cases. For example, study after study proves that there is indeed a correlation between the rising amounts of carbon dioxide in the air and increasing global temperatures. But correlation does not always equal causation. Of course this does not mean that we shouldn't continue to cut back on emissions; cluttering our atmosphere with gaseous toxins can't possibly be beneficial to our environment. However, a study on swivel.com showed a distinct relationship between increasing global temperatures and decreasing number of pirates. So what can we derive from this data? That pirates secretly conspire with Eskimos? I hope not. I know it sounds ridiculous, but we must decide for ourselves which

information to rely on. Because, unfortunately, there are some people out there who will take advantage of those who don't doubt them.

Doubt has powers far greater than you might imagine. In fact, it can save lives, and no one knows this better than Kenneth Foster, a man put on death row under Texas's Law of Parties. This law states that anyone accompanying a perpetrator, knowingly or unknowingly, should have anticipated the crime. Kenneth Foster was the driver in a drive by shooting that he did not know was going to take place. But since he was driving the car, courts suggested he should have known that his friend would pull the trigger and therefore, deserved the same conviction as his friend--death. Soon, activists all over the country became outraged. Questioning the validity of the Law of Parties, thousands began to campaign for Foster's life, and after much hard work, Governor Perry pardoned Foster just seven hours before he was scheduled to be lethally injected. If protesters hadn't doubted the value of the law, or Governor Perry had taken just a few more hours to decide that the law was unjust, Kenneth Foster would be dead.

Doubt comes in a variety of forms, ranging from a child's doubt over toothfairy to an activist's doubt over the justice of a law. But no matter the subject of our doubt, the ability to question often leads to positive results. So, after realizing the tooth fairy's a cheapskate, I decided to invite doubt into my life, but here's where I had to ask myself: maybe it's not about doubting more, but doubting *smarter*. What causes me to believe what i believe? Is my knowledge based upon intrinsic evidence or just well thought out assumptions? Once I acknowledged that just because somebody seems like a nice person doesn't mean what they say is necessarily true (mother), it became easier to decipher the fact from the ficticious. Maybe you can start by checking out the ideas of a philosopher you've never heard of before and realizing that there are so many different ideas in the world that haven't been publicized as much as that stupid balloon boy story. Maybe the best thing that you can do is just stay impartial to what you hear or read, take in multiple perspectives, and step out of your comfort zone a bit! If you normally MSNBC, flip to the O'Reilly Factor on Fox for a change... or don't. Once we take in multiple perspectives can we

start to skeptically, but intelligently form opinions. It doesn't take a lot of effort to have a little bit of doubt.

According to Buddhist tradition, the last words of the Buddha were, "Doubt everything. Find your own light." And today we've realized just that. Asking questions is a positive first step in this direction, even if it means that the tooth fairy is only real in my heart. After examining the problems, impacts and solutions of our lack of skepticism, we've all learned that doubting doesn't necessarily correlate with pessimism (or pirates), and without it we would be left narrow-minded and defenseless. And there's no doubt about that.

When discussing the **causes**, consider:

- *What individual actions might have generated the problem*
- *What organizational actions might have generated the problem*
- *What individual actions might have allowed the problem to continue and fester*
- *What organizational actions might have allowed the problem to continue and fester*
- *What mindsets and attitudes might have allowed the problem to begin, continue, and fester*
- *What barriers might have blinded us to problems*

When addressing **the problem/effects/impacts**, remember to:

Layer the harms, moving from lighter examples to heavier, more serious ones. We should see that what once impacted those outside of our lives now hurts us.

When naming the **solutions**, you should:

Tell us what we need to do, readjust or reconsider. Tell us what to think and what we should accept and reject. Solutions move in two directions: 1) "Out there"—what they do/think, and 2) "In here"—what I must do/think.

Body Paragraph Organization

State your claim

Explain what you mean

Support your claim with researched evidence

Summarize the point

Example:

1. State: Ice cream is the best.
2. Explain:
 - a. Ice cream is my favorite dessert.
 - b. Ice cream is sweet and yummy.
3. Support:
 - a. Desserts Daily: 75% of Americans surveyed claimed ice cream was their favorite dessert.
 - b. Johnny, 5: "I love ice cream more than I love anything else!"
4. Summarize: Ice cream appeals to a wide range of people.

I love ice cream—it's the best! Both sweet *and* yummy, it is by far my favorite dessert. But I'm not the only one who thinks it's so good. Johnny, age 5, elaborates, "I love ice cream more than I love anything else!" And Johnny speaks for over half the country. According to Desserts Daily, 75% of Americans surveyed chose ice cream as their favorite dessert. Ice cream appeals to a wide range of people and is clearly the best choice in dessert.

Argumentation Theories

Monroe Motivated Sequence

A technique that is the most commonly used persuasive structure.

1. Get the **attention** of the audience
Gain favorable attention and direct it toward the main idea of your speech.
2. Establish a **need** for them to want to listen. Convince us that harms are accruing as a result of the problem. We can be harmed physically, socially, financially, morally, or intellectually.
Because of certain harms that exist or are forthcoming, attend the need step in any of the following ways:
 - a. *Urge a change*
 - b. *Demand preservation of the status quo*
 - c. *Inform (the audience's ignorance is the issue)*
3. Offer **satisfaction**—a solution to the problem that eliminates the harms and its causes
Propose an action and/or belief, and get the audience to understand your point and why the suggestions are crucial
4. Offer a **visualization**—an example of someone who suffered harmful effects but who now, having employed the solutions, is free of the problem
Should project the audience into the future so that they are impressed with future conditions. The imagery must be vivid and can be carried out in three ways:
 1. *Positive Method: describing conditions that will exist in the future if your proposals are carried out, if your solutions are implemented. Let us see a better world.*
 2. *Negative Method: describing conditions as they will be in the future if your conditions are not carried out*
 3. *The Method of Contrast: combining the two previous methods, beginning with the negative and ending with the positive.*

5. Suggestion an **action**—advising us to go forth to embrace the cure and to try to avoid the problem in the future

Translate the desire created in the visualization step into a definitely fixed attitude or belief, or to galvanize it into overt action. Focus the audience's thoughts and feelings onto the general theme, leave them with it and in the proper mood, inspire them to change with pride—decisively.

Challenge or Appeal: challenge them again to do what needs to be done

Summary: recap your main points, so that they audience's memory of your oration is refreshed

Quotation: end with a statement by someone significant who agrees with you all the way

Illustration: end with a simple story that captures your speech's kernel

Inducement: urging the audience in more emotional ways (sometimes even with quick jabs of evidence)

Pathos, Logos, & Ethos:

Pathos: emotional appeal. This means adding in soft evidence, such as jokes, anecdotes, and quotes.

Logos: logical appeal. This means putting in hard evidence like statistics and scientific studies, and making sense in your sentences. (i.e.: don't say "Never sleeping makes you happy". Instead, say: "Getting 8+ hours of sleep keeps you alert".)

Ethos: credibility of the speaker. This means standing up straight, acting like you know what you're talking about, and using credible sources (rather than wikipedia or spikeyflash.com)

Claim + Data + Warrant = Argument

Claim: What you're saying

Data: What backs up your claim

Warrant: Why do we care?

Argument: convincing people to agree with your point of view

Give *reason* to change & different ways how to:

→Cognitive (thoughts)

→Emotional (i.e.: baby fetuses)

→Behavioral (i.e.: don't bump into people)

Extrinsic: doing stuff for external awards

Intrinsic: doing stuff for yourself

The OO Flow (Ooooh Ahhhh)

Ooooh: means that we need to feel the seriousness of the problem

First, its mildly annoying nature

Next, its increasing gravity

Ahhhh: means that we need to see a way out of its problem

First, with suggestions that calm us down and point our behavior in the right direction

Then, with an example of those who overcame the problem by employing the solutions

The audience's journey

1. Indifference or uninvolved curiosity
2. Alertness and awareness of a potential problem
3. Agreement that the problem exists
4. Appreciation of the seriousness of the problem
5. Anger—even outrage—that such a situation is allowed to exist
6. The urgent desire for a solution to the problem
7. Reassurance that a solution exists/satisfaction that things are, or can be made, right

“C” your way to success in OO

Catch the attention of your audience

Connect the attention to the main idea

Clarify the thesis

Concern the listener about the topic

Concede part of the topic—you’re not solving for everything

Cut down your ideas into a preview

Clinch the intro with an interesting ending

Classify the problem areas

Corroborate the significance and harmful impact of the problem areas

Caution us about the incidental and cumulative harm

Claim the reasons why the problem exists and persists

Cure the problem and eliminate the causes by offering solutions

Comfort us by offering a visualization of someone who has triumphed by following the solutions given

Conclude by summarizing the topic and/or main points

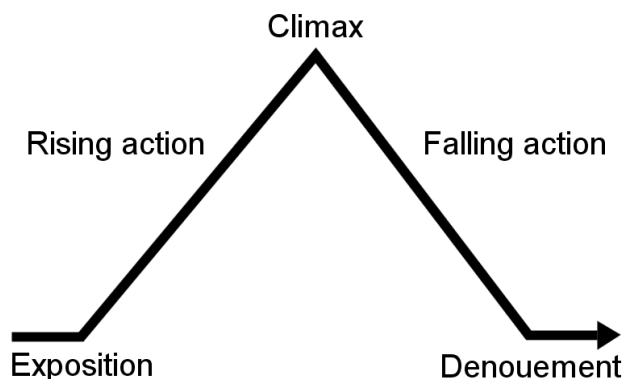
Clinch by persuasively inspiring us to reach the goal by referring back to the attention step or somehow ending creatively

Dramatic Structure

Effective Dramatic Structure

- Is complete
- Is deliberately shaped (Don’t start talking about your dog, end up talking about your teacher)
- Has variety (quiet/funny; passionate/logical)
- Engages and maintains interest
- Is internally consistent

Freytag’s Pyramid:



As you engage in the writing process ask:

- Does each part have a dramatic arc?
- Does the whole have a dramatic arc?
- What are my peaks and valleys?
- What stylistic choices (from later lectures) will best serve my text, my method, and my dramatic structure?

Principles of Conducting Textual Analysis

1. What do you observe: gathering the facts
2. What parts stand out to reflect the whole?
 - a. Joke
 - b. Motif
3. What patterns emerge from these parts?
4. What is the main argument?
 - a. Doesn't have to be the same argument the speaker give
5. What are the implications of these arguments?

Introduction

Sets the stage for what's to come

First impressions say a lot, but don't mean everything

1. Attention-Getting Device (AGD)
2. Link to Topic
3. Thesis Statement
4. Significance Statement
5. Concession
6. Preview
7. Clincher

AGD: *opening story or hook that comes at the beginning of your introduction*

Examples: fictional/nonfictional story, quotation, series of examples, etc.

*Draws your audience into the speech as you ease them into the topic

Link/Segue: *Connection from AGD to topic*

*Helps the audience get from one thought to another

Thesis Statement: *sums up the speech, can be argued one way or another, addresses the question you're tackling, displays your view of something*

Must answer the following:

1. What is your topic?
2. What is your position?
3. What is at stake (who cares)?

Should be: CLEAR, CONCISE, and DEBATEABLE

Should NOT be: MORE THAN TWO SENTENCES, WISHY-WASHY, or OBVIOUS

*Draws the audience in

Example: Topic—Oratory is an important tradition

Thesis—Oratory is a valuable tradition that should be continued because of its importance in the art of communication

Significance Statement: *describes why your topic matters/why it's important (usually includes a source)*

*Gives context to your audience to get them to care about what you're saying

Concession: *acknowledgement of what your speech is and is not talking about*

*Addresses a counterargument and clarifies your own argument

Preview: *lays out the structure of your speech*

*Gives your audience a chance to know what's coming up

Clincher: *a cute ending to your introduction*

*Optional, but adds a nice touch and can be a source of laughter at the end of the introduction

Marked Introductions:

"You're It"

by Samantha Perrotta, Lake Highland Preparatory School, FL

AGD: When I was a kid, one of my favorite games was tag. You know, someone would be designated as it, and the rest of us would try our best to avoid it, by running away, or by hiding behind things, like a big tree, or an expensive car. You see, if it touched us, we would be the next it. And that was not going to happen. And while I remember fondly falling on my face a few times while trying to escape my sister's clutch, it was a moment of being touched by it that was, quite ironically, the biggest thrill of all. **SEGUE:** And this comes as no surprise. You see all of us enter this world needing to be touched. It is necessary as the air we breathe. **SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT:** Yet, according to Leo Buscaglia, author of "Living, Loving, and Learning," "Too often we underestimate its power," and as in the game of tag, we avoid it. A 2000 study concluded that on average, women over the age of 18 made physical contact with another individual only 12 times a day; men in that same age range average a mere 8. I'm Italian, and in my homeland, people can't keep their

hands off of each other. **LINK:** The power of a touch can be an awesome thing. A head on your shoulder, a squeeze on your arm, or a soothing hug all have the ability to make someone's day brighter, or to change their life forever. **THESIS:** However, in the past decade, we have become a "touch-me-not-society" oblivious of its power. **PREVIEW (with CLINCHER):** First, let's examine why. Next, let's explore the negative effects of avoiding contact as well as the benefits of bestowing it; so that finally, we will know why we must get in touch with it.

"A Tale of Two Goats"

by Sarah Knapp, Morristown High School, NJ

AGD: I'm no stranger to epic battles. I've fought a few humdingers in my time, for instance the calculus chronicle. As super fro function girl I had a duty to protect the world from the slithering subtractess, also known as Mrs. Berfer, my 11th grade calculus teacher, who, as far as I could tell, was decreasing my absolute value. You know, my grade. Armed with my overhead projector and TI83, I approached my reciprocal and she was just sitting there like a bump on my logarithim. I had reached my limit, as my anger approached infinity, I said "Kiss my asymptote! Let's measure the angle between you and demise!" She looked at me and said, "Sarah, I only wanted to ask you about your homework." I felt lower than one over x, as x approaches 0 from the left. I was no longer a great superhero, and Mrs. Berfer, well, she was just a math teacher. **SEGUE:** I know this story is a little derivative, **THESIS:** but, far too often, we find ourselves pointing fingers, exaggerating and demonizing actions making others into super villains. **SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT:** According to *Psychologists for Social Responsibility*, the most significant and persistent cause of conflict is the exaggerated image of the enemy. **PREVIEW:** So, in order to take these villains down, we must look out for the causes and effects before advancing to battle fully armed with our solutions.

“A Single Step”

by James Patrick McGraw, Loyola Blakefield, MD

AGD: There I was, playing in the sandbox, when out of the corner of my eye, I saw the neighborhood bully beating up my friend. I thought for a moment and said to myself, “James, you cannot sit idly by and watch this social injustice!” So, after I finished burying my boogers, I walked up to the bully, rolled the sleeves of my Oshkosh tightly over my bulging muscles preparing to beat the B-Gosh out of him, when I realized that I was about to take on the jolly green giant in a fist fight...Good thing I had my diaper on. You see, I wasn’t the imposing force I am today. And after I composed myself, I cried home to my mom. Once I got there I began to wonder, why couldn’t I step up to that bully? **SEGUE:** Unfortunately, it seems that I’m not the only one who should be asking myself that question. **THESIS:** Today, we don’t see opportunities to make a difference because our culture has led us to believe that you need a spidey sense or nuclear arsenal to setp up. We think stepping up belongs squarely in the realm of superheroes, firebrands, or global leaders, but every day each of us is presented with opportunities because we are simply in the right place at the right time. **SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT:** On March 11, 2005, after Brian Nichols had stormed into an Atlanta courtroom and shot to death the judge, the deputy, and a reporter, he held hostage Ashley Smith in a local apartment complex. After negotiating with him for 26 hours, Smith, a recovering alcoholic, convinced Nichols to turn himself in. But, far too often, we don’t act so courageously. In response to the 1974 controversial murder of Kitty Genevieve, Dr. Stanley Milgram of Yale University conducted an experiment in which he had volunteers electrocute fake patients. 65% of the volunteers watched and did absolutely nothing. As author Mike Davis stated in his article *The Scalping Party*, our “tolerance for atrocity is now enshrined at every level of American culture.” **PREVIEW:** So, it’s no surprise that in the face of our enduring tolerance when the dial points to us, we miss our turns, because we either a) don’t see the opportunities to step up, or b) we see them but avoid them.

Vehicle

A rhetorical device used to color and unify a speech

You begin the speech with it (usually as an AGD) and use it for transitions between points, then conclude the speech with it.

Helps your audience contextualize your ideas

It helps tie the speech together and makes it memorable.

The vehicle *cannot be* FORCED. It should flow naturally throughout the speech and relate to every point in some way.

The vehicle should be RELATED to the topic. Don't just talk about bananas and say "bananas are yellow, just like the pineapples in Costa Rica, where a woman was raped because she wasn't creative enough." Let it help you make the point, not just make jokes.

The vehicle doesn't HAVE to be funny, but it's a good place to bring humor into the speech. Humor is also a great way to open up paragraphs/points and wake people up again.

The vehicle, like the AGD, is exaggerated truth, but still plausible. The exaggeration could add to the humor, and the plausibility helps it still be relatable.

Example:

Topic: We focus on short-term solutions rather than long term ones.

Introduction: I used to deal with problems in the wrong way (too short-term)

Point 1: We need to get to the root of the problem → I tried pulling out the weeds by the tops, and they kept growing back.

Point 2: We get worn out by dealing with the problems so much. → I was too tired to wake up in the mornings, so I decided to sleep when I came home. But then I stayed up late and was tired the next day.

Example:

Topic: We need to embrace the three components that make us fully human—head, heart, and courage

Introduction: Begin with a few lines from the Wizard of Oz, discuss Dorothy’s life journey. To return to her Kansas home she needs to find the scarecrow (head), the tin man (heart), and the cowardly lion (courage), and recognize that they really are integral components to her own self.

Preview: Let’s journey with Dorothy as she tries to find her brain, her heart, and her courage.

Point one: Beginning by talking about the scarecrow, then leading into the discussion of people who are not in tune with their brains or common sense.

Point two: Beginning by talking about the tin man, then leading into the discussion of people who are not in touch with their feelings.

Point three: Beginning by talking about the cowardly lion, then leading into a discussion of people who lack the courage to make tough decisions or who lack what it takes to integrate head and heart.

Conclusion: Dorothy discovers that she can be her own Wiz, just as we can be, if only she would embrace and properly balance out the components—head, heart, and courage—components that can take her anywhere she wants to be.

Conclusion

1. Restates the thesis
2. Recaps the main points
3. Urges us to action again
4. Inspires us to be a part of the solution
5. Links back to the AGD
6. Ends creatively

Transitions

These show your listener how you get from one point to the next

*Transitions can be as long or as short as they need to be—ranging from one word to a full paragraph.

There are different functions/types of transitions:

1. Transition of Movement: Point the listener in the direction that the speaker's thought is going, making a clear, logical connection between two parts

*Example: Passing the buck inhibits progress, and prevents us from evaluating ourselves, identifying problems, and looking for answers. Quite simply, passing the buck is a solution saboteur. **So why do we blame others? Perhaps it would be better to ask: Why not? I mean, let's face it, there are definite benefits to passing the buck. It's easy. It's usually less expensive. It's non-threatening. If someone else is at fault, then I'm not. It's convenient.***

2. Transitions of contrast:

*Example: According to the National Institute of Diabetic and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, more than half of U.S. adults are overweight and more than one quarter of Americans are actually obese. **These statistics, however, hold little meaning for a sizable group, though obviously not the majority, of people in our country.** These are the thousands of people, young and old, who suffer from anorexia and/or bulimia.*

3. Help to summarize where the speaker has been
4. Keep the listening audience from being intellectually "disoriented"
5. Transitions of Order: Enable the listener to discern and follow the order of events and thoughts that the speaker is presenting. These are the easiest to accomplish but the most difficult to accomplish creatively. Be careful not to overdo it, though

Example: First, Second, Firstly, Secondly, Chiefly, Primarily, More/Most Importantly, Here, There, etc.

6. Transitions of relationship: Act as the glue or context that makes clear the connection between the following intellectual pairs:
- a. Idea/Idea
 - b. Idea/Example
 - c. Idea/Statistic
 - d. Idea/Testimony
 - e. Example/Statistic
 - f. Example/Testimony

*Example: Psychologist Mary Contrary states that eating disorders are among the most destructive emotional illnesses facing young women today. **Few things can illustrate this better than the case of Sally Johnson.** Sally was a young, happy, bright teenaged girl.*

Writing Technique

Writer's voice: the product of the words you choose and how you put them together (your voice should be as individual and unique as you are)

How to find your voice:

- Write like you talk (for the most part—be professional, but allow your personality to shine through)
- Make it conversational
- Choose your words carefully
- Remember that you're writing a speech, not just connecting dots between points in your outline (your words have to flow)

Finding flow:

- Give plenty of sign posts
- Transition between subpoints
- Transition between main points
- They say/I say
 - Show the need for a source
 - Give the source
 - Explain what it means and how it connects to your subpoints and thesis

10 Rules for Good Writing

by D. Roberts

1. Prefer the simple description to the elegant
2. Prefer the familiar word to the exotic
3. Prefer ordinary writing style to the romantic style
4. Prefer nouns and verbs to adjectives and adverbs
5. Use picture nouns and action verbs
6. Never use a long word when a short one will do as well
7. Master the simple metaphor
8. Prefer the simple sentence to the complicated
9. Vary your sentence length
10. Use the active voice

Call Me Maybe Writing Theory

BAD Version:

Salutations

We have recently been acquainted

And this is absolutely absurd

But here is my contact information

Please ring me if you desire

BAD Version:

Yo. Call.

GOOD Version:

Hey

I just met you

And this is crazy

But here's my number

So, call me, maybe?

Conversational Writing

1. Simplify sentence structures
2. Eliminate long sentences that are hard to follow
3. Replace bombastic words with listener-friendly ones
4. Insert one or two or three word sentences (here and there)
5. Do not slop on adjectives; choose one fine word over a series of majestic ones
6. Read your speech to your family—if they look confused, then your speech is too confusing

Dignifying and Disneyizing

We have reverence for significant history and literary figures

We are also lured in by less profound but trendier figures—fun and pop

So, use the dignity and flip to the Disney—start with the credible and flip to the current

Example: Homer once said; and today, Homer Simpson agrees

Figures of Speech

Enhance a speaker's writing style

Allegory: a long narrative in prose or verse in which the literal meaning is described as a metaphor. The prose or verse carries an alternate meaning along with the main idea.

Anaphora: figure of repetition that occurs when the first word or set of words in one sentence, clause, or phrase is/are repeated at the beginning of successive sentences, clauses, or phrases (Example: My Republican party today—it is not a conservative party. It is soft on globalism. It is soft on big government. It is soft on the second amendment. It is soft on life.)

Antanaclasis: repetition of words in the same sentence with the words having separate definitions. Also a word used twice to contrast comic ideas. (Example: The lot I chose for my house is a lot bigger than I had realized.)

Anthimeria: can be described as substituting one part of speech with another. Many examples can be found in the works of Shakespeare where he would use an old word in a new way to express his thoughts. (Example: I'll unhair thy head)

Auxesis: is magnifying the importance of something by giving it another name, or heightening a word and using it in place of a common word. Also, it can be the opposite of meiosis. (Example: The defendant described the plaintiff's paper cut as a "wound")

Erotema: a rhetorical question

Hyperbole: an exaggeration used for emphasis, not meant to be interpreted literally

Irony: the use of a word to convey an opposite meaning of the literal definition

Litotes: a deliberate usage of understatement to enhance the quality of what was said. It also expresses a thought by denying the contradictory statement. (Example: It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain)

Meiosis: a lessening of a word, sometimes in a degrading or belittling way. (Example: Vandalism → "Teenaged high jinks" or *Hamlet* → "A play of some interest")

Metaphor: a comparison between two unlike objects without using "like" or "as"

Metonymy: a substitution for an arbitrary or suggestive word in place of what is actually meant (Example: If a lot of rich people are in a room → “There is much wealth in that room”)

Onomatopoeia: making up words that sound like their meaning

Oxymoron: the use of two words whose meanings are contradictory to convey one meaning

Parable: a story meant to teach a moral by use of an extended metaphor

Paradox: self-contradictory, not necessarily a true statement (Example: We know too much for one man to know)

Paralipsis: an emphasis by obvious omission (Example: Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain)

Paronomasia: a play on words like a pun. The words are similar in sound, but not necessarily identical (Example: Having cooked too long, it was a fowl tasting turkey)

Personification: the act of giving human qualities to inanimate objects or animals

Puns: a play on words. There are different forms, such as rhetorical and poetic. They sometimes connect two unlike objects in humorous

Rhetorical Question: to ask a question but not expect an answer

Simile: a comparison between two unlike things using the words “like” or “as”

Synecdoche: where a part stands for a whole (Example: All hands were summoned to the deck → “hands” = sailors)

Humor

Embraces/depends on the unexpected

Consistently evolving

The great equalizer

Aristotle: “Of all types of performance, comedy is the most divorced from true life.”

Mel Brooks: “Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when I fall down an open sewer and die.”

- Escapism
- When bad things happen to someone else
- Absurdist
- Relies on invention
- There is humor in specificity

*Do not telegraph a joke; they seriously have to not be expecting the punch line. Seriously.

Elements of comedy

Character: who is this person? Who is this person in relation to other characters/the audience?

Situation: how does the time and place affect the text and/or character

Text: what is written/directed (joke triangle, consisting of object, listener, and teller)

Why humor is important in oratory:

1. You don't want it to be a snore-atory/bore-atory
2. Methos (Credibility as yourself)
3. Economical and effective persuasive tool
4. Immediate feedback
5. Bonds audience and performer

When are the right times for humor?

At the beginning—to engage your audience, and show us that you are clever

In the midst of discussing something complex or after a barrage of proof—to give us a break

At or near the end—to end with a POW

What kind of humor can be used?

Nothing offensive, foul mouthed, or belittling

Topical

Self depreciative is good because it humanizes you

Humorous quotations

Clever analogies: an off-the-cuff comparison to something else for a useful and funny effect. Example: “The grand canyon is a dimple on Brad Pitt’s face” or “The snow was as white as Michael Jackson’s skin”

Puns

Jokes about current events

Allusions

Short, simple, ironic commentaries, Example: after describing an unsavory event, you can pause and say “heartwarming”

Understatement: drawing humorous/sarcastic attention to something by making it seem less than what it is

Jokes: short and germane

Cliches: using them with irony, Example: Say ‘An apple a day keeps the doctor away’ after a story about a patient hitting her doctor with an apple when he tried to attack her

Overstatement

Portmanteau Words: smushing two words together, Example: Fantastic + Fabulous = Fantabulous

Alliteration: a string of words each beginning with the same first letter

Irony: the difference between what you expect to happen and what actually happens, Example: a baby asks his mom about foreign policy

Misdirection: making it seem as if you are talking about one thing when you are really talking about something else

Clever wording/wit

Dos & Don'ts of Using Humor in Speech

1. DO use humorous stories and jokes that relate directly to the topic of your speech
2. DO make jokes your own
3. DO make jokes your support
4. DON'T laugh at your own story or joke
5. DON'T offend your audience
6. DO joke up—DON'T bully your audience/people for whom we should actually feel sorry
7. DO make the story or joke clear and to the point
8. DON'T distract from your point
9. DON'T just insert jokes—make sure that they flow
10. DO relate the story or joke to the audience
11. DO speak audibly
12. DON'T repeat a story or joke that flops
13. DON'T repeat a story or joke that works.
14. DO tell a story or joke about yourself
15. DON'T use the name of living persons in a story or joke to which the audience can relate

Delivery

The C Word (Control)

1. **Control** your body
Keep your eyes and body still, your gestures purposeful and precise
2. **Control** your words
Articulate the ends of your words and hold the ends on very crucial words
3. **Control** your voice
Use variety and contrast, emphasize what is important, and infuse emotion and thought into your words

This will allow you to control the audience by:

- Fixing them in their chairs
- Making them feel every moment
- Making them trust and follow you

Paralanguage

The use of inflection and modulation to convey meaning

Rule of Thumb: use **contrast**.

Variables—

- Pitch:** high to low (high=excited, low=calm)
- Volume:** loud to soft (loud if you want to audibly arrest your audience, soft if you want to lure them in)
- Rate:** fast to slow (fast if you are talking about something exciting or telling something quickly which builds to a climax, slow if you are deadly serious or establishing a bottom)
- Stress:** word emphasis—highlight words (by raising pitch/volume, stretching it out, etc.)
- Quality:** pulling sound from the entire chest cavity, producing full volume and resonance, to pulling sound from the throat, producing lesser volume and resonance
- Phrasing:** pausing after a few words (to make the point slowly so that it sinks in) to pausing after many words (to build to some climax)
- Articulation:** fuzzy (bad) to crisp (good)
- Duration:** one second per syllable to a few seconds

High Status Delivery

Goal: eliminate low status habits

Low Status Physicality	High Status Physicality
Moving head randomly	Keeping head still
Darting eyes	Keeping eyes still
Looking at empty spaces	Directing one phrase to one person's eyes
Obsessing with notes permitted	Changing expression when moving to another's
Moving body jerkily	Looking at people
Not using gestures	Looking down sparingly at notes, if permitted
Not completing gestures	Moving body
Slumped posture	Using a variety of hand gestures
Unsteady stance (swaying, shifting weight, rocking, twisting)	Extending gestures out, holding them still, returning them smoothly
Frozen positioning	Gesturing above the waist
Blank look	Erect but comfortable posture
Unconcerned about feedback reaction	Steady stance
Dressing for failure (too casual, unmatched, wrinkled, untucked/unbuttoned, unkempt hair)	Facile movement
Not "packaged" before walking up (visibly emptying pockets, visibly adjusting clothing, visibly combing hair)	Moving during transitions in the speech
Unprofessional visuals	Smiling, facial expressions, eyes thinking
No contrast in pitch, volume, rate, and phrasing	Showing concern for the audience
Fuzzy articulation	Comprehension/Appreciation/Adaptation
Lack of emphasis on pivotal words	Dressing for success (conservative, elegant attire, nothing distracting or dangling, neatly styled hair away from the eyes)
Inaudibility	Ready to seize the stage
Memorized sound	Professional visuals
Low energy	High vocal status
No meaning behind words	Meaningful contrast
	Clear articulation
	Emphasis of pivotal words
	Clear projection
	Conversational, friendly sound
	High energy: enthusiastic, passionate
	Subtextual meaning behind the desire feelings/thoughts/memories

Eye Contact

Most important non-verbal tool

1. Look at audience members, one at a time, eye to eye
2. Stay with one person's eye for the length of one phrase
3. Then, move your eyes to another person's eyes.
4. Be sure to change your facial expression somewhat as you switch
5. Do not: look anywhere but EYES
6. Do not: pan the audience
7. Do not: flick, dart, or wander eyes
8. Do not: let eyes go blank
9. Allow your eyes to show thinking—we want to see you process the information as we do and as you say it
10. Allow your eyes to connect with another human being
11. Allow your eyes to say, at the start and throughout, "I like you, I want you to understand, I am confident about my content and my talent, as well as in my ability to give you a great listening experience."
12. Do a subtextual analysis, so that the speaker has decided what he or she desires, thinks, feels, and knows for each line of the speech
13. Use eye contact during silent moments—shift to another person's eyes during a dramatic pause; smile at people who are enjoying humor

Walking the Walk

- NEVER pace
- Staying still is generally good
- Keep speaking as you walk
- Walk normally
- Walk between main points, as well as after the intro, before the conclusion
- Keep yourself open as you walk (don't turn all the way towards the side you are walking)
- Start walking with your upstage foot (if you're walking right, start with your right foot)

Stance

1. When getting out of your chair, stand erect, pause for a few seconds so that people will see you are in control. Then, walk confidently, with a smile, head up, to center stage. Never get up before the judges are finished with the previous contestant's ballot
2. Keep feet comfortably apart—not together, not wide apart, pointed straight
3. Do not sway, do not shift weight, do not rotate, do not rock, do not pace, do not go on tip toe, do not bounce
4. Maintain high status by keeping your shoulders back and by holding your head and carriage high—slumping shoulders forward will make you seem weak
5. Walk during transitions into new ideas. As you walk, look at one person in the direction of your walk. When you find your new place, look at one person on the side where you began (to show that you have not forgotten about them)
6. When finished speaking, pause, then walk confidently to your seat, looking pleased

Tonal Inflection

Tones are like *colors*. For example, an impact story might be purple. However, the whole story shouldn't be purple, or else the audience will tune out. It might start out yellow, fade to green and then blue, grow into light lavender and slowly deepen to a dark purple. It would fade out to red and then orange. It's important to identify these different tones, because they add color and life to the speech.

Contrasts

Every phrase, sentence, claim, and section of the oratory has its own purpose and tone. It is important to identify and highlight contrasts—even small ones—because if the audience feels change and movement, they will be more likely to pay attention. Contrasts will also more strongly clarify the point.

Freytag's Pyramid

Freytag's Pyramid is a dramatic structure that builds up to a climax and falls back down. An oratory is one large pyramid, but each point is a pyramid in itself, and even sentences are pyramids. It is important to identify the climax of the sentence/point/oratory so you know what you're building towards.

Gestures

- Gestures should add to words, not take away from them
- Be versatile and have a myriad of hand gestures (big, small)
- Remember: gestures enliven your presentation and make use of energy that otherwise would manifest itself in annoying tics
- Keep them above the waist
- Hand gestures facing up represent positivity
- Hand gestures facing down represent negativity
- Gesturing in signifies I/me/we/us
- Gesturing out allows the speaker to reach out to the audience during "asides" such as the concession statement
- Do not flick—raise, extend, freeze, and return
- Keep hands comfortably at your sides when not gesturing
- Do not touch your clothing or hair
- Do not clasp yourself
- Use tech RARELY
- Use box gestures (pretend there's a box in front of you and put your hand on it, around it, under it, etc.)
- Use grapefruit gestures (one grapefruit, two, over under, around, etc.)
- Surprise us with gestures—don't become predictable or robotic
- Allow your body to speak for you
- Be natural—do the gestures that come naturally

Subtext

Lines are not just said; they are presented with reasons, thoughts, desires, and memories. So, if you have attached thought, feeling, and memory to every line in your speech, your delivery will be imbued with genuine life.

Answer the following questions:

- (1) What do you really want? What are you trying to accomplish?
- (2) What are your unspoken thoughts/concerns?
- (3) What memories are going through your mind?
- (4) What images/sensory experiences are you subjected to?

Each answer to each question will add an interpretive level that must be woven into vocal and physical delivery. Thus, the most believably performed—and therefore, successfully delivered—line is one that is multi-layered.

Example: “Are you using your car?”

- (1) I must borrow your car immediately
- (2) Mom is at the hospital, dying. I need to get to her—pronto. I’m anxious, nervous.
- (3) The last time you lent me your car I hit a parked car. Shoot. You better not hold this against me. Heck, we are best friends, right?
- (4) I am sweating, standing in 100 degree weather. I am shaking, very nervous. You answered the door drowsy, in your underwear—I woke you up. I hope you can quickly find your keys!

Speech patterns

Speak within your normal range

**Don’t go too high (which can be annoying) or too low (we can’t hear you, and lose some of your words)*

EXPLAIN it to the audience. CONNECT with them. What do you mean? If you try to really persuade your audience throughout the speech, you will be less likely to fall into monotony.

Allow the INTONATION to PROMOTE the CONNOTATION

→ You choose the words you write for a reason; utilize your voice as best you can to give each word a purpose

Volume

Judge the room:

- Size (*louder for larger rooms*)
- Number of people (*louder for larger audiences*)
- Flooring (*carpets absorb sound, tiles reflect it*)
- Account for open windows, blasting ACs, other noises that may conflict with your voice

****You want to hear your voice bouncing off of the back wall**

Test:

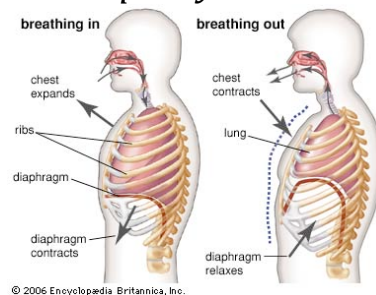
- If you can, visit the room beforehand and deliver a few lines from your speech
- If not, say something when you get to the front of the room (example: ask for time signals, request none, etc) to hear what it sounds like so your first line isn't your first ever in the room

****Don't scream—screaming has less to do with volume, more with intonation ("screaming" is a strain on your voice, and sits in your throat. You will run out of breath very quickly by screaming)**

→ *Instead*: PROJECT through your chest while breathing using your diaphragm

Breathing through the diaphragm

Gives lungs more capacity



1. Lie down (*Most people naturally breathe with their diaphragms lying down. Put a book on your stomach and watch it go up and down → that's what you want*)
2. Stand up, leaning against a wall (*Try to simulate your experience on the floor, but using your hand instead of a book. **Make sure you're not just breathing normally and sticking your stomach out*)
3. Stand up without the wall (*It might take a while to get down, but it gets easier the more you do it*)

Editing

Look for these key factors when editing:

1. Redundancy
 - Ask, “Did I already prove this?”
 - Read it OUT LOUD!
2. Logical flaws
 - Make sure that all of your sources prove the SAME THING
 - Make it flow
 - Peer edit
3. Additional information
 - Make sure that all of the information MUST be included
 - Make sure that the details are relevant
 - “Will somebody be lost if I take this out?”
4. Beautification
 - Choose the right words → vocabulary
 - Be descriptive

Ask as many people as you can to read it over. This is very important, because everyone is going to have a different idea as to what they want to see in the speech. That being said, you don't have to take everyone's advice. If you get the same note more than once, then it's probably a good idea to change it. But ultimately, it's your speech. You do what you think is right.

Vocal Warm-Ups

Vowels: EH-EE, EEEE, AH-EE, AW-OO, YOU, WAH-EE

Fud dud dud dah

Pretend you are a rattle snake and rattle

Tea tick tail dish deal thick nape table hack paw yacht dot yard dart tab
tot dark hah tat lad high tie die rye kite howl noun loud coin loyal dine

Pit pat pit pat pit pat

Cricket critic

Irish wristwatch

Toy boat

We're you well-wishers

Upper roller, lower roller

Unique New York

Stupid superstition

Rubber baby buggy bumpers

The big black bug bit the big black bear and the big black bear bled
blood

Good blood bad blood

She sells seashells by the seashore

Ken Dodd's dad's dog's dead

Red leather yellow leather

The shell-shocked soldier shot his shotgun

A box of mixed biscuits and a biscuit mixer

Double bubble gum bubbles double

Some shun sunshine; do you shun sunshine?

Sheep shouldn't sleep in a shack; sheep should sleep in a shed.

A box of mixed biscuits and a biscuit mixer

Round and round the rugged rock the ragged rascal ran

Eat fresh fried fish free at the fish fry

He sawed six slick slender slippery silver saplings

A swan swam over the swell; swim, swan, swim; a swan swam back over
the swell; well swum, swan.

The sixth sheik's sixth sheep's sick

Theophilus thistle, the successful thistle sifter, in sifting a sieve of unsifted thistles, thrust 3000 thistles through the thick of his thumb. See that thou in sifting a sieve of unsifted thistles, thrust not 300 thistles through the thick of thy thumb.

Amidst the mist and coldest frosts, with stoutest wrists and loudest boasts, he thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts.

The brown cow found a round town in the south country

The trustees decreed that seniors be freed from fees

Martin's mournful music marred many memorable minutes

Noisy new gnats know nothing about naughty knaves

She shuddered and shook at the sight of sheared sheep

Peter Prangle, the prickly prangly pearpicker, picked three thousand packs of prickly prangly pears

Vincent vowed vengeance very vehemently

A skunk sat on a stump. The stump thunk the skunk stunk, and the skunk thank the stump stunk. Which stunk?

A blue trip slip for an eight cent far. A buff trip slip for a six-cent far. A pink trip slip for a three-cent fare.

He asks that the least casks and flasks be first thwacked, next burst, then mixed and heaped around despite all risks and at last swept into the best fixed chests.

You know New York. You need New York. You know you need unique New York.

I am a mother pheasant plucker. I pluck mother pheasants. I am the most pleasant mother pheasant plucker to have ever plucked a mother pheasant. I am not the mother pheasant plucker. I am the mother pheasant plucker's son. And I will be plucking mother pheasants until my mother pheasant plucking days are done.

I slit the sheet. The sheet I slit. And on that slitted sheet I sit.

To sit in solemn silence on a dull dark dock in a pestilential prison with a life long lock, awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock from a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block.

Peer Coaching

How to work on others' speeches:

- Tell them your reasoning behind the critique—*if they understand why you're saying what you're saying, they'll be more willing and likely to change it*
- Don't be mean! *Nobody listens to someone who's mean.*
- Work on a few select parts at one time—*don't bombard them with everything at once*
- Telling them what they do well is equally as important
- Don't show favoritism in a group environment—*everyone has something that they're good at and something they can work on*
- Be specific, and be sure to work WITH them, *for example: if you think it needs more humor, don't just TELL them that, help them come up with jokes*
- Go until they get it right—*there's no point in bringing attention to a flaw if you're not going to correct it*
- Don't give advice on things that they cannot work on anymore, *for example: don't tell them that you don't like their topic the night before districts, that's just mean*
- Know who you're dealing with—*do they take criticism well? Do they ignore it? Do they need your active help or do they prefer to work alone? Do they like efficient work sessions, or do they learn better by taking lots of breaks?*
- Make it fun—*If you make it fun to work, they'll want to work; if they want to work, they're going to get a lot better a lot faster*
- Be confident—*let them know you know what you're doing; people like having a go-to person*
- Go around the room and allow novices to each say one thing they liked about the speech—*Personally, I don't like my novices critiquing speeches until the second half of the year because I feel they need to build a firm sense of humility and respect.*
- Always end on a positive note 😊

How to work on your own speech with others:

- No disclaimers—*don't preface with the speech with why it might be bad*
- Try everything they say—even if you don't like it, think about it, try it out, try to find a way to make it work for you
- Don't protest a comment, *example: "I usually do it differently", they're commenting based on the performance they saw, just as the judge will*
- Stay positive—*working on your speech can be physically and emotionally exhausting, but don't let it get to you*
- Know when you need a break

Example Speeches

“Our Makeover Society”

by Anthony Francomacaro, Holy Ghost Preparatory School, 2005-2006

My Mom has the camera ready, just like every other first day of school. I'm downstairs, dressed like Richy Rich, and waiting for my 7-year-old sister to accompany me on the bus. After many, many, many minutes, and a few choice words from my saintly mother, my sister Sammy begins to descend the stairs. And then we watch in horror as her baby girl walks down the steps with about ten pounds of makeup slathered on her face and wreaking of Britney Spears's "Fantasy" perfume. She looks at us, smiles, and then asks, "Mommy, don't I look beautiful?" As I stare at her, I realize that she is grotesque, but oddly familiar. Is it Britney Spears? No. Is it Mimi Bobeck from the Drew Carey Show? No, that's not it. And then it came to me. My little sister has been transformed into a cross between a drag queen and the mayor of Munchkinland!

After I got over my horror, I did what any brother would do, I laughed. Why? Because a little girl looking like she survived an explosion at a Maybelline Factory is funny! What my little sister, the Maybelline Munchkin, was doing, was playing the childish game of dress up and nothing more. But as I was thinking about it later, I realized that it's not a bad metaphor to describe the approach many of us employ throughout our lives. So often many of us dress up the realities of our lives to take the focus off our issue. Ours has become an airbrush culture where instead of coping with life's unpleasantness and accepting who we are, we avoid our problems, from the mundane to the insidious. Our avoidance comes in two forms: a) covering up life's blemishes, or b) brushing them aside. In the first scenario, our solutions are as artificial as lip-gloss; and the second, our avoidance is far more dangerous than the dust mites under your bed. And, like Joan Rivers, after one too many face lifts, neither one looks good on a t-shirt. So today, let's attack our problem of avoidance

from both sides, and learn how we can stop glossing over—or brushing aside—our problems, and face them head on.

“God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another zounds.” If only Shakespeare were around today! He probably wouldn’t be speaking in rhyming couplets, but he would be appalled by how many of us want to feel good...the superficial way. Psychology today tells us that the Americans are so obsessed with makeovers that those who do not have them often feel left out. For what used to be ungodly sums, we can now augment, insert, enhance, modify, reduce, or suck out with a simple credit card swipe. Think about the TV we watch: Extreme Makeover, The Swan, Pimp My Ride...Americans are truly fixated with makeovers. In the year 2005 more than 10.2 million cosmetic surgery procedures were performed in the US, up 11% from 2004, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and I’m not indicting those who truly need these procedures, the burn victims, or those with birth defects or health issues. The problem lies with those of us who pay for plastic surgery with the expectation that a deeper dilemma of self-image, or relationship, or deeper psychological issue will be addressed. Maybe that is why, a Journal of Psychology reports that those who undergo the knife wind up with more emotional difficulties than those that sent them to the surgical table in the first place. Epidemiological studies conducted in four different countries have shown that there is a two to three fold increase in suicide rate among women who have breast implants for cosmetic reasons. Of course, I’m not claiming that the cosmetic surgery caused the suicide, but rather that whatever underlying psychological issue was present for those women was not addressed or solved by changes their appearances. Simply dressing themselves up in a new face or new body was not enough to deal with the problems that remained, the problems that sadly resulted with their deaths.

But using face-lifts, breast implants, and other forms of cosmetic surgery as substitutes for addressing personal problems is not the only way our makeover society avoids reality. In the real world of harsh facts and tough truths, the child’s game of dress up becomes the grown up game of cover up. Mention that term and what do we think of—politics, of course. Politicians on both sides of the aisle are

guilty of covering up unpleasantries. President Clinton, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman,” little did we know he was talking about Mrs. Clinton. To get out of this predicament, President Clinton lied, changed the definition of sex, and eventually was impeached by the house before he ‘fessed up. President Bush, confronted with this leak, which uncovered Secret Agent Valerie Wilson, allowed Vice President Cheney’s Chief-of-Staff, Scooter Libby, to take the blame. A bigger secret of course is how you rise to the upper levels of government with the name Scooter. Of course the government does not have a monopoly on this practice—although if they did, they’d probably cover it up. The business world can make the government look as pure as...as pure as...well, you get the idea. Just ask Robert and Eva Boyce. With over two million dollars in Enron Stock, Mr. Boyce was looking forward to a very comfortable retirement including travel and putting his six grandchildren through college. That didn’t happen. When Enron wiped away its cover up, it also wiped away Mr. Boyce’s hope for future. At 71, Mr. Boyce works a full time job at a spa and pool company. Travel, his grandchildren’s education, and retirement have all vanished like the smoke and mirrors that was Enron itself. Cover-ups may seem harmless, but when it comes down to it, they hurt every day people like you and me and Mr. Boyce.

But if we do not cover up an issue with an actual or metaphorical airbrush, we simply brush it aside, sweep it under the carpet like an inconvenient dust bunny or turn a blind eye to something we should pay attention to. We feel that if we focus on what’s peachy keen about something, maybe rotten apples will go unnoticed. Consider New Orleans. For years, the city was known for being hot—it was the place to go to if you wanted a week to remember, or forget—depended on how many mint juleps and bourbons you had. But when the hurricane hit, devastating the community, leaving so many helpless—we all began to see the big easy for what it really was—a city in which 30% of the population was poverty ridden, 40% illiterate, and that educationally ranked as one of the weeks in the nation. Because it had been airbrushed and “beautified” for so long, no one wanted to see the city as it was—until Katrina came and wiped away the sparkly beads and exposed its soul.

This cover-up philosophy that applies to a whole city is also seen among individuals. A dad sensing signs that his son might be into drugs, but refusing to believe that his child would traffic in such things, brushes it all aside—until the hospital calls to inform him of his son’s death. My school experienced this very thing a few months ago and believe me, it is not easy to forget. When some of the school community, attended the burial, and looked at the family looking down into the grave, there was no illusion: there was heartbreaking sadness and there was deep regret that signs, which could have saved Joseph’s life, were ignored, brushed aside.

Now I know I am only 16, I haven’t studied psychology or written books on this subject. But things do make sense to me. So, maybe I can leave you with a few thoughts, things I picked up from my research, and things I have learned from others. First, in terms of paint jobs, we must realize that no amount of dressing up or lip changes who we are. Kate Winslett, after appearing on the cover of British GQ, was shocked that the editors had airbrushed her hips to look thinner and altered with her cheekbones to give them more definition. She voiced her opinion loud and clear: “I’m proud of my body and my imperfections. It is who I am.” All of us need to take her Titanic advice to heart. Second, if we sense that something warrants our focus or attention we need to face it for what it is. When Joseph’s dad made the mistake of his life, resulting in the death of his son, he decided to set things right. He spoke to our school community about his choice to ignore the signs, and he urged all of us—students, teachers, and parents—to step up to each situation and not dance around it. Because that dance could be the last dance for someone you love.

Now, back to my sister. No harm was done. After my mother scraped the mountains of makeup from her seven-year-old face and we all had a good laugh—I mean, who among us hasn’t spent an hour or two trying on our mothers’ makeup?—moving on. It would be nice if it were so easy for us to avoid the pitfalls of our made up world. But perhaps we can. Perhaps we can be a little more like that otherwise not too cheery guy, Oliver Cromwell, protector of England during the 17th century who told the artist who was painting his portrait, “I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly like me, and not flatter me at all, but remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts, and all, otherwise, I never will pay a farthing for it.”

There is something admirable in that honest, the honesty that will enable us to see ourselves and our world, warts and all, and leave the game of dress up to the Maybelline Munchkins.

**“Party of One”
by Sarah Weinflash, Montville Township High School, 2010-2011**

As usual, my hair was fierce, my makeup-- stunning, and my outfit-- supermegafoxyawesomehot. As I looked myself over in the mirror that night, an unusual bout of narcissism overtook me, and I realized that the only person up to my standards was... me. So, I asked myself out on a date that night. And really, how could I refuse those enchanting blue eyes? Of course I accepted! But when I asked to be seated as a party of one, the hostess gave me this weird look. Clearly just jealous that my date is way hotter than her, she reluctantly handed me my menu. But soon the jealous couples around me couldn't stop staring, and when the check came, the waiter left me a note. It read, "I'm sorry you got stood up." Why would he think that I got stood up? Remember, this is me we're talking about: fierce. But, more importantly: Is it such a strange phenomenon that I enjoy my time alone? Because, believe it or not, I was perfectly happy by myself. Yet at that moment, I was embarrassed to be seen as a loner, since as a society we think of loners as losers. Trapped behind the bars of constant interaction, we're missing out on quality time with the one person we should really know best—ourselves. As Dr. Esther Bucholz puts it, "We need to unshackle aloneness from its negative position is kin to loneliness. Remember that love is not all there is to psychic well-being." And although a strong support group is essential to conquer every day battles, privacy doesn't have to imply loneliness. So today I will demonstrate how alone time is different from a lone life, why we can't tell the difference, and what the benefits of solitude can be. And hopefully I will ultimately spin your idea of a spinster.

Now, I know that you can probably relate to the hostess, the couples, and the waiter I encountered during my night out. You too might find it out of the ordinary to see just one person at a dinner table. But just like ponytails and wives, sometimes

it's best to leave it at one. Philosopher Paul Johannes Tillich explains that the English language has two words to distinguish the two sides to being alone, "the word loneliness expresses the pain in being alone while the word solitude expresses the [pleasure] in being alone." As social creatures, we assume that being alone means being lonely, but this isn't necessarily the case. Many people can be alone without being lonely, and vice versa; Norman Bradburn even cautions in his book, *The Structure of Psychological Well-Being*, that too much social involvement might be a cause of our loneliness. On a quest for intimacy, Americans sometimes turn to excessive interaction, but multiple meaningless relationships only intensify this growing feeling of emptiness. Since really it's the quality, not the quantity of our interactions that determines if one is truly lonely. In *Thoughts in Solitude*, Thomas Merton writes, "The man who fears to be alone will never be anything but lonely, no matter how much he may surround himself with people." Sadly, many renounce solitude because they fear loneliness when solo, but this can be an occasion to refocus, rehabilitate, and reexamine your beliefs, and with the comforting knowledge that nobody is judging you.

Let's walk and talk. We're not spending enough time alone first, because we don't believe it's productively necessary, and second, because we're afraid of or embarrassed by it. Writer Scott Burns describes our growing need for time; with everything we want to accomplish, taking time to ourselves just doesn't take priority. And even when we do want time alone, we're not always willing to admit it. Ester Buchholz of *Psychology Today* found that subjects that wanted to be alone were likely to refer to this desire as an "intimacy problem", rather than simply stating that they need a bit of privacy. But changing the terminology doesn't change the problem; it just shows that because of its misunderstood connotation, nobody wants to be alone. Case in point, people look upon Henry David Thoreau as an antisocial freak for living by himself in the woods for over two years. What these people don't realize, however, is that while he was a solitary author, he was also a social activist. He had friends and family visit his cabin; he ate dinner with his mother darling a few times a week. He appreciated socialization, but knew when he needed to take a step back. It was while in the woods that Thoreau wrote a civil

disobedience document that has inspired leaders such as Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr., to improve nations through communal effort. And despite this document's emphasis on community, upon completion he wrote that the man who is constantly checking his mailbox for correspondence "has not heard from himself in a long while". See, Thoreau understood the advantages of both interaction and isolation, and was therefore able to make an informed decision as to how to live his life. Which, some of the time, was socially. But only some of the time.

Fact: Spending time by ourselves is essential to our well-being. Also a fact: I'm double entered in duo. By myself. As intriguing as my solo forensics career might seem, let's backtrack to fact number one: it's in our best interest to take some time to ourselves. Indiana University Professor Reed Larson conducted a series of studies in which he separated participants into two groups. He gave one group alone time before social interaction, and the other—none. Those who were isolated beforehand proved more alert, cheerful, and socially aware. So if all of the evidence points to the fact that some seclusion is healthy, then why aren't we doing it? Maybe it's because, yes, in excess isolation can have harmful effects. But we consistently fail to acknowledge the reality that solitude isn't doled out in such large quantities. But even when it is, after constant exposure to others' thoughts and ideas, taking an extended period of isolation might not be such a bad idea for some, like Sean Pica. As a junior in High school, Sean was approached by his crush in homeroom. Emotionally needy and longing for a relationship, he became willing to do anything for her. Thus, when she hired him as a hit man to kill her abusive father, he complied. Sean was sentenced to up to 24 years in jail and later, punished further with solitary confinement. However, it was there, in solitude, where he decided to turn his life around. Still in prison, Sean earned his high school diploma, a bachelor's degree as well as a master's. "I made a mistake," he said. "I'll be the first to admit it was a huge mistake. But I still believe I deserve a second chance." And once released, Sean made the most of his second chance, by helping other inmates make the most of theirs. Today, Sean Pica works with tenants in the East Harlem housing project, helping them readjust to the outside world. And all because of an epiphany found

through time alone. But unlike Sean Pica's story, not all solitude has to function as a punishment or last eons. It can just mean taking a step back and taking a breath.

Not surprisingly, we can find the solution in ourselves. First, we must dispel the myths of what solitude is. In doing so, we'll eliminate the needless embarrassment that comes with it. You can start by not making assumptions about those who do spend time alone. I'm not telling you to ignore a freshman girl who looks like she needs a smile. But don't assume that just because she doesn't need four escorts to the bathroom, she's depressed. She probably just wants to pee. Next, find time to get away. Take a day off of work or a weekend to yourself every once in a while. Full moons are especially great times to lock yourselves in your rooms, because nobody questions werewolves. But I know for you regular human folk it's tough to find time sometimes, so make use of your current alone times, whether it's driving by yourself, working out, or not working out. Utilizing such moments is the perfect first step, even if it is a small one.

Elizabeth Gilbert wrote in her book *Eat, Pray, Love*, "Never forget that once upon a time, in an unguarded moment, you recognized yourself as a friend" because the greatest form of companionship can often come from within ourselves, we just need to take some time to form that friendship. And since me, myself, and I really hit it off, we've started planning a second date! And hopefully others won't be quite so baffled by the nature of our relationship this time once they discover that being alone can be a party: a party of one.

"Race Against the Clock" by Molly Smith, Montville Township HS, 2011-2012

Unlike most teens out there, I am a phenomenal driver. And being from New Jersey? Trust me—I know the real rules of the road. Contrary to popular belief, the point of driving is to get from Point A to Point B as fast as possible. Speed *limits* they taught you?... na-no. They mean *suggestions*! When you get to a yellow light, you're supposed to speed up, so you *don't* have to wait at the red one. And the regular brake is for emergencies only. But emergency or not, we just don't seem to be

hitting the brakes enough lately. Our society, from driving to communicating, has an obsession with saving time. Like, legit, we've got a serious prob here with all these abbrevs and we've gotta fix it ASAP. All shortcuts aside, we spend too much time trying to save time. Time was once perceived as an unlimited resource, but now it is something we always seem to be running out of. So, let's take our foot off the gas to examine two sides of this issue. First, we are so obsessed with saving time that it has become a normal activity, and we fail to address it as a real problem. And second, this mindset has skewed our priorities to stress efficiency over effectiveness. Then, we'll view the implications of this dilemma before finally shifting our priorities to solve our crisis with the clock.

In our roadrunner culture, we are always on the go. From speed dating to speed baking, one-stop shopping to drive-thru restaurants, we have jam-packed schedules that don't allow for much wiggle room. That is my first concern—we live our lives in a never-ending race against the clock and “A.S.A.P.” has become the norm. With so many activities to juggle, we naturally look to cut corners and maximize each and every hour of the day. Multitasking seems like the logical way to go about satisfying our infinite to-do lists but ironically becomes the cause of the problem. Research done by neuroscientist Daniel Weissman proves that our brains can't handle more than one task at a time, no matter how simple. We have to keep switching back and forth, which ends up taking longer than just doing them separately. We can all relate to this because it is so common. I'd bet that most of us don't truly regard it as a problem—it's simply a means of getting through the day. I know that between school and work and tennis and forensics, I have a lot to do and not a lot of time to do it. So yes, yes, I am guilty of abiding by some of my driving rules, reading Sparknotes instead of the actual book, and skipping the most important meal of the day. But I'm not alone in my busyness and certainly not the only one who feels the need to FLOOR IT all the time.

Many Americans have this similar situation of feeling rushed, and it's no wonder that our capitalistic country is responsible for our turbo-charged lives. Yet in our pursuit to save time, we have come to value efficiency over effectiveness. Even before the clock was invented, our society already had this need for speed.

You know, maybe clocks were around at the time of the Industrial Revolution, but how would I know? I got through history freshmen year by speed-reading... Wikipedia. So let's look back in history for just a second. The Industrial Revolution introduced timesaving novelties like mass production, electrification, and the factory itself. Fast forward to today's instant gratification, fast food, and high speed Internet, these old-age concepts were the building blocks of the phrase, "the faster, the better." However, we end up sacrificing more than we realize in the process. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed in 2007 that as we try to save time, productivity in the business sector has been increasing by only 3% since the year 2000. Not coincidentally, the Department of Commerce reported that in that same time frame, the number of manufacturing jobs in the United States has dropped over 15%, now at its lowest level ever. Our preference for horsepower over manpower has led to skyrocketing levels of unemployment rather than success. When we turn to machines rather than people, essentially treating every hour as rush hour, we ultimately put ourselves at a disadvantage when we're desperately trying to get ahead.

Maybe I'm the only one here with road rage, but it's safe to diagnose this country with a serious case of the fast and the furious. Growing up with whatever we desire right at our fingertips, we lose patience and creativity while trying to save time. A March 1st broadcast on ABC World News deemed America as the "Impatient Nation," reporting that Google found that people are willing to wait only 250 milliseconds for an answer—less time than the blink of an eye. We also only need this amount of time to make up our minds, often resulting in hasty and ineffective decision-making. This was evident in the BP oil spill in 2010, where incentive deadlines and last minute rush jobs ultimately led to the catastrophic 200 million gallon multi-billion dollar accident. Speeding through two crucial procedures to detect gas in the wells and the quality of cement around the pipes, the project spiraled out of control, putting coastal cities and thousands of animals in jeopardy. This was the epitome of turning the concept of rush-and-crash into drill-and-kill, literally. While it may be tempting for us to rush to judge the management at BP, we too are guilty of dangerous habits while trying to save time. According to the

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, speeding is a factor in one third of all fatal car crashes. Between spilling oil in the water and burning it on the highway, our race against the clock has far exceeded the limit.

So let's do some self-reflection here and ask ourselves, "What's the big rush?" No, not the Nickelodeon boy band that I am secretly obsessed with. A trip to Europe a few summers ago made me realize that this endless time crunch isn't as universal as I thought it was. I played on a Spanish tennis team, and my American teammates and I were excited to fill every minute off the court with stereotypical tourist sightseeing. But what we saw was so far from the overwhelming hustle and bustle of New York City. The locals were taking breaks—naps, even—in the middle of the day. In Spain, it's called siesta. And it's not that they have less to do, but rather, take better care and less stress in what needs to be done. When we Americans took advantage of this break in the day, we found ourselves more ready and alert, both on and off the court. Back in the states, we, too, can make time our friend, rather than an enemy we have to beat, in a few simple steps. And as much as I'd like to say so, instituting a national naptime is not one of them. First, we have to alter our perception. We view slowness as lethargic, lazy, and unproductive, when really, it can be calming, effective, and rewarding. Second, we need to get our priorities in check. In his book, *In Praise of Slow*, Author Carl Honoré writes that we should seek to do things "as well as possible instead of as fast as possible." We need to ditch the idea that faster is better and just say "no" to the multitude of activities that can easily engulf our lives. Lastly, flexibility is key to reducing stress. Author Corinne McLaughlin suggests allowing time for the unexpected inconveniences, like being stuck in a traffic jam or replacing an ink cartridge. It's about time that we view these seemingly huge roadblocks as merely inevitable speed bumps, not as life-changing obstacles. For as Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu once said, "Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished." In the end, cramming our schedules leads to further exhaustion—whether in our cars or our minds. We all need to just chillax, if we'd only allow ourselves the time to do so, so our lives will seem a bit less rushed—and abbreviated, for that matter.

At the end of the day, let's face it—we are always going to exploit Wal-Mart and zip through the EZ-Pass lane instead of measuring out exactly \$7.50 at the toll. C'mon, this is the 21st century, right? We don't need to abandon all of the progress our society has made to keep up with life in the fast lane. But saving time can't be the only motivation to fuel us forwards. Plain and simple, time is infinite, so we will never truly beat it if there's not a clear finish line in sight. So instead of wasting our precious time in a race against the clock, let's vow to *savor* each minute, rather than trying to *save* it. By shifting our mindset and gaining an appreciation for deceleration, we can kick our lives into a whole new gear, and really put our pedal to the metal. And now, we should be at just about 10 minutes—right on time.

**“Sonia the Stick Situation Solver”
by Sonia Foroudastan, The Lovett School, 2009-2010**

When I was in elementary school I was known as Sonia the Sticky situation Solver, you know the go to girl when someone had a problem. My secret to tackling tough issues came from my favorite movie of all time, “The Lion King”. According to my friends in the animal kingdom, Hakuna Matata means, “no worries for the rest of your days. It's a problem free philosophy”. I quickly came to the conclusion that this life style was perfect, or so I thought. I began finding quick and easy solutions that would make my problems disappear before you could even say Simba. For example when running low on cash, just hit up the tooth fairy. String. Doorknob. Ouch! Chaching. And if you are faced with the issue of an annoying puppy that hasn't learned to appreciate the beauty of silence. Hello, it's called duck tape. My problem solving philosophy of Hakuna Matata seemed perfect, until one day a gal pal presented me with the ultimate dilemma: what did I recommend when people run out of baby teeth and PETA finally catches up? See, my advice was just short-term solutions and while they got my problems to disappear, they never truly solved the root issues. Unfortunately this ineffective problem solving extends far beyond my hakuna matata methods and is affecting all of us.

Today, our tendency to seek out short-term solutions in order to alleviate long-term problems is preventing us from ever truly resolving our troubles. Psychologist Neal Williams brings this issue to light in his article, *The Gray Area*, explaining that “until we [change] our society will continue to deteriorate.” Now, I’m not saying that it is always possible to implement long-term solutions and I realize short-term solutions DO help certain situations. But we need to realize that we will never be able to put an end to our problems unless we start looking for answers that address the roots of our predicaments. Lets observe why people, like myself, look for short cuts in life, first because of our habit of immediacy and second because our belief that a long term solution does not exist and then discuss how we can discover long-term solutions that will actually end our problems – not perpetuate them.

We are a society that has transformed into a nation dependent upon everything to be fast, easy, and convenient. After all, we are part of a country known for its fast food, instant coffee, and frozen TV dinners. McDonalds and Lean cuisine...Yum. While immediacy is a good quality in certain scenarios, it is the first reason why we only create short-term change. We have a need for convenience, which causes us to only take actions that are quick and easy. Dr Ian Yeoman explains, “This coming of immediacy has changed how we think about our cultural and moral values ... where convenience has become a major selling point in almost any market you care to name.” Our need to fix problems as soon as possible causes us to only address the surface of our issues. Immediacy causes us to fall into the mind set that if you sweep a problem under the rug you make it problem disappear and that it no longer exists. Thus we disillusion ourselves into feeling a sense of contribution to ending the problem. But Dean Spitzer, researcher and consultant for IBM says, “Quick fixes [only] make it appear, at least for a while, that something meaningful has been done...[We fixate on the fact that] we are doing something [not] whether [we] are actually solving the problem.” While these quick fixes make our problems disappear, they only prolong our issues in the long run.

The second reason why we only implement short-term solutions is our belief that a long-term solution does not exist. We assume long-existing problems must be so deeply entrenched that we just can’t fix them. Alex Knapp writes in his article,

The Age of Immediacy, that immediacy, “also results in a society in which patience and big picture thinking is undervalued and under practiced.” We don’t recognize that new technological advancements bring new and better opportunities to foster solutions that address the roots of our issues, and as a result we never put an end to our problems.

We are all faced with challenging problems daily. I know I have my fare share of problems and I understand that it’s easier to just ignore them, because an actual solution doesn’t even feel like a possibility. But our belief that our problems are irresolvable leads us to ignore obstacles, allowing our problems to escalate into even larger issues. A perfect resemblance of these issues is displayed in mental health. According to the World Health Organization, “Depression . . .affect[s] 121 million people world wide...Structured forms of psychotherapy are effective for 60-80 % of those affected...However, fewer than 25% receive such treatments [because of] lack of resources.” We become overwhelmed by the number of people affected and forget that treatment does exist. As a result, our healthcare system doesn’t provide the long-term resources necessary to help long-term problems. We don’t realize it’s possible to end big problems, so we doubt our capabilities to discover appropriate solutions.

So how can we start to solve the big issues? First, we need to understand how change works. In his best seller, *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell states, “We expect everyday change to happen slowly, ...and for there to be [a] relation . . . between cause and effect. And when there isn’t – when crime drops dramatically . . . for no apparent reason . . . when movie[s] made on shoestring budget[s] make . . . millions of dollars – we’re surprised.” So my solution: don’t be surprised, expect the unexpected. Stop looking for the easy way out and take the time to really examine your problems. By figuring out the roots of our issues we can find solutions that will actually put an end to our problems.

Second, we need to realize that with new technologies we have potential solutions to problems we never dreamed solvable. We need to take advantage of these advancements and use them to further propel us forward towards long-term change. Just because we weren’t able to solve the problem in the past does not

mean we can't solve it now. For example, look at the upheaval that occurred in Iran this past summer. How did other countries find out about all of the chaos going on in Iran, when the government wasn't allowing news groups to send out accurate information? How did the people of Iran organize protests when the government shut down access to cell phone use? The Answer: Twitter and Youtube. A June 2009 New York Times article says, "During the elections in Iran, Twitter proved a useful source of information for news outlets . . . suggesting its value . . . as a real-time reporting tool." Without these social networks Iran's citizens would never have been able to fight for their rights or obtain support from other countries. Whether we're a scientist with access to all of the equipment at MIT or a teenager with access to Facebook, we need to use the resources available to us to find solutions that address the roots of our issues, so we can truly begin to end our problems.

Now, that I've grown up from elementary school...mentally anyways ... I've learned a couple lessons, a), talking animals may not be the best people to get advice from and more importantly b) when it comes to problem solving the quicker isn't always the better. The truth is: our current short-term solutions are not going to get rid of our problems whether these issues be an annoying pet or the stigmas associated with mental health disorders. It is up to all of us to begin employing our new knowledge and technological advancements, to make positive change so that we can get rid of problems once and for all. And that lesson extends to me too, because I'm ready to reclaim my title as Sonia the Sticky Situation solver. After all, you never know, with the help of facebook groups, maybe I'll become the next Oprah.

“Won't You Be My Neighbor?”
by Brittany Fisher, Montville Township HS, 2006-2007

It's a gray, ordinary, rainy day in the scummy streets of my Montville neighborhood. Mr. McFeely, the slothful delivery man, is out walking his mutt. It

barks incessantly, and then does his business in the middle of my lawn. McFeely pretends not to notice and leaves it there for someone else to clean up. As I look outside to see if the mail has come yet, King Friday is driving off in his SUV. I wave hello to him, and he waves back, with one finger. Handyman Negri is sitting in his truck sending clouds of cigarette smoke in my direction, while Lady Elaine Fairchild sits in her ivory tower, watching all of this happen. So much for friendly neighbors in this neighborhood. I guess we can't all have it as good as Mister Rogers did in his nice warm sweater.

Oh, how I yearn for Fred's neighborhood, for as simple as the philosophy of this children's show may seem, that old man in the sweater with an unusual assortment of puppet friends had the right idea from the very beginning; an idea we loved to watch and learn about as children, but often forget the older we become. We've seen the world population skyrocket in recent years, reaching six billion people. Yet, with so many so near, instead of growing closer, we seem to be pushing others away at faster rate than ever before. And the risks that come along with self imposed isolation are increasing greatly as well. On June 30th, 2006, the Deseret News revealed these dangers, stating, "Social Isolation is as big a risk factor for premature death as smoking. We are ten degrees of separation away from one another, and only one or two people away from loneliness." So come with me and let's revisit my earlier story and revise. We'll put on that red sweater (metaphorically speaking), visit some friends old and new, and see if we can finally make the sun shine through. Come along with me as we hop on the trolley and journey through what could be a more beautiful day in our neighborhood.

First, let's help Lady Elaine Fairchild to step out of her ivory tower, to the unfamiliar world outside her home. Unfortunately, Lady Elaine is not the only one who has a fear of the unknown. Today we find ourselves stuck in a comfort zone of familiarity, and when our obstinacy takes control we refuse to experience change and new ideas. This was exemplified in the northwestern Chicago neighborhood of Belmont Cragin. A story published in the May 2003 Chicago Reporter described the reluctance of the citizens to accept an influx of Hispanic culture into their community. The executive director of the Northwest Neighborhood Federation,

John Gaudette explains this behavior saying, “They don’t know their [Hispanic] neighbors, their culture, their customs. They are seeing fewer and fewer folks like themselves...they become more and more isolated.” A similar scenario was documented in the PBS film *Taking the Heat: The First Women Firefighters of New York City*, which explores the time when the New York City fire department refused to allow women in its ranks. The fire “men” refused to hire women, I guess because of that whole male bonding thing that happens when houses go up in flames. It took a lawsuit and the force of a thousand fire hydrants to get the male establishment to open its doors to those women who wanted to become heroes too. We have wrapped ourselves up way too tightly in the blanket of our comfort zone. Clearly, it can be difficult for us to tolerate diversity and change, but without even an attempt to open ourselves up to new possibilities, we will remain separated into factions, and ignorant of what other cultures can contribute to the neighborhood.

I remember, once upon a time, King Friday used to play baseball with his son, Prince Tuesday, every afternoon when he got home from work. But as he works more and more, they play less and less. Time spent with family and friends has lost the top spot on our list of priorities and has quickly been replaced by work, computers, and email. Robert D. Putnam explores such issues in his book *Bowling Alone*. It discusses declining trends in social interaction over the past twenty five years, in which America has seen a 33% decrease in family dinners, a 45% decrease in having friends over, and a 58% decrease in attendance at club meetings. Unlike back in the 1950’s, dinner with family now seems lost, along with poodle skirts and duck tail hair cuts. When parents arrive home late at night after sitting in rush hour traffic, they often find themselves chomping on cold French fries and last night’s pizza jeopardizing the family’s physical and emotional health. Without sitting down to dinner to discuss the day with our families, there can be significant consequences.

James S. House, professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor has been studying such effects. In his 2001 article, *Social Isolation Kills, But How and Why?*, House explains that behaviors such as smoking, overeating, alcoholism, and drug abuse can easily occur if there is no one there to discourage them. On the contrary, positive, healthy behaviors such as sleep, diet, and exercise

will cease to exist without heartening support. In yet another article, *Happier Ever After*, social psychologist David Meyers attests that isolation can lead to “more loneliness, more divorce, more homicide, and more stress-related disease.” Are these stressful factors worth the risks, especially when the benefits of sharing ourselves with others, by simply having dinner together, can be so positive and healthy?

Before three car garages we used to see Dagwood driving off to work every morning in the crowded carpool car in the comic strip *Blondie*. Now, many commute alone and often find themselves landing in a cubicle, exemplified in *Dilbert* and *Office Space*. Although it may seem much more productive to leave each person solely dedicated to their work, this also leaves coworkers no time to get to know one another, and barely any opportunity to gossip in the corner by the water cooler. What these satires do reveal – No communication, no productivity. However, Google is just one example of how a renewed effort of collaboration and teamwork can produce tremendous results. A company co-founded by Sergey Brin and Larry Page in September 1998 has grown to be one of the most popular internet search engines. At the Googleplex headquarters in Mountain View, California, a community environment is strongly encouraged. No one sits alone in a cubicle. Instead, staff members collaborate in offices with comfy couches and ping pong tables. There are snack rooms and recreation rooms, even company roller hockey games twice a week in the parking lot. The corporation believes that a “highly communicative environment fosters...productivity and camaraderie.” Working together allows ideas to grow and develop with input from many different sources, a philosophy that Page and Brin have proven extremely successful.

Mister Rogers neighborhood, complete with a royal family of both stuffed and real people, was quite a diverse group. However, Fred Rogers children’s classic was not the only show to embrace such a concept. *Sesame Street*, another show loved by many, has taught three generations of children the values and importance of strong connections within the neighborhood. As that big yellow bird teaches children their ABC’s and 123’s, he also teaches them to be polite, friendly, and respectful of their neighbors. Television shows like *Full House* and *7th Heaven*

highlight the importance of family connections and friendships in ones life. Even Steve Urkel in his suspenders and short pants showed us the importance of strength within a community. These television shows are not just there to entertain us, but to truly make us aware, of just how important connections with other people can be.

So the next time you Google “neighborhood” or Mr. Rogers or success stories about companies with similar philosophies, such as Apple and Pixar, resolve that with some hard work and determination we can begin to see results in our own lives as well. Forming a neighborhood watch program not only protects the neighborhood, but allows you to get to know your neighbors and unites everyone under a common cause. A monthly book club would be a chance to get to know others, without being a significant inconvenience in your schedule. Simple things such as having friends over, reading to your children, or talking on the phone to those who live far away can truly help people connect with one another. For as renowned author Pearl S. Buck affirms, “The person who tries to live alone will not succeed as a human being. His heart withers if it does not answer another heart. His mind shrinks away if he hears only the echoes of his own thoughts and finds no other inspiration.”

Inspire Mr. McFeely to pick up after his dog. Inspire King Friday to wave back with all five fingers. Inspire Handyman Negri to get out of his truck and join the Stop Smoking Center support group. Inspire Lady Elaine Fairchild to step out of her ivory tower. Make friends with all your neighbors. It’s your turn to button up the sweater and make the sun shine for a beautiful day in the neighborhood.

“The Icarus Syndrome” by Saniya Waghay, Ridge High School, 2010-2011

Over the years, I’ve learned countless valuable lessons: never tell lies, treat others how you’d want to be treated, and most importantly, that bicycles are not conducive to flying. Let me explain. Back in 2nd grade, we spent a unit studying Greek mythology, and one of the most important lessons was that of Icarus and

Daedalus. Faced with exile, Daedalus decided to escape by making wings for him and his son Icarus. This got me thinking – flying is so cool! But even after 10 different trips to Michael's, I didn't have nearly enough feathers or glue to make my own wings. Nevertheless, I was determined to fly. So I used the next best thing – my newly trainer-wheel-less bike. Eagerly I rushed out the door, only to be stopped by my mother warning me “not go too close to the curb or too far out into the street”. Brushing it off, I said “I know, mom!”, and rode out the door. In retrospect, I've realized that whenever I say “I know” or “I'm right” ...I'm bound to not know, or not be right. In this case, that realization came in the form of a broken ankle when I crashed into the curb. Thank you, Karma. As for Icarus, this realization came when he flew too close to the sun, against his father's warning, and melted his wings.

This Icarus Syndrome is defined as our compulsive need to be right. University of Pennsylvania professor Paul J. H. Schoemaker, states that our personal and professional pride is too tied up in being right. We are so focused on this correctness compulsion that we lose the chance to learn from our mistakes. First, we must understand how society and ego play crucial roles in sustaining our Icarus Syndrome, figure out how to become more open to learning before finally, owning up to our mistakes.

So as I was sitting in the hospital with a broken foot, I reread the myth of Icarus, and saw that he egotistically didn't heed his father's warning. Like Icarus, we often let our egos take over. Social psychologist Elliot Aronson says our brains work hard to make us think we are doing the right thing, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Think OJ Simpson. As Kathryn Schulz, author of “Being Wrong - Adventures in the Margin of Error” says, “The sentence ‘I am wrong’ is a logical impossibility. As soon as we know that we are wrong, we aren't wrong anymore, since to recognize a belief as false is to stop believing it. Thus we can only say ‘I was wrong’”. We can either be wrong, or we can know it, but we can't do both at the same time”. Whew. So basically, our egos won't let us be mistaken. Growing up, we're always encouraged to believe in ourselves, even if said beliefs are slightly skewed. Here's where the other component of our Icarus Syndrome comes in - the people who “encourage” us. These people have made it so terrible to be wrong that

no one is willing to accept responsibility. As Alina Tugen of the New York Times confesses, “I made an error in an article, and of the thousands who read it, a few gleefully e-mailed me about it. I corrected it, although my first...instinct was to avoid owning up.” Tugen’s confession is applicable to each and every one of us, yet we fail to see how much of a problem this still is.

Instead of learning from our errors, we automatically justify them. Like, how many times have we justified our actions to our families? Last year, whenever I got a bad grade – and I don’t mean “Asian fail” here – all I did was justify. But there are only so many times you can convince yourself that an F is just an A tilted and without a diagonal line. Anyway...This ego that we have can lead to very costly mistakes. In his book “The Icarus Syndrome”, author Peter Beinart uses Icarus’ character flaw, hubris, to support his study of America’s major foreign-policy blunders. For example; George W. Bush, Beinart argues, was guilty of hubris in thinking that America was too globally dominant to lose a war. Not only did Bush insist on entering Iraq without the consent of Congress, but insisted on staying there after America discovered no nuclear weapons were present.

Though not as drastic as Icarus’ death, our inability to admit mistakes can leave us both weak and alone. Insisting we are always right forces us to establish an “amnesia for mistakes”. Greg Markus, research professor at University of Michigan Ann Arbor, asserts this idea with his study on memories. In 1993, he asked a random sampling of people what their views were on certain controversial issues. 10 years later, in 2003, he asked the same group of people what their views on those issues were currently, and what these people thought their views had been 10 years prior. Results showed that in 2003, these individuals’ perceptions of what they had thought in 1993 were much closer to their views currently, as opposed to what their views actually had been. Basically, not only did these people not learn from their mistakes, but didn’t even acknowledge that the mistake had existed. The implications of this amnesia are astounding. According to a Christian Science Monitor article of May 2010, the state of Texas, which produces textbooks used around the world, is rewriting its curriculum by screening out ideas that might be considered too traditional, controversial, or offensive. Teachers are forced to teach a

filtered form of history instead of the truth. If we recreate our entire existence based on a false history, not only are we lying to ourselves, but to the entire world.

American “imperialism” changed to “expansionism,” “capitalism” replaced with “free enterprise”, and slavery changed to “the Atlantic Triangular Trade.” America – land of the free and home of the brave – but not brave enough to admit we were wrong.

Although Icarus never got to change his ways, we can. First, Don't be afraid to apologize. Just make sure it is sincere. Journalist Steve Aduvato, in his article “Don't Make an Apology a Sorry Excuse”, explains the Do's and Don'ts of apologizing. He uses President Obama as an ideal example, stating that Obama's candid language, “I messed up, I'm sorry”, really gets the point across. Second, Change your view on error! My sister and I don't always get along. We're kind of like the Kardashians....just...less enhanced...Whenever she's right, I always get defensive. My parents always used to tell me that my bond with my sister would suffer – and somehow it seems to be happening. I wonder sometimes, if being right is worth it, if being right means that much, if being right provides such satisfaction, even at the expense of my relationship with my sister. My family means too much to me to lose them over something silly, because more often than not? I'm wrong. But my family has helped me realize that making mistakes is okay – as long as we own up to them. So, I decided I would make a blog we could all contribute to. It's called: “imadeablooper.blogspot.com” – a tangible, real way to at least admit our mistakes to ourselves.

So moral of the story? Don't try to ride a bike expecting to fly. And don't be afraid to admit you're wrong. It is ultimately wrongness, not rightness, that can teach us who we really are. As Shulz describes, being wrong is “a more complicated, more interesting, and ultimately more revelatory pleasure than being right”. So stop suffering from this Icarus Syndrome - after all, wouldn't you rather fly?

“Sarah Weinflash Was Here”
by Sarah Weinflash, Montville Township HS, 2011-2012

I'm graduating from high school next week (hopefully), and in the spirit of my 2012 graduation, I really wanted to go out with a bang. So, my options were: pull a wicked awesome prank, or that's it. So... a prank was my best bet. I saw a sign that said "wet pavement," and being the creative genius that I am, carefully inscribed, "Sarah Weinflash Was Here." Except I probably shouldn't have written my full name given the next day I was called down to the principal's office and sentenced to two weeks of detention. And they repaved. How is anyone supposed to remember who I am anymore? Well, later that day, my friend waved to me and said, "Hi, Sarah!" And during class, I raised my hand, and my teacher said, "Yes, Sarah?" And it happened a third time, too! People knew who I was without there being a statue of me on the front lawn (a viable, alternate plan). You see, like many people, I was scared of getting lost in the crowd, and, eventually, forgotten. Nobody wants to think of him or herself as average, but the reality is that most people are—that's why it's average. And yet, we flee from the word like a dog from fleas. So, today, we will examine this fear, its inherent causes, daily impacts, and practical solutions.

Perhaps our fear of being average stems from the fact that we don't know what it means. For the answer let's turn to my best friend: the internet. Bloggers warn that average people have emotions that are only skin deep, tend to be uncool, and fart 14 times a day. Boy, I'm just glad I'm not alone. However, none of the users were able to cite their sources, leading me to a point made by British sociologist Richard Hoggart. In his ground-breaking work, *The Use of Literacy*, he reveals that because historians were (and are) interested mainly in powerful individuals, ordinary people have been left out of almost every historical study. So, while we know the basic cultural tendencies and political movements, it seems that what these original researchers have been implying is that the average individual is not worth studying. We therefore know surprisingly little about most people in most of the world for most of time. From this ignorance arises a misconception that being average is bad, and the effects, much like Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg's bikini body, are less than ideal. Some of us—no, many of us—will fall victim to the Illusory Superiority Effect, known satirically as the Lake Wobegon Effect named for Garrison Keillor's fictional town in which "all of the children are

above average.” Psychologists hypothesize that we tend to overestimate our positive qualities and underestimate the negative. And while a positive self image has historically been seen as a good thing, research conducted in 2007 by Robert Horton and Aiden Gregg found this syndrome detrimental to individuals and their social interactions. In other words, our hands are covered in wet cement, and people don’t want to be around us because we assume that what happens to us is more important than whatever happens to them (although in my case it usually is). In *An Average Essay*, high school English teacher Corey Quick describes the trouble he encounters when his students and their parents complain about average grades given for average work. While other teachers create a base grade of an A, Quick wonders why he should assume, before reading it, that his students’ work is anything but average. He relates the phenomenon back to Lake Wobegon, scoffing at the reality of Keillor’s supposedly fictional town. Quick asserts, “Here I was faced with the end result of a system that has stopped giving Cs—has stopped accepting average as okay.” It seems that Lake Wobegon is flooding our country, and we’re drowning in our own self-assurance.

A guy walks into a bar, orders a drink, drinks the drink, and leaves. No rabbits, no peanuts, no electrons. No laughter... great. The bartender isn’t going to remember this guy because it’s the same anti-joke he hears every day. But we don’t want to be forgotten, not even by the bartender. And our biggest fear becomes the root of our problem: if we’re average, we’re going to be forgotten.

Long ago, the Anglo Saxons had a similar fear, which they quelled with a concept known as *wyrd*. *Wyrd* was their way of showing that everybody has an impact, but nobody’s immortal. Like throwing pebbles into a pond—some will make waves, some will simply plop. But all will leave ripples behind, and all of those ripples will eventually die down as more stones are cast.

Next, we’re not rewarded for being average, even when the norm achieved is worthy of accolades. Comedian Jon Stewart recognized this oversight when he invited Sergeant Leroy Arthur Petry onto *The Daily Show* this past July. Petry gained recognition when he was awarded the medal of honor for courageously and selflessly sacrificing his hand for his men in Iraq. But what Stewart wanted to thank

him for was all he'd done before the formal recognition. He told Petry, "As extraordinary as your acts were, what's really extraordinary is your ordinary service—all that you've done without commendation. I just wanted to thank you for not only your heroism, but your service." Much like Petry, average citizens with remarkable capabilities go unrecognized and unrewarded every day. And thus, they feel society has forgotten about them.

Because we don't typically gain too much attention for being normal, we try to make ourselves noticed in other ways. In his article, "The Sad Science of Hipsterism: The Psychology of Indie Bands, PBR, and Weird Facial Hair", science writer Jeff Wise examines the hipster trend which values difference, but only because it's different. On a quest for individuality, this movement devalues diversity—from "being yourself" to just being unlike anyone else. And while hipsters are an easy target, we're all at fault here. Even if it's on a small scale, we strive to stand out because we long for acknowledgement of our presence, our work. The problem is, though, when we attempt only to be distinctive, we're essentially watering down our message—forgetting about what we're saying, focusing only on how to say it.

Sadly, many of us don't want to be a part of a group because we want to feel like we are doing something. We believe that's the only way to invoke change, but we can affect our worlds simply by following a cause in which we believe. This past year, citizens in the Middle East banded together against their oppressive dictators. They cry in unison, "Ash-sha'b yurid isqat an-nizam."—"The people want to bring down the regime." Revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, uprisings in Libya, Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen—none of these feats could have been achieved if not for the great group effort of these brave, faceless citizens. As business strategist Gary Hamel once stated, "From Ghandi to Mandela, from the American patriot to the Polish ship builder—the makers of the revolution have not come from the top." Although many of these protesters weren't anything more than just that, they shared a vision, followed it as one, and truly made a difference.

American anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever

has.” Being ordinary isn’t about being insignificant or indistinguishable from those around you; rather, it’s about ignoring fame and legacies, and trusting that you will be survived by those who truly knew you. A few years ago, my great grandma was going to breakfast in New York City when a man in a suit approached her. He told her that he used to be the beggar outside of her apartment and every day when she left home she would give him about \$5. To her it wasn’t much, but the money added up. He said it was because of her that he was eventually able to afford these clothes, and an apartment, and maintain a steady job. He found her and thanked her because he knew she could have easily donated her money to some fancy foundation to get a plaque in her honor, but instead, she chose to unknowingly help turn this man’s life around. And maybe “Leah Stupell” isn’t written in stone, but she’ll never be forgotten—not by that man, and certainly not by me.

And so, maybe my name isn’t written in stone either anymore. But ultimately, being well known doesn’t mean anything if it’s just your name people are repeating. So, maybe you’ll forget my name. It’s Sarah. But hopefully, you’ll remember (on average) what I had to say.

“How to ^Really Walk on Sunshine” by Jade Scangarello, Montville Township HS, 2010-2011

The other day I was thinking. . .yeah I was bored, and I realized, everything we learned in childhood, is a lie. Santa Claus is a fraud, there are hundreds pokemon so there is no way you can “catch ‘em all,” and with Pluto no longer being a planet, my very excellent mother just served us nine. Now, I was able to get through these discoveries, until I listened to the song, “Walking on Sunshine.” Katrina and the Waves claim to be “walking on sunshine” because they used to think maybe I loved them, and now they know it’s true. But you see, it’s physically impossible to walk on individual particles of sunshine and virtually float in midair. I mean, love is a strong emotion, but it does not give you the powers to defy the laws of gravity . . . unless you’re Elfabia from Wicked, but let’s not walk down that yellow brick road. Enraged by this unrealistic lyric, I asked my friend, Adam, for his opinion. He

explained to me, however, that "Walking on Sunshine" had nothing to do with the photons in the air, but instead represented happiness. More specifically, happiness found from love. This discovery got me thinking even more. Since when does love guarantee supreme happiness? Since when can anything guarantee supreme happiness? In our society, we are constantly looking for ways to make ourselves happier, whether it be through money, fame, or love. We believe that the more we win, the more photons we capture, and the happier we'll be. The determination to achieve our goals is definitely not a bad thing. After all, Ben Franklin did say, "The Constitution only gives people the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself." But the issue arises from our society's distorted mind set regarding joy. And thus, what I propose today, is we should no longer look at happiness as a set destination, but instead as a way of seeing the world. So let's open our eyes without looking directly towards the sun.

Often, our blind pursuit for happiness can be credited to the way in which our generation was raised. While growing up, an unfortunate number of us have been told that we're special, entitled to be happy, and that we're all winners. This is where our problem starts, it's not possible for all of us to win. For every 1 that's given in a round, there's going to be a 3 . . . and....a 6. Unless I can have a round by myself . . . that would be really convenient. Anyway, it's true that we all have a special talent, but that's the thing: one special talent. As Time magazine social critic, Joel Stein writes, our country has become caught up in anti-elitism. Complaining about others being more skillful than we are, Stein observes that "teaching our children that we're all equally valuable was a stupid message. We have to go back to keeping the scores of kids' games and giving trophies only to those who win." This may seem like tough love to you, but that's because it is. Today, we expect awards for just simply trying, instead of focusing on our single talent. So when we don't get recognition for everything we do, we can't handle it. Being told that we're always winners, sets us up for disappointment when we don't get that medal.

Nathaniel Hawthorne once observed that "Happiness is a butterfly, which when pursued, is always just beyond your grasp, but which, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you." With our stubborn belief that we constantly must be

walking on sunshine, we're always on a wild chase for light . And for many, the constant chase for more particles of sunshine only illuminates which ones are out of reach. Basically, we think it's necessary to always be happy, and are willing to do whatever it takes to fix our unhappiness. This belief causes us to try to supplement happiness for ourselves, and everyone around us. A study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveals that antidepressants are the most prescribed drugs in the United States. The CDC also found that between 1995 and 2002, the use of antidepressants rose 48%. Don't be fooled. This does not mean we are becoming dangerously depressed, but rather, that we are just trying to feel happy, all the time. Dr. Robert Goodman believes that not all 118 million prescriptions are entirely necessary. For example, Dr. Ronald Dworkin in his book, "Artificial Unhappiness: The Dark Side of the New Happy Class," writes about a patient who didn't like the way her husband did their finances. Instead of taking over the job of doing the calculations herself and potentially insulting her husband, the woman took an antidepressant. She did indeed feel better, that is. . . until her husband brought the family into financial devastation. Culturally, we have become so obsessed with the idea that everyone must be in a state of happiness, no matter what it costs us, that we avoid potential confrontation and face inevitable disaster.

I know what you're thinking: "Jade, you're being a little bit dramatic. DI is down the hall." But there comes a cloudy day when we don't get our way, this disaster hits, and we have to figure out what to be happy about. When I was about 7 years old, my cousin, Matt, was born. So as with any other cousin before and after him, once he started talking, I was determined to make sure he learned my name first. After a couple of months, and M&Ms as bribery, Matt recognized me every time I saw him. As he got closer to turning 3, however, I noticed that he stopped remembering. It was then that I was told that Matt was diagnosed with autism. Being the 10 year old that I was, I had to have it explained to me. Put into grown-up words, autism is a developmental disorder in the brain that affects social and communication skills. My aunt and uncle immediately enrolled him in a specialized school for kids with similar needs, and they try their absolute best to make sure Matt has as close to a normal life as possible. They have taught him how to swim,

ride a bike, and let me just tell you, Matt is a better snow boarder than I will ever be. My aunt and uncle turned what many would see as an unfair misfortune, into a new mind set. Instead of looking at Matt's disabilities as a reason to be depressed, they can now capture photons by viewing his achievements, however simple, as a reason to be happy.

I come before you today to tell you it's only a pursuit for happiness if you make it one. Trust me, the only way possible for us to capture all the colors in a rainbow is if we take a handful of Skittles. . . in which case we can taste the rainbow too. Though we may not have the trophies or success we imagined, our happiness lies in the collective experiences we've been lucky enough to have. And FDR agrees as he explains that, "Happiness is not in the mere possession of money, it lies in the joy of achievement." So exactly how can our society go about realizing what we already have achieved? Okay fine . . . I'll tell you. Make a list. Rather than supplement happiness with say, antidepressants, make a list of everything that you find funny or cute or enjoyable in your life. Write down all the experiences you've ever had, no matter how small. And no, I don't have a big Harvard study to support my solution, but I did conduct my own study. Upon searching "lists of happy things" in Google, I found pages of lists similar to what I've just described. Among the search results, I came across Barbara Kipfer's book, 14,000 Things to Be Happy About. Ever hear of listography.com? This site allows for people to post their own lists, which others can look at as well. The fact that these websites and books exist show that this chase for photons is a common problem we all have, and that, I am not the only voice calling for a change in mind set. So while you're writing your list, don't forget the steps most forgotten such as learning how to crawl, how to speak, how to feel happiness when it embraces you, and learning to accept it when it moves to someone else for awhile. Also, feel free to keep adding to the list whenever you want, and then . . . and most importantly . . . save it for a rainy day.

So today, I just told you everything you probably already knew. That is, our anti-elitist society teaches us that we are all so special, always winners, and entitled to be happy. And with this mind set, we actually lose, we have become depressed and miserable. But our lists are going to change that. So the next time we come in

dead last in a race, or lose the promotion, all we have to do is reach for our list to remember how uniquely awesome we are. For it is only when we finally can finally see all the blessings that surround us, that we can capture the spectrum of photons in the air, and can show Katrina and the Waves how to really walk on sunshine. And don't it feel good.

“The Impossible Dream” by Nora Henrie, Convent of the Sacred Heart 2012-2013

America is the greatest. Seriously, we're kind of a big deal, and that's not just because we're so, you know, big. Land of the free, home of the brave, we are red, white, and blatantly awesome, even if the rest of the world can't always see it. As British-FDR, Winston Churchill said, "You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something." I mean, if we just stood politely by and stayed out of trouble, we wouldn't be America. We'd be Canada. We are a varied land, a patchwork quilt of diversity. Even my sour-cream skin adds some spice to that American melting pot. Yeah, that's right. This Irish gal has potatoes in her veins...as do most of the people who live in a country where French fries are considered a vegetable. I'm proud to be from the good old U.S. of A. And it's because of a rabid love of this country that I feel it is necessary to address a serious problem. We are staked in the idea that in America no matter who you are and where you come from, hard work and a can-do attitude are the only tools you need for success. This dream, the American Dream, is very near and dear to our hearts. However, in a 2010 study conducted by Xavier University, 69% of those polled gave the American Dream a rank of 5 or lower on a scale of 1-10. The American Dream is the impossible dream. Not only does it set an unattainable standard, but it actually hurts those who believe it. The time is ripe to redefine the American Dream to focus less on individual journeys and more on collaborative effort. Doing so will rekindle our national success, integrity, and pride, because as comedian George Carlin said "It's called the American dream because you have to be asleep to believe it."

The first mindset of the American Dream is the "pull yourself up by your

bootstraps” ideology. We emphasize hard work, but an underlying concept is that we think to succeed, you have to do it on your own. And much like my misguided childhood aspiration of being a ballerina, we often choose to ignore how unattainable success really is. Our society is riddled with inequalities and inconsistencies that make it next to impossible for some individuals to get ahead, a concept many of us view as a threat. Now, as a kid who, admittedly, has had it pretty easy thus far, I’ll be the first to admit that words like “privilege” can often get our custom, monogrammed, Armani panties in a bunch. I mean, it’s cool, the butler can always get them untwisted, but the point is there is some serious backlash when someone dares to suggest that we didn’t earn our place in life. Social commentator John Scalzi compares life to a giant video game. He explains, “In The Real World, you don’t unlock any rewards or receive any benefit for playing on higher difficulty settings. The game is just harder, and potentially a lot less fun.” Playing life on an easier setting doesn’t mean you can’t lose. It just means, you’re more likely to win. We neither deserved, nor earned our lot in life. And it’s not shameful. We didn’t ask to be born into the position we were. Neither did the 46 million Americans, who, as of the 2010 census, were living below the poverty line. Hard work cannot be the only variable at play. We don’t control how we enter this life, and often, we can’t control how we leave it either. In this way, the American Dream has fundamentally failed us. Individual hard work is not always enough.

Which brings us to our second problem. We are putting too much faith in an individual’s ability to control their own fate, and delegitimize the power of collaboration. When we assume that we can have it all and get it on our own, we forget how many people help us along the way. You know- the little people who don’t matter. The firm, restaurant, or lab that gave us our first job. That social security number you...borrowed to get a car loan. Thank you Deb Moneybags. That one guy on level two who got fired, opening a spot for us to take his place. Our fates are heavily impacted by others. In a study conducted by the National Association of Independent Schools, students were interviewed to see what made them successful. Their achievements were credited to hard work, as well as the adults in their lives who had been there for them. To reach their potential, the students needed

someone who was invested in their story. Now imagine we had a society where everyone is willing to play that role for everyone else. It's an idealistic goal, but if anything, the American Dream proves that this nation needs an ideal that gives them hope. The difference is the American Dream expects us to hope on our own. If we stood together, perhaps success wouldn't be so far out of reach.

On July 11th, 2012, I was at a restaurant waiting for friends, when I met Christopher Nelson, a parking attendant who worked nearby. Chris was 20 years old and clearly brilliant. He was an idealist, with eyes that refused to blink in anything but sunlight. We talked about life, about plans for the future. Chris struggled through high-school, battling bad decisions and peer pressure. He shifted from school to school as every institution routinely gave up on him. But he earned his diploma, and hopes to go to college someday. This man is the reason why there is something fundamentally wrong with our national ideology. This man who, at the end of his all night work shift, climbs to the top of the parking garage to watch the sun rise. This man, only three years my senior, with the weight of the world on his shoulders, already the victim of a country that had long since given up on him. Who, when asked about the American Dream, looked into my eyes and shook his head. "I want to believe in it." he said, " But I just don't think it exists."

I believe in the beauty, the strength, the spirit of our country. I also believe we are better than the stale notion of the American Dream. It's time we re-stoked the flame that sent us burning into history as a land of equality, opportunity and innovation.

It's tempting to reminisce about the days when all of our country's problems could be solved by tossing tea into a harbor and blaming our issues on the British (they're accents make them sound like Bond villains. Don't be fooled people. The Beatles and One Direction are only part one of the British Invasion). Unfortunately, us yanks don't have any redcoats to humiliate this time around. Instead, we must start an internal revolution. But this time, not north vs. south. The American Dream has failed, and now is the time to correct it. To achieve an ideological shift, we must first accept that we cannot control the difficulty settings we are born into, a fact we must be willing to forgive about ourselves, and of others.

As American Civil Rights Activist Jesse Jackson said, “ Never look down on someone unless you’re helping them up.” Second, we must accept that the American Dream is a failed ideal and stop allowing it to define our nation. True patriotism does not come from stubbornly defending our country, but instead, holding it to a higher standard, and doing everything in our power to ensure that that standard is met. We have the power to reverse the American Dream simply by looking out for each other, understanding that those who struggle to succeed do not need our scorn or pity, but our assistance. If we reassess our country’s American Dream identity and adopt an attitude of compassion and teamwork, we will be re-establishing our country’s reputation as the Land of Opportunity.

I’m proud to be an American. Yes, it is tempting to be cynical about our country. But let’s remember, we’re still a young nation. In fact, we are just entering our awkward teenage years, which explains why we’re always borrowing money, we always think we’re right, and Gavin won’t ask us to the prom. Just like our childhood aspirations rarely predict who we are as adults, we can’t allow our national identity to be set in stone when we are still in our adolescence. The American Dream has failed us. However, that does not mean that we have failed. We can become a nation that stands together, and uses their collective strength to become an unshakeable force. And that is a dream we can believe in.