

LEARNING STRATEGIES:
Marking the Text, Graphic Organizer

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
Notice the bracketed section at the beginning. How does it set the satire in motion?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
Identify and explain one element of irony in the text.

Learning Targets

- Examine how tone is connected to a writer’s purpose.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of a satirical text.

Before Reading

1. Writers often use satire to critique public policy. Brainstorm a list of controversial public policies. The reading you have done from the newspaper should help you come up with topics.

During Reading

2. As you read Mohr’s and Saukko’s essays, mark the text for words, phrases, and images that contribute to the satiric tone and purpose of each essay.

TEXT 1

Satire

Gambling in Schools

by Howard Mohr

1 [When Minnesota jumped into legalized gambling, it was off the deep end without a lifeguard. First it was Canterbury Downs, a clean, well-lighted horse track that seemed more like a Lutheran church with betting windows. Then came Powerball, Daily Three, Gopher Five (named after the official state rodent), and Scratch-Offs. At the same time Native American casinos were springing up in the land of sky blue waters, raking it in with blackjack and slot machines and high-stakes bingo. What could possibly be next?]

2 Parents and teachers who have been worried sick about finding enough money just to maintain public schools at a minimal level, worry no more. The Minnesota Legislature last week approved the Education Gambling Bill. The bill allows Video Gaming Devices (VGDS) in K-12 classrooms. Only two machines per classroom will be permitted, unless the class size exceeds thirty, in which case one additional VGD machine will be permitted for each additional ten students. Class size, however, will not be a problem once the gambling revenue begins pouring in.

3 Students in math classes will be instructed in probability, statistics, and hot streaks. The VGDs in kindergarten classrooms will operate with nickels only. All students will be expected to do their assignments and homework before gambling, unless they’re on a roll.

4 Powerball and Gopher Five tickets will be sold only in the lunchroom during the noon hour. But the attractive neon Minnesota lottery signs will be permitted at the main entrance of the school and near the scoreboard at games.

5 Pulltabs and Scratch-Offs are specifically outlawed in the bill because they make a big mess, according to the powerful Janitor’s Lobby.

6 Off-track horse betting will be handled in the Principal’s office, with a \$2 and \$5 window initially, but with the option of a \$100 window after the first year. Race results will be available in convenient locations. The first half hour of the school day will be a “handicapping homeroom,” but students will be encouraged to arrive early if they are psyched up and have the feeling that this is the day.

7 Each school system may publish and sell its own Tip Sheet or it can hire a professional tipster, such as “Gimp” Gordon or “Fast-Forward” Freddy, to be a counselor and role model.

8 Betting on high school sports will be forbidden, but the morning line for collegiate and professional sports will be broadcast on Channel One and posted in the principal’s office near the sports betting window. As a safeguard, students will not be allowed to bet on sporting contests unless they have successfully passed Math II, “Point Spreads and Injuries.”

9 Poker games will be operated as an extracurricular activity from the final bell until four a.m. The School will be the “house” and provide the dealers. There will be a 10 percent rakeoff for each pot up to a maximum of \$10 per hand. Only Five-Card Draw, Stud, and Hold-Em will be permitted. Midnight Baseball, Spit in the Ocean, or Mission Impossible will not be permitted because they are silly games of chance and would send the wrong message to students.

10 Gambling will obviously bring new life and big money to the schools, but there are other advantages:

- 1: Students will be prepared for jobs in the gambling industry after graduating.
- 2: Part-time jobs will be created in the schools for change walkers, dealers, security officers, and so on.
- 3: A wider variety of people will be attracted to the teaching profession.
- 4: Discipline will be better because the hope of getting something for nothing is one of the oldest drives for excellence.

11 A bigger gambling issue faces the Legislature soon: Should gaming be permitted in hospitals and medical centers? And if so, how much and what kind? Would patients be able to bet the ponies from their beds? Could nurses deal blackjack in the sunroom? Could you go double or nothing with your physician?

TEXT 2

Satire

How to Poison the Earth

by Linnea Saukko

1 Poisoning the earth can be difficult because the earth is always trying to cleanse and renew itself. Keeping this in mind, we should generate as much waste as possible from substances such as uranium-238, which has a half-life (the time it takes for half of the substance to decay) of one million years, or plutonium, which has a half-life of only 0.5 million years but is so toxic that if distributed evenly, ten pounds of it could kill every person on the earth. Because the United States generates about eighteen tons of plutonium per year, it is about the best substance for long-term poisoning of the earth. It would help if we would build more nuclear power plants because each one generates only 500 pounds of plutonium each year. Of course, we must include persistent toxic chemicals such as polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) and dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) to make sure we have enough toxins to poison the earth from the core to the outer atmosphere. First, we must develop many different ways of putting the waste from these nuclear and chemical substances in, on, and around the earth.

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Choose one tone word that characterizes the entire piece. In other words, what do you think the writer’s attitude or moral view is toward the subject? Justify your choice in two or three sentences.

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

The author presents this information in a very logical, step-by-step, unemotional, “how-to” format. How does the tone of this piece contribute to its effectiveness?

The Satirical Critique

My Notes

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Choose one tone word that characterizes the entire piece. In other words, what do you think the writer's attitude or moral view is toward the subject? Justify your choice in two or three sentences.

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Where (if at all) does the tone of the piece shift?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Identify and explain one element of irony in the text.

GRAMMAR & USAGE

Verbal Phrases

This piece includes gerund and participial phrases. A **gerund** is a verbal that ends in *-ing* and functions as a noun. For example:

Poisoning the earth can be difficult ... (gerund phrase as subject)

... many different ways of *putting the waste from ...* (gerund phrase as object of preposition *of*)

A **participle** (the present or past participle form of a verb) functions as an adjective.

Keeping this in mind, we should generate ... (participial phrase modifying *we*)

2 Putting these substances in the earth is a most important step in the poisoning process. With deep-well injection we can ensure that the earth is poisoned all the way to the core. Deep-well injection involves drilling a hole that is a few thousand feet deep and injecting toxic substances at extremely high pressures so they will penetrate deep into the earth. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there are about 360 such deep injection wells in the United States. We cannot forget the groundwater aquifers that are closer to the surface. These must also be contaminated. This is easily done by shallow-well injection, which operates on the same principle as deep-well injection, only closer to the surface. The groundwater that has been injected with toxins will spread contamination beneath the earth. The EPA estimates that there are approximately 500,000 shallow injection wells in the United States.

3 Burying the toxins in the earth is the next best method. The toxins from landfills, dumps, and lagoons slowly seep into the earth, guaranteeing that contamination will last a long time. Because the EPA estimates there are only about 50,000 of these dumps in the United States, they should be located in areas where they will leak to the surrounding ground and surface water.

4 Applying pesticides and other poisons on the earth is another part of the poisoning process. This is good for coating the earth's surface so that the poisons will be absorbed by plants, will seep into the ground, and will run off into surface water.

5 Surface water is very important to contaminate because it will transport the poisons to places that cannot be contaminated directly. Lakes are good for long-term storage of pollutants while they release some of their contamination to rivers. The only trouble with rivers is that they act as a natural cleansing system for the earth. No matter how much poison is dumped into them, they will try to transport it away to reach the ocean eventually.

6 The ocean is very hard to contaminate because it has such a large volume and a natural buffering capacity that tends to neutralize some of the contamination. So in addition to the pollution from rivers, we must use the ocean as a dumping place for as many toxins as possible. The ocean currents will help transport the pollution to places that cannot otherwise be reached.

7 Now make sure that the air around the earth is very polluted. Combustion and evaporation are major mechanisms for doing this. We must continuously pollute because the wind will disperse the toxins while rain washes them from the air. But this is good because a few lakes are stripped of all living animals each year from acid rain. Because the lower atmosphere can cleanse itself fairly easily, we must explode nuclear tests bombs that shoot radioactive particles high into the upper atmosphere where they will circle the earth for years. Gravity must pull some of the particles to earth, so we must continue exploding these bombs.

8 So it is that easy. Just be sure to generate as many poisonous substances as possible and be sure they are distributed in, on, and around the entire earth at a greater rate than it can cleanse itself. By following these easy steps we can guarantee the poisoning of the earth.

After Reading

3. Which satire is more effective in making its point? Why?
4. Meet with others who chose the same essay. Be prepared to debate with a member of the group who chose the other essay, using effective reasoning and evidence from the text to prove your claim. Be able to point to satirical techniques and purpose.

Writing a Satire

The first task of writing a satire is to choose a topic you are informed and passionate about. Think of some of the topics written about in this unit: advice, football, war, poisoning the earth, and gambling.

Imagine that your school has a persistent problem with students being late to class. Evaluate how the steps below can get you started on a satirical piece of writing.

Step 1: Identify the topic.

Students being late to class (tardiness)

Step 2: State the problem in hyperbolic terms.

The staggering lack of students at the beginning of class leaves teachers paralyzed. (The diction overstates the severity of the problem: “paralyzed” and “staggering.”)

Step 3: Propose an ironic solution.

If students are late, they must stand outside the door for 20 minutes.

(This action does not solve the problem of students not being in class to learn.)

1st offense: Students will carry around a 40-lb clock for the remainder of the day.

2nd offense: Students will receive jail time.

(The punishment does not fit the “crime.”)

Step 4: Use wit (wordplay, clever language, or rhetorical analogy).

Punishment will be doled out in a *timely* manner. (Word play)

This problem is a *ticking time bomb*! (Rhetorical analogy)

My Notes

The Satirical Critique

My Notes

Step 5: Downplay the severity of the punishment using litotes.

Missing class and being ridiculed is a *small price to pay* to promote punctuality.

Sample paragraph using the above process:

It has come to my attention that students have been late to class at an alarming level. The staggering lack of students at the beginning of class leaves teachers paralyzed. To address this problem, we are adopting a new tardy policy. Following the first offense, students will carry around a 40-lb clock for the remainder of the day. Following the second offense, students will receive a night in jail, during which time they will be able to think about what they have done wrong. We promise to dole out this punishment in a timely manner as we have identified this issue as a ticking time bomb!

Check Your Understanding

Writing Prompt: Select one of the topics from the class brainstorm of issues and draft a satirical paragraph. Be sure to:

- Clearly identify the topic.
- State the problem in hyperbolic terms.
- Propose an ironic solution.
- Use wit and have fun with words.