

“A Modest Proposal”: A Discussion Guide

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Preface

This brief document contains the text of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," as well as a number of question and answers about this satire. I hope that this brief discussion guide will help teachers as they introduce their students to satire.

Note: I have numbered the paragraphs in "A Modest Proposal" to make it easy to refer to sections of the satire.

Chapter 1: “A Modest Proposal”

By Jonathan Swift

Section 1

1. It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through this great town, or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads and cabin-doors crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants who, as they grow up, either turn thieves for want of work, or leave their dear native country, to fight for the Pretender¹ in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbados.

2. I think it is agreed by all parties, that this prodigious number of children in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom, a very great additional grievance; and therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap and easy method of making these children sound and useful members of the commonwealth, would deserve so well of the public, as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

3. But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars: it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age, who are born of parents in effect as little able to support them, as those who demand our charity in the streets.

4. As to my own part, having turned my thoughts for many years, upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of our projectors, I have always found them grossly mistaken in their computation. It is true, a child just dropped from its dam², may be supported by her milk, for a solar year,³ with little other nourishment: at most not above the value of two shillings, which the mother may certainly get, or the value in scraps, by her lawful occupation of begging; and it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them in such a manner, as, instead of being a charge upon their parents, or the parish, or wanting food and raiment for the rest of their lives, they shall, on the contrary, contribute to the feeding, and partly to the clothing of many thousands.

5. There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children, alas! too frequent among us, sacrificing the poor innocent babes, I doubt, more to avoid the expense than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

¹ Pretender: James Francis Edward Stuart (1688-1766) was a Catholic who was the son of King James II of England and Ireland and VII of Scotland (1633-1701). He claimed (that is, according to non-supporters, pretended to) the thrones of England, Ireland, and Scotland. James Stuart is known as the Old Pretender, while his son, Bonnie Prince Charles (1720-1788), is known as the Young Pretender.

² A dam is the mother of a domestic animal, especially livestock that is used as food.

³ Solar year: An ordinary year — the time it takes for Earth to orbit once around the Sun.

6. The number of souls in this kingdom being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couple whose wives are breeders⁴; from which number I subtract thirty thousand couple, who are able to maintain their own children (although I apprehend there cannot be so many, under the present distresses of the kingdom) but this being granted, there will remain an hundred and seventy thousand breeders. I again subtract fifty thousand, for those women who miscarry, or whose children die by accident or disease within the year. There only remain an hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born. The question therefore is, How this number shall be reared, and provided for? which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed. For we can neither employ them in handicraft or agriculture; we neither build houses (I mean in the country), nor cultivate land: they can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing till they arrive at six years old; except where they are of towardly parts, although I confess they learn the rudiments much earlier; during which time they can, however, be properly looked upon only as probationers: As I have been informed by a principal gentleman in the county of Cavan, who protested to me, that he never knew above one or two instances under the age of six, even in a part of the kingdom so renowned for the quickest proficiency in that art.

7. I am assured by our merchants, that a boy or a girl before twelve years old, is no saleable commodity, and even when they come to this age, they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half a crown at most, on the exchange; which cannot turn to account either to the parents or kingdom, the charge of nutriment and rags having been at least four times that value.

Section 2

8. I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

9. I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee⁵, or a ragout⁶.

10. I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males; which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine, and my reason is, that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages; therefore, one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred thousand may, at a year old, be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune, through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump, and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends, and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a

⁴ “Breeders” is a word used mainly for livestock. Farmers increase their herds and flocks by breeding their animals.

⁵ A fricassee is pieces of meat served in its own gravy.

⁶ A ragout is a well-seasoned meat-and-vegetable stew.

reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt, will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

11. I have reckoned upon a medium, that a child just born will weigh 12 pounds, and in a solar year, if tolerably nursed, increase to 28 pounds.

12. I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

13. Infants' flesh will be in season throughout the year, but more plentiful in March, and a little before and after; for we are told by a grave author, an eminent French physician, that fish being a prolific diet, there are more children born in Roman Catholic countries about nine months after Lent, the markets will be more glutted than usual, because the number of Popish infants, is at least three to one in this kingdom, and therefore it will have one other collateral advantage, by lessening the number of Papists⁷ among us.

14. I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers, laborers, and four-fifths of the farmers) to be about two shillings per annum, rags included; and I believe no gentleman would repine to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good fat child, which, as I have said, will make four dishes of excellent nutritive meat, when he hath only some particular friend, or his own family to dine with him. Thus the squire will learn to be a good landlord, and grow popular among his tenants, the mother will have eight shillings neat profit, and be fit for work till she produces another child.

15. Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require) may flay the carcass; the skin of which, artificially dressed, will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen.

16. As to our City of Dublin, shambles⁸ may be appointed for this purpose, in the most convenient parts of it, and butchers we may be assured will not be wanting; although I rather recommend buying the children alive, and dressing them hot from the knife, as we do roasting pigs.

17. A very worthy person, a true lover of his country, and whose virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased, in discoursing on this matter, to offer a refinement upon my scheme. He said, that many gentlemen of this kingdom, having of late destroyed their deer, he conceived that the want of venison might be well supplied by the bodies of young lads and maidens, not exceeding fourteen years of age, nor under twelve; so great a number of both sexes in every country being now ready to starve for want of work and service: And these to be disposed of by their parents if alive, or otherwise by their nearest relations. But with due deference to so excellent a friend, and so deserving a patriot, I cannot be altogether in his sentiments; for as to the males, my American acquaintance assured me from frequent experience, that their flesh was generally tough and lean, like that of our schoolboys, by continual exercise, and their taste disagreeable, and to fatten them would not answer the charge. Then as to the females, it would, I think, with humble submission, be a loss to the public, because they soon would become breeders themselves: And besides, it is

⁷ "Papists" is an insulting term for Catholics.

⁸ A shambles is a slaughterhouse where animals are killed and butchered.

not improbable that some scrupulous people might be apt to censure such a practice (although indeed very unjustly), as a little bordering upon cruelty, which, I confess, hath always been with me the strongest objection against any project, how well soever intended.

18. But in order to justify my friend, he confessed, that this expedient was put into his head by the famous Salmanaazor, a native of the island Formosa, who came from thence to London, above twenty years ago, and in conversation told my friend, that in his country, when any young person happened to be put to death, the executioner sold the carcass to persons of quality, as a prime dainty; and that, in his time, the body of a plump girl of fifteen, who was crucified for an attempt to poison the Emperor, was sold to his imperial majesty's prime minister of state, and other great mandarins⁹ of the court in joints from the gibbet¹⁰, at four hundred crowns. Neither indeed can I deny, that if the same use were made of several plump young girls in this town, who without one single groat¹¹ to their fortunes, cannot stir abroad without a chair,¹² and appear at a playhouse and assemblies in foreign fineries which they never will pay for; the kingdom would not be the worse.

19. Some persons of a desponding spirit are in great concern about that vast number of poor people, who are aged, diseased, or maimed; and I have been desired to employ my thoughts what course may be taken, to ease the nation of so grievous an incumbrance. But I am not in the least pain upon that matter, because it is very well known, that they are every day dying, and rotting, by cold and famine, and filth, and vermin, as fast as can be reasonably expected. And as to the young laborers, they are now in almost as hopeful a condition. They cannot get work, and consequently pine away from want of nourishment, to a degree, that if at any time they are accidentally hired to common labor, they have not strength to perform it, and thus the country and themselves are happily delivered from the evils to come.

Section 3

20. I have too long digressed, and therefore shall return to my subject. I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many, as well as of the highest importance.

21. For first, as I have already observed, it would greatly lessen the number of Papists, with whom we are yearly over-run, being the principal breeders of the nation, as well as our most dangerous enemies, and who stay at home on purpose with a design to deliver the kingdom to the Pretender, hoping to take their advantage by the absence of so many good Protestants, who have chosen rather to leave their country, than stay at home and pay tithes against their conscience to an episcopal¹³ curate.

⁹ A mandarin is an important government bureaucrat or public official of imperial China.

¹⁰ A gibbet is a public place where criminals are hanged and their bodies displayed as a warning to other people.

¹¹ A groat is a coin of little worth: fourpence.

¹² A chair is a covered sedan chair that is carried by two bearers who grasp two poles. Look up "sedan chair" in Google Images for illustrations. Swift is pointing out that some Irish women without much money are wasting it on luxuries. It's like being almost broke but taking an expensive taxi instead of taking an inexpensive bus.

¹³ The term "episcopal" refers to church administration.

22. Secondly, the poorer tenants will have something valuable of their own, which by law may be made liable to a distress, and help to pay their landlord's rent, their corn and cattle being already seized, and money a thing unknown.

23. Thirdly, whereas the maintenance of an hundred thousand children, from two years old, and upwards, cannot be computed at less than ten shillings a piece per annum, the nation's stock will be thereby increased fifty thousand pounds per annum, besides the profit of a new dish, introduced to the tables of all gentlemen of fortune in the kingdom, who have any refinement in taste. And the money will circulate among ourselves, the goods being entirely of our own growth and manufacture.

24. Fourthly, the constant breeders, besides the gain of eight shillings sterling per annum by the sale of their children, will be rid of the charge of maintaining them after the first year.

25. Fifthly, this food would likewise bring great custom to taverns, where the vintners will certainly be so prudent as to procure the best receipts for dressing it to perfection; and consequently have their houses frequented by all the fine gentlemen, who justly value themselves upon their knowledge in good eating; and a skillful cook, who understands how to oblige his guests, will contrive to make it as expensive as they please.

26. Sixthly, this would be a great inducement to marriage, which all wise nations have either encouraged by rewards, or enforced by laws and penalties. It would increase the care and tenderness of mothers towards their children, when they were sure of a settlement for life to the poor babes, provided in some sort by the public, to their annual profit instead of expense. We should soon see an honest emulation among the married women, which of them could bring the fattest child to the market. Men would become as fond of their wives, during the time of their pregnancy, as they are now of their mares in foal, their cows in calf, or sow when they are ready to farrow¹⁴; nor offer to beat or kick them (as is too frequent a practice) for fear of a miscarriage.

27. Many other advantages might be enumerated. For instance, the addition of some thousand carcasses in our exportation of barreled beef: the propagation of swine's flesh, and improvement in the art of making good bacon, so much wanted among us by the great destruction of pigs, too frequent at our tables; which are no way comparable in taste or magnificence to a well-grown, fat yearly child, which roasted whole will make a considerable figure at a Lord Mayor's feast, or any other public entertainment. But this, and many others, I omit, being studious of brevity.

28. Supposing that one thousand families in this city, would be constant customers for infants' flesh, besides others who might have it at merry meetings, particularly at weddings and christenings, I compute that Dublin would take off annually about twenty thousand carcasses; and the rest of the kingdom (where probably they will be sold somewhat cheaper) the remaining eighty thousand.

Section 4

29. I can think of no one objection, that will possibly be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged, that the number of people will be thereby much lessened in the kingdom. This I freely own, and 'twas indeed one principal design in offering it to the world. I desire the reader

¹⁴ The term "farrow" refers to an animal's giving birth.

will observe, that I calculate my remedy for this one individual Kingdom of Ireland, and for no other that ever was, is, or, I think, ever can be upon Earth. Therefore let no man talk to me of other expedients: Of taxing our absentees at five shillings a pound: Of using neither clothes, nor household furniture, except what is of our own growth and manufacture: Of utterly rejecting the materials and instruments that promote foreign luxury: Of curing the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming in our women: Of introducing a vein of parsimony¹⁵, prudence and temperance: Of learning to love our country, wherein we differ even from Laplanders, and the inhabitants of Topinamboo: Of quitting our animosities and factions, nor acting any longer like the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very moment their city was taken: Of being a little cautious not to sell our country and consciences for nothing: Of teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy towards their tenants. Lastly, of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and skill into our shopkeepers, who, if a resolution could now be taken to buy only our native goods, would immediately unite to cheat and exact upon us in the price, the measure, and the goodness, nor could ever yet be brought to make one fair proposal of just dealing, though often and earnestly invited to it.

30. Therefore I repeat, let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients, 'till he hath at least some glimpse of hope, that there will ever be some hearty and sincere attempt to put them into practice.

31. But, as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal, which, as it is wholly new, so it hath something solid and real, of no expense and little trouble, full in our own power, and whereby we can incur no danger in disobliging England. For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation, and flesh being of too tender a consistence, to admit a long continuance in salt, although perhaps I could name a country which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it.

32. After all, I am not so violently bent upon my own opinion, as to reject any offer, proposed by wise men, which shall be found equally innocent, cheap, easy, and effectual. But before something of that kind shall be advanced in contradiction to my scheme, and offering a better, I desire the author or authors will be pleased maturely to consider two points. First, as things now stand, how they will be able to find food and raiment for a hundred thousand useless mouths and backs. And secondly, there being a round million of creatures in humane figure throughout this kingdom, whose whole subsistence put into a common stock, would leave them in debt two million of pounds sterling, adding those who are beggars by profession, to the bulk of farmers, cottagers and laborers, with their wives and children, who are beggars in effect; I desire those politicians who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold to attempt an answer, that they will first ask the parents of these mortals, whether they would not at this day think it a great happiness to have been sold for food at a year old, in the manner I prescribe, and thereby have avoided such a perpetual scene of misfortunes, as they have since gone through, by the oppression of landlords, the impossibility of paying rent without money or trade, the want of common sustenance, with neither house nor clothes to cover them from the inclemencies of the weather, and the most inevitable prospect of entailing the like, or greater miseries, upon their breed for ever.

¹⁵ The word “parsimony” means frugality — not spending money unnecessarily.

33. I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children, by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past child-bearing.

Chapter 2: “A Modest Proposal” Discussion Guide

• What is satire?

Here are a number of definitions of “satire” from the WWW:

The literary art of ridiculing a folly or vice in order to expose or correct it. The object of satire is usually some human frailty; people, institutions, ideas, and things are all fair game for satirists. Satire evokes attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation toward its faulty subject in the hope of somehow improving it.

Source: http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/literature/bedlit/glossary_p.htm

In satire, human or individual weaknesses or shortcomings are shown by means of ridicule, derision, irony, or other methods, ideally with the intent to bring about improvement. Although satire is usually meant to be funny, the purpose of satire is not primarily humour in itself so much as an attack on something of which the author strongly disapproves.

Source: <http://www.hjk-steinfeld.de/index.php?id=446>

A literary technique in which ideas, customs, behaviors or institutions are ridiculed for the purpose of improving society.

Source: <http://www.northwestern.k12.oh.us/curriculum/documents/glossary.doc>

• What is irony?

Here are a couple of definitions of “irony” from the WWW:

Irony is an implied discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. ... [V]erbal irony is when an author says one thing and means something else.

Source: http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/lit_terms/irony.html

Irony is a literary or rhetorical device, in which there is an incongruity or discordance between what a speaker or writer says and what he or she means, or what is generally understood.

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony>

• Write a brief biography of Jonathan Swift.

On November 30, 1667, Jonathan Swift was born in Dublin, Ireland.

He attended Trinity College in Ireland, but at age 22, he moved to England, where he served as a secretary to Sir William Temple, a government diplomat.

In 1713, he was appointed Dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin, Ireland.

Swift began writing early, and he is most famous for his satires *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) and “A Modest Proposal” (1729).

He was friends with Alexander Pope, translator of Homer and the author of satiric verse, and John Gay, who is best known for *The Beggar’s Opera*.

On 9 October 1745, Swift died. He left most of his money to Dublin for the founding of a hospital for people who are mentally ill. In 1757, the hospital, then called St. Patrick's Hospital for Imbeciles, opened.

• Write a short summary of “A Modest Proposal.” What is Swift doing in this satirical essay?

“A Modest Proposal” was a pamphlet, given away free and containing a proposal to solve an important problem. Its full title is “A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burden to their Parents, or the Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Public.”

Of course, it is a satire. A sign of intelligence is the ability to recognize satire.

In “A Modest Proposal,” Swift's narrator says that he wants to find a way to solve the poverty of the Irish. Many, many Irish, mostly Catholic, are beggars and thieves because of their poverty. The ruling class of Ireland was Protestant.

Swift's narrator proposes breeding the poor and using their young children as meat. By selling their children to the rich to serve as meat for their meals, the poor adults of Ireland will have fewer mouths to feed and will have money in their pockets. This will greatly reduce the number of poor in Ireland and the remaining Irish citizens will be financially much better off. (At this time, no safety net existed for the poor. People really did starve to death in Ireland.)

Swift's narrator lists many, many benefits of his proposal. For example, husbands will not beat their wives because they will fear their wives' miscarrying and thus losing an infant that can be sold for money.

• What is the context of “A Modest Proposal”? What was Ireland like in the 1720s? (“A Modest Proposal” was published in 1729.)

In 1707, the Kingdom of Scotland and the Kingdom of England became the United Kingdom. Ireland was not a part of the United Kingdom at that time.

England imposed trade restrictions on Ireland that contributed to the country's poverty.

The main characteristic of Ireland at the time that Swift wrote “A Modest Proposal” was the poverty of so many of its Catholic citizens.

Much of Ireland's land was owned by absentee landlords (they lived outside of Ireland) who treated their tenants poorly and exported much of Ireland's food and wealth.

• What persona does Swift adopt for this essay? What kind of person is speaking?

A persona is a character who tells a story. The persona can be very much different from the author of the work of literature.

Swift's narrator does not suffer from poverty, but is instead a member of the upper class.

Swift's narrator claims to have good motivations. He wishes to reduce the great amount of poverty in Ireland.

Swift's narrator is logical. He clearly enumerates the advantages of his proposal.

Swift's narrator, of course, is a device for Swift to get his satire across. The narrator proposes an inhumane proposal to reduce the poverty of many Irish citizens. However, Swift's real proposals for dealing with the problem are also enumerated in "A Modest Proposal."

The tone that Swift's narrator uses throughout "A Modest Proposal" is calm and rational. The times when emotion breaks out in the proposal are when Swift makes a direct attack on evil people:

12. I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for [rich] landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

31. For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation, and flesh being of too tender a consistence, to admit a long continuance in salt, although perhaps I could name a country [England] which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it.

• Who is being satirized in this essay? Does Swift have criticisms of the Irish people as well as of the absentee English landlords?

Swift criticizes both the absentee English landlords and the Irish people themselves.

The absentee English landlords owned, of course, much fertile farmland in Ireland, and they exported the best food, including meat and grain, leaving the Irish to live mainly on potatoes.

However, Swift also greatly criticizes the Irish themselves. In Section 4 of "A Modest Proposal," he lists many actions that the Irish could take — but have failed to take — to help themselves.

• Jonathan Swift's "Modest Proposal" follows the classic organization of a proposal written to solve a problem.

This is a classic organization of a proposal written to solve a problem:

Section 1

- Introduction
- Description of the Problem and Background Information

Section 2

- Description of the Proposed Solution

Section 3

- Benefits of the Proposed Solution

Section 4

- Rebuttal of an Objection to the Proposed Solution
- Why Other Solutions Will Not Work
- Conclusion

Of course, the reader is aware that Swift is being satiric and ironic in his “Modest Proposal.” The solutions that the narrator says will not work in Section 4 are actually the solutions that Swift recommends.

SECTION 1

• Which background information does Swift provide in Section 1, and how does Swift describe the problem in Section 1?

Paragraph 1: Swift’s narrator presents a picture of the many beggars in Ireland at the time:

It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through this great town, or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads and cabin-doors crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants who, as they grow up, either turn thieves for want of work, or leave their dear native country, to fight for the Pretender¹⁶ in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbados.

These beggars are unable to support themselves, and so they engage in such activities as thieving.

Paragraph 2: Swift’s narrator says that a solution ought to be found for this problem.

Paragraph 3: Swift’s narrator says that his proposed solution will help many poor people with infants, not just those who are begging in the streets.

Paragraph 4: Swift’s narrator says that his proposed solution will result in infants of one year old not being a burden to their families, but instead contributing to “many thousands”:

[...] it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them in such a manner, as, instead of being a charge upon their parents, or the parish, or wanting food and raiment for the rest of their lives, they shall, on the contrary, contribute to the feeding, and partly to the clothing of many thousands.

Paragraph 5: Swift’s narrator says that an additional advantage of his proposal is to reduce the number of abortions and of infanticides in Ireland.

Paragraph 6: Swift’s narrator estimates the number of poor children in Ireland born each year, and he again states the problem: How are poor parents going to be able to provide for these children?:

There only remain an hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born. The question therefore is, How this number shall be reared, and provided for?

¹⁶ Pretender: James Francis Edward Stuart (1688-1766) was a Catholic who was the son of King James II of England and Ireland and VII of Scotland (1633-1701). He claimed (that is, according to non-supporters, pretended to) the thrones of England, Ireland, and Scotland. James Stuart is known as the Old Pretender, while his son, Bonnie Prince Charles (1720-1788), is known as the Young Pretender.

Paragraph 7: Swift's narrator says that a 12-year-old child cannot be sold for much, and certainly not for as much as it has taken to feed and clothe the child for 12 years.

SECTION 2

• **What is the satirical, ironic solution to the problem? What are the narrator's arguments for using Irish children for food?**

Paragraph 8: Swift's narrator says that he will offer his solution to the problem, and he says that he is confident that no one can object to his solution.

Paragraph 9: Swift's narrator says that an American whom he knows has assured him that a one-year-old infant is excellent food.

Paragraph 10: Swift's narrator recommends that most of the one-year-old children of poor Irish mothers be used as food, with just a fraction being allowed to grow to maturity so that they can have children to raise to be sold and butchered at one year of age. As we do with animals, we can use one male to fertilize more than one female:

I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males [...].

Paragraph 11: Swift's narrator uses facts and figures in his arguments. A newly born infant will weigh 12 pounds, and an infant at one year of age will weigh 28 pounds. (Swift's narrator is incorrect when he says that a newly born infant will weigh 12 pounds. That is a very large infant, and poor mothers would be unlikely to be able to consume enough food to have an infant that large. Poor mothers are likely to give birth to undernourished and smaller-than-average infants.)

Paragraph 12: Swift's narrator acknowledges that the flesh of infants will be expensive, and he suggests that the rich landlords of Ireland would be likely to be the ones to purchase the flesh. In a savage criticism, Swift himself says that these landlords have already (metaphorically) devoured the parents:

I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

Paragraph 13: Swift's narrator points out that the flesh of infants will be in season year-round, but especially in the spring, in March, because during Lent Catholics eat fish instead of meat, and fish makes women fertile, according to Swift's narrator. Swift's narrator is prejudiced against the Catholics, and to him one advantage of his proposal is that it will lessen the number of Catholics in Ireland:

[...] therefore it will have one other collateral advantage, by lessening the number of Papists¹⁷ among us.

¹⁷ "Papists" is an insulting term for Catholics.

Paragraph 14: Swift's narrator calculates the probable cost of rearing an infant to one year of age and the probable price paid for a one-year-old child to be butchered. The result is a profit for the mother and an increase in the popularity of a landlord who is a good customer:

Thus the squire will learn to be a good landlord, and grow popular among his tenants, the mother will have eight shillings neat profit, and be fit for work till she produces another child.

Paragraph 15: Swift's narrator says that infants may be used for more than food. A thrifty person may skin the corpse of the infants and make clothing from the skin. (The Nazis occasionally did such things as make curtains from the skin of Jews during the Holocaust.)

Paragraph 16: Swift's narrator says that in Dublin slaughterhouses can be set up to butcher the infants. However, he acknowledges the advantages of butchering the children in one's own home, as the meat will be fresher.

Paragraph 17: Swift's narrator says that a suggestion has been made to use older children as food. Swift's narrator does not think that that is a good idea because the females will soon become breeders, and in any case the flesh of older children is disagreeable. Only the flesh of one-year-old infants is delightful. Besides, some people may think that it is cruel to butcher older children. (All too often, the narrator says, critics reject sensible proposals on account of supposed cruelty.)

Paragraph 18: Swift's narrator says that to be fair to the person who suggested butchering older children that that person had heard that such an action was done in Formosa. Swift himself engages in savage satire when he says that such an action when done to certain people would improve Ireland:

Neither indeed can I deny, that if the same use were made of several plump young girls in this town, who without one single groat¹⁸ to their fortunes, cannot stir abroad without a chair,¹⁹ and appear at a playhouse and assemblies in foreign fineries which they never will pay for; the kingdom would not be the worse.

Paragraph 19: What about the "aged, diseased, or maimed"? Swift's narrator says that nobody need worry about them, as they are dying off anyway.

Note: This is a satire, of course, Swift is not arguing that the poor people of Ireland actually raise their children to one year of age and then sell them to be butchered. Knowing that, the reader has to figure out what Swift is actually arguing: What are the solutions that Swift thinks will solve or help solve the problem of poverty in Ireland?

¹⁸ A groat is a coin of little worth: fourpence.

¹⁹ A chair is a covered sedan chair that is carried by two bearers who grasp two poles. Look up "sedan chair" in Google Images for illustrations. Swift is pointing out that some Irish women without much money are wasting it on luxuries. It's like being almost broke but taking an expensive taxi instead of taking an inexpensive bus.

SECTION 3

- **What are the ironic, satirical benefits of the solution to the problem?**

In Section 3, Swift's narrator details the benefits of his proposal to solve the problem.

Paragraph 20: Swift's narrator announces that he will now list the benefits that will follow if his proposal is implemented.

Paragraph 21: Swift's narrator says that a major advantage is that his proposal will lessen the number of Catholics in Ireland.

Paragraph 22: Swift's narrator says that the poor people will have something valuable that they own, and that therefore the poor people can use to pay their debts to their landlords.

Paragraph 23: Swift's narrator says that implementing his proposal will lead to a healthy economy in Ireland and to a new kind of food.

Paragraph 24: Swift's narrator says that because parents will sell their children at one year of age to be butchered, the parents will be relieved of the cost of feeding and clothing their children after the children have reached one year of age.

Paragraph 25: Swift's narrator says that the flesh of infants will be a popular dish at taverns, and that a good cook will be able to make the flesh especially delicious, and therefore the taverns will be able to charge more for it.

Paragraph 26: Swift's narrator says that marriage will become more common as marriage will lead to breeding for profit. Parents will value and take care of their infants so that they reach one year of age and can be sold. Husbands will value and not beat their wives because they would not want to cause miscarriages or do anything to lessen their wives' value as breeders.

Paragraph 27: Swift's narrator says that more Irish beef can be exported. The Irish, including landlords living in Ireland, will eat the flesh of infants, as it is too delicate and tender to be exported. (See also Paragraph 31.)

Paragraph 28: Swift's narrator says that in Ireland 100,000 infants can be sold to be butchered per year. Of them, 20,000 infants would come from Dublin.

SECTION 4

- **How does the narrator of "A Modest Proposal" rebut an objection?**

Paragraph 29, 1st part: An objection to the proposal of Swift's narrator is that his proposal will reduce in a drastic reduction of the population of Ireland. Swift's narrator acknowledges that this is true, but he says that that is an advantage, not a disadvantage.

- **Does Swift make any serious proposals for relief of the situation?**

Swift makes many serious proposals to solve the problem of poverty in Ireland. All of these solutions are rejected by Swift's narrator, but Swift himself favors them.

Paragraph 29, 2nd part: In this paragraph are Swift's actual recommendations for solving the problem of poverty in Ireland. In Swift's own words, his solutions consist

- “Of taxing our absentees [absentee landlords] at five shillings a pound:”
- “Of using neither clothes, nor household furniture, except what is of our own growth and manufacture:”
- “Of utterly rejecting the materials and instruments that promote foreign luxury:”
- “Of curing the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming in our women:”
- “Of introducing a vein of parsimony²⁰, prudence and temperance:”
- “Of learning to love our country, wherein we differ even from Laplanders, and the inhabitants of Topinamboo:”
- “Of quitting our animosities and factions, nor acting any longer like the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very moment their city was taken:”
- “Of being a little cautious not to sell our country and consciences for nothing:”
- “Of teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy towards their tenants.”
- “Lastly, of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and skill into our shopkeepers, who, if a resolution could now be taken to buy only our native goods, would immediately unite to cheat and exact upon us in the price, the measure, and the goodness, nor could ever yet be brought to make one fair proposal of just dealing, though often and earnestly invited to it.”

Here is a summary of Swift’s real recommendations:

- Absentee landlords have been exporting wealth out of Ireland. By taxing these absentee landlords, Ireland can keep much of that wealth in Ireland.
- By buying only goods manufactured in Ireland, Irish citizens can help to make the Irish economy healthy.
- By rejecting “foreign luxury,” Irish citizens will help to keep their money in Ireland. They will also be more frugal and better money managers.
- If the morality of Irish women should improve, and they were to do such things as marry instead of having children out of wedlock, Irish families and society would improve.
- If Irish citizens have “Parsimony, Prudence, and Temperance,” they will be better managers of their money and their lives. (Management is important. Some people lead good lives on little money, while other people lead miserable lives although they spend much money.)
- Irish citizens need to abandon bad factionalism. Strife between Catholics and Protestants and between rich and poor is a bad thing.

²⁰ The word “parsimony” means frugality — not spending money unnecessarily.

- Irish need to refuse “to sell our Country and Consciences for nothing.” Too much wealth flows out of the country with the Irish getting little in return.
- Landlords need to stop taking advantage of their tenants and need to treat them fairly.
- Merchants need to stop taking advantage of their customers and need to treat them fairly.

Paragraph 30: Swift’s narrator says that he rejects all these proposed solutions since there is little or no chance of their ever being implemented in real life.

Paragraph 31: Swift’s narrator says that he is happy to have come upon a new way to solve these problems. Again, Swift breaks out into savage satire with a condemnation of England:

For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation, and flesh being of too tender a consistence, to admit a long continuance in salt, although perhaps I could name a country which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it.

Paragraph 32: Swift’s narrator says that he not only believes that his proposal will solve the problem of the poor in Ireland, but that the poor people themselves will be in favor of it. Critics of his proposal should

[...] ask the parents of these mortals, whether they would not at this day think it a great happiness to have been sold for food at a year old, in the manner I prescribe, and thereby have avoided such a perpetual scene of misfortunes, as they have since gone through, [...]

Swift’s narrator does say that he is willing to consider other proposals, but only if they solve or help solve the problems that his proposal solves:

1. How to feed and clothe 100,000 “useless mouths and backs.”
2. How to solve the poverty of the Irish people, many of whom, Swift’s narrator says, would prefer to have been sold to be butchered at one year of age than to live the lives they have now.

• **How does Swift end “A Modest Proposal”?**

One way of criticizing the proposer of a solution to a problem is to say that the proposer will benefit from the proposed solution.

Paragraph 33: Swift’s narrator says that he will not be able to benefit from his solution because his youngest child is nine years old, which is too old to be butchered, and because his wife is too old to bear any more children who could be sold to be butchered.

Chapter 3: Anecdotes for “A Modest Proposal” and Jonathan Swift

- Jonathan Swift was fiercely loved by the people of Ireland after publishing such satiric works on their behalf as “A Modest Proposal,” in which he ironically suggested that the Irish sell their children as meat and give the landlords the first choice of buying the children, as the landlords seemed to have the best right, having already “devoured” the children’s parents. Once Archbishop Boulton admonished Dean Swift for inciting the Irish to rebellion. Dean Swift replied, “If I were but to lift my finger, they would tear you to pieces.”
- Satirist Jonathan Swift did not suffer fools gladly. He opposed astrology, and he disliked astrologers. When an astrologer named Partridge started publishing annual almanacs of prediction, Mr. Swift invented the persona of “famous astrologer Isaac Bikerstaff” and in 1707 published his own almanac — in which he predicted the death of Partridge on March 29, 1708. When March 29 arrived, Mr. Swift printed and distributed a news report he had written on the “illness and demise” of Partridge, although Partridge was still alive and well. After reading of Partridge’s death in the report, the church sexton visited Partridge’s house to find out about funeral arrangements. Partridge’s friends stared at him in the street and told him that he looked exactly like one of their deceased friends. People referred to Partridge’s wife as the “widow Partridge.” When Partridge tried to publish another almanac, his publishers tried to stop an “imposter” from using Partridge’s name. Eventually, Partridge published a pamphlet to prove that he was still alive, but even so six years passed before he was able to publish another almanac.
- Jonathan Swift once travelled with a lazy servant. One night, he gave his boots to the lazy servant to clean and shine, but the next morning they were still dirty. When Dean Swift asked for an explanation, the lazy servant said that he had not cleaned them because Dean Swift was going to ride again today, and what was the use of cleaning them if they were just going to get dirty again. Hearing that, Dean Swift told the servant to get ready immediately to continue their journey. The servant protested, “But I haven’t eaten breakfast yet!” Dean Swift responded, “What is the use of feeding you breakfast if you are just going to get hungry again?” After that, Dean Swift had his boots cleaned and shined each night, and the servant ate breakfast each morning.
- Jonathan Swift had a bad habit of not tipping. Once, a boy delivered a package to Dean Swift. Because he knew that he would not receive a tip, the delivery boy’s manners were abrupt. Dean Swift told the boy that he needed to learn some manners, and so for educational purposes he told the boy to pretend to be Dean Swift while he pretended to be the delivery boy. Dean Swift then said, “Sir, Mr. Brown has sent you this package of fruit and begs you to accept it.” The delivery boy said, “Tell Mr. Brown that I accept the package with great thanks, and here’s half a crown for yourself.” Having learned his lesson, Dean Swift smiled, then gave the delivery boy half a crown.
- Jonathan Swift was walking along a narrow pathway when he met a young man who stood in the middle of the pathway. The young man sneered at Dean Swift and said, “I never get out of the way of fools.” Dean Swift replied, “I always do” and walked around the young man.
- For many years, England exploited Ireland. Lord Carteret’s wife once stated to Jonathan Swift that she liked the air of Ireland. Dean Swift immediately fell to his knees and begged her, “For God’s sake, madam, don’t say so in England, for if you do they will certainly tax it.”

- When Jonathan Swift died, he left £10,000 to be used for the founding of an Irish Hospital for Idiots and Lunatics. That was his final joke. As he had written earlier:

He gave the little wealth he had
To build a house for fools and mad,
And shew'd by one satiric touch,
No nation wanted it so much.

Chapter 4: How Do I Write Humor and Satire?

By David Bruce

Note: David Bruce taught at Ohio University and writes a humor column for *The Athens News*. Occasionally, he gets angry at Ohio University, as some of the sample satires in this short document show.

- Humor is funny; satire is humorous criticism.
- You may want to write humor simply to amuse other people; you may want to write satire both to amuse and to educate other people.
- If you are going to write satire, it will definitely help if you have some strong opinions.
- If you are going to write satire, it will definitely help if you recognize foolishness when you see it.
- If you are going to write satire, you will need to call a fool a fool, either directly or indirectly. (It is possible to call a fool something other than a fool, and still have the readers know that you are calling a fool a fool.)
- If you are going to write satire, it will if you read lots of satire.

A Brief Satire

“When I started my junior year of high school, I was already the captain of the football team and the baseball team, I was a straight-A honors student, and girls were offering themselves to me. I just couldn’t say no to easy sex and free booze, but I knew I was risking my future. So I prayed on it, drove to Boise, and got this butt-ugly haircut. I haven’t been laid since, praise Jesus!” — MARK G., Atomic City, ID

Source: <http://www.theagitator.com/archives/012245.php>

Even Briefer Satires: Bumper Stickers

- When Jesus said, “Love your enemies,” he probably meant don’t kill them.
- Who would Jesus torture?

Humor/Satiric Techniques

Write a Misleading Title and Introduction.

Hunger in the First World

Hunger is widespread. Emaciated bodies, excessive thinness, lack of calories — such things are prevalent in many parts of the world, including countries that are considered rich.

Is there anything we can do to stop the hunger?

Yes.

The next time you see a fashion supermodel, give her a cheeseburger. ...

Seem to Agree with the Position that You are Actually Attacking.

I think that's what we need: more people carrying weapons. I support the [concealed gun] legislation, but I'd like to propose one small amendment. Everyone should be able to carry a concealed weapon. But everyone who carries a weapon should be required to wear one of those little beanies on their heads with a little propeller on it so the rest of us can see them coming. — Molly Ivins

The word “propose” helps show that Molly Ivins is writing satire. She is making a reference to Jonathan Swift's famous satire titled “A Modest Proposal.”

Be Funny in the Details — When Appropriate.

Not Funny in the Details

And before you accuse me of being some kind of wussy, please note that I am a sports guy myself, having had an athletic career on the track team at Pleasantville High School.

Funny in the Details

And before you accuse me of being some kind of sherry-sipping ascot-wearing ballet-attending *MacNeil-Lehrer-NewsHour*-watching wussy, please note that I am a sports guy myself, having had a legendary athletic career consisting of nearly a third of the 1965 season on the track team at Pleasantville High School (“Where the Leaders of Tomorrow Are Leaving Wads of Gum on the Auditorium Seats of Today”). — Dave Barry

Note: Dave Barry uses parody in the passage above. Answers.com defines parody as “A literary or artistic work that imitates the characteristic style of an author or a work for comic effect or ridicule.” Mr. Barry parodies high school mottos when he writes a motto for Pleasantville High School: “Where the Leaders of Tomorrow Are Leaving Wads of Gum on the Auditorium Seats of Today.”

Put the Punch at the End.

“Women want men, careers, money, children, friends, luxury, comfort, independence, freedom, respect, love, and three-dollar pantyhose that won't run.” — Phyllis Diller

“There ain't nothin' an old man can do but bring me a message from a young one.” — Moms Mabley

“Happiness is finding a book that’s three weeks overdue, and you’re not.” — Totie Fields

Be Controversial.

“I say this to the dude with a ‘Stop Abortion’ picket sign, ‘I have the answer to abortion: Shoot your dick. Take that tired piece of meat down to the ASPCA and let ’em put it to sleep.” — Whoopi Goldberg

“I’m getting an abortion. I don’t need one, but I feel that as an American I should exercise that right before it’s taken away.” — Betsy Salkind

Engage in Word Play.

“I became a mom six months ago. I adopted a highway. I’m trying to teach it to pick up after itself.” — Nancy Jo Perdue

“I’m getting older, and I’m thinking about getting my eggs frozen. Well, just the egg whites. I’m trying to cut back on my cholesterol.” — Brenda Pontiff

“I’m descended from a very long line my mother once listened to.” — Phyllis Diller

“I love animals, especially with gravy.” — Cyndi Stiles

Make a Twist on a Cliché or Well-known Expression.

“Remember, we’re all in this alone.” — Lily Tomlin

Exaggerate.

“The walls of my apartment are so thin that when my neighbors have sex, I have an orgasm.” — Linda Herskovic

Have a Weird Outlook on Things.

“The other night I was home by myself, and all the lights went out. I absolutely freaked out. I thought, ‘There’s a guy in the basement, he flipped a switch, and he’s coming up to kill me.’ Then I looked out the window and saw the lights in the whole neighborhood were out. I was relieved because I thought, ‘Maybe he’ll start at the end of the block.’” — Paula Poundstone

Write a Triple (Three Things, with the Funny Thing Coming at the End).

“‘Children need booooundarieees,’ child psychologists harangue in that sing-songy, whiny voice that annoys the crap out of me. ‘They need limits on what they’re allowed to dooooo.’ I wholeheartedly agree. I am a firm believer in setting boundaries as a way to help children grow. My own kids have learned the Basic Rules for Getting Along in the Deckers’ House: be respectful to others, never hit your siblings, and never, ever cheer against the Colts.” — Erik Deckers

“Trapped in time. Surrounded by evil. Low on gas.” — Poster for the movie *Army of Darkness*, starring Bruce Campbell

“Dollywood surprises me. It embraces all the values of the American South — patriotism, Christianity and 3lb portions of apple pie...” — Simon Hattenstone.

“While others worry that Americans are getting dumber, I’m excited about a future in which I am one of the smartest people in the country. These columns will win Nobel Prizes in economics, literature and fields not yet invented, like kickassness and noyouidntity. I will be asked to run an Ivy League university solely based on my insights: Avoid land wars in the Middle East; buy stocks when the Dow drops 40%; do not floss with licorice.” — Joel Stein

Point out Contradictions or Incongruities.

“I just got junk mail from this organization that wants me to save the forest. I sent them back a letter saying, ‘Stop sending me junk mail and save the forest yourself.’” — Linda Herskovic

Say Something Unexpected.

“This woman goes into a gun shop and says, ‘I want to buy a gun for my husband.’ The clerk asks, ‘Did he tell you what kind of gun?’ ‘No,’ she replied, ‘he doesn’t even know I’m going to shoot him.’” — Phyllis Diller

Tell an Anecdote.

Humorist Frank Sullivan had a sister named Kate, who bought a TV in the days when TVs were rare. Very quickly, she called a TV repairman, who asked, “What seems to be wrong with it?” She replied, “Well, for one thing, a lot of the programs are lousy.”

Chapter 5: Sample Satires

A Short Sample Satire

“I recently made a public-records request to get a copy of the contract of a Division 1 football coach at a public university that is NOT Ohio University. The contract stated that the football coach would not make more money in salary than the highest-paid tenured faculty member at the university but could earn extra money from incentives of the type that are also available to tenured faculty members. Here are a few examples of the incentives: If a football player gets accepted into graduate school, the coach gets \$2,000. However, if the graduate school the football player is accepted into is a medical school, then the coach get \$3,000. In addition, the coach gets an additional \$2,000 when the football player graduates from graduate school — and \$3,000 if the graduate school the football player graduates from is a medical school. In addition, the coach can earn more money through other incentives. If the coach is able to retain 95 percent of his freshman recruits and have them graduate within four — not five — years, then the coach will receive a retention bonus of \$20,000. Also, whenever 95 percent of the members of the football team make the Dean’s List in a single quarter, the coach receives a bonus of \$20,000 — \$25,000 if the quarter is fall quarter. Obviously, the university that gives its football coach a contract like this is located up on Clouducuckooland. Real universities know what is truly important and have the right priorities in life.” — David Bruce

Commentary: Zombie-killing excursion perhaps isn't best use of a scholar's time

By David Bruce

Athens NEWS Writer

May 10, 2007

I wrote this after receiving a letter from the Ohio University Club Sports Department telling me that the OU Waterskiing Club is traveling to Dale Hollow (a lake in Tennessee? The letter didn't say) for a week to participate in spring training. Much of this letter is taken word for word from the letter I received. I leave it to you to guess which parts I wrote and which parts Ohio University wrote.

Dear Ohio University Faculty Member,

The Ohio University Zombie-Killing Club will be traveling to Dale Hollow to participate in spring training. The team will leave on Tuesday, May 8, 2007 and return to Athens on Sunday, May 13, 2007. This training is an important part of the club's existence in order to kill zombies safely and at a high level and to compete in zombie killing as a sport at the club level. The team also develops its sexual dynamics and teamwork skills throughout this week. During this week of training, the team will be studying zombie decapitation, zombie disembowelment, and waterskiing.

Understanding the value of out-of-class experiences, and understanding the lack of value of in-class experiences, you will no doubt support the Zombie-Killing Club's weeklong vacation in the middle of the 10-week quarter. After all, since the Zombie-Killing Club was formed, not a single Ohio University faculty member has died as a direct result of a zombie attack.

The Ohio University Zombie-Killing Club and Ohio University Zombie Club Sports Department would greatly appreciate it if these members could make alternate arrangements, no matter how much extra work they cause for you and no matter how much education the members will miss, to meet their academic requirements during the time period the team will be vacationing.

As long as the members get a passing grade (for retention) and pay their tuition (no IOUs, please, but high-interest credit cards may be used), no one really needs to care about their education. After all, this is Harvard on the Hocking, not Harvard, and thank God Harvard has not sued Ohio University for misappropriating its name.

Thank you in advance for your support of the lowering of Ohio University academic standards and the lowering of the academic reputation of Ohio University.

We realize that you may have concerns. You may be concerned that these team members should be in class, not vacationing for a week in the middle of the quarter. You may be concerned that Ohio University keeps raising tuition, yet is running a budget deficit. You may be concerned that Ohio University recognizes many, many excused absences for varsity sports, thus giving club sports the idea that they too can have many, many excused absences, even though they are not varsity student-athletes, aka indentured servants, whose major purpose at Ohio University is to win so that their coaches can keep their high salaries and not get fired. You may be concerned that Ohio University is becoming a badly inadequate academic institution, despite the rhetoric of paid people whose job is to insist, despite evidence to the contrary, that Ohio University (with

the exception of the truly excellent Honors Tutorial College, whose students tend to win the awards that Ohio University boasts about) is an almost adequate academic institution and is becoming even more almost adequate. You may be concerned that many Ohio University students are graduating with a degree, \$40,000 of debt, and a job that a fairly bright high-school dropout could perform.

If you have any questions or wish to share your concerns, please call us at 1-740-EAT-CRAP.

Sincerely,

Roberta Zombie

Graduate Assistant Director

Ohio University Zombie Club Sports Department

Ping Recreation Center

P.S. by David Bruce: Why don't we get rid of any club sport that abuses the academic mission of Ohio University? Maybe it will save us some money and get the soul of the graduate assistant director of the Ohio University (Zombie or otherwise) Club Sports Department back in her body. Maybe I'm wrong, but in my opinion, she can't feel good writing letters asking teachers to let students go on weeklong vacations in the middle of the quarter.

A Modest Proposal to Help Female Students at Ohio University

By David Bruce

Athens News Writer

2010

All of us are aware of the high cost of education, and all of us value higher education, but not in cost.

One problem with higher education is the high cost of textbooks. Go to any local campus bookstore, and you will see first-year composition readers that cost \$44 and calculus textbooks that cost \$150 and engineering textbooks that cost more — much more. Perhaps sometimes the cost is justified, but at other times it is not.

Take calculus, for example. Calculus does not change. Why, therefore, must students purchase a new, expensive edition of a calculus textbook?

The same is true for other kinds of textbooks. When I was a student at Ohio University's Zanesville branch, I remember buying a new edition of Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* at considerable cost. Another student had an older edition, which was much cheaper. He and I compared editions and saw few differences other than page design. The professor saw us comparing texts and admitted that there was little difference between the editions; he said that the book publisher changed things a little bit once in a while because then students would have to buy the new edition.

Of course, one result of the high cost of textbooks is students working a job or two — I once had a student who was working three part-time jobs during each quarter to get an Ohio University degree (I have no idea when she found time to study), and I once had a student who got mad at me because I called on her to answer a question during a morning class after she had been up much of the night working at a legitimate job to get money to go to Ohio University. Another result of the high cost of higher education is parents giving up a vacation, a second home, and two retirements to help their kids get a college degree. And yet another result is massive debt for students and for parents.

Sometimes I wonder why I don't see more students and parents carrying bushel baskets of money into Ohio University's Chubb Hall to pay their tuition and room and board and into college bookstores to buy their books, but then I remember that students and parents have credit cards to protect their backs from becoming strained. There's no sense in getting into even further debt to pay doctor bills.

Of course, it is easy to describe the problem; the hard part is to come up with a solution. I have a solution, although it is only partial, seeing as how it will benefit only, or mostly, age 18-and-over female students. My solution is legal, and it will put money into the pockets of the age 18-and-over female students, or at least put books into their book bags.

My modest proposal is to start making pornographic films at Ohio University. Prostitution being illegal, I would not, of course, recommend it. However, making pornographic films is legal, but regulated. The actresses would have to be 18 or over, and they would have to provide proper identification to prove that they are 18 or older. To keep everything legal, the Ohio University

Police Department could even be in charge of making the pornographic films. After all, police officers know the law, and they have the resources for the needed documentation to keep things legal. And after all, Ohio University has the use of the students' money, so it might as well have the use of the students' bodies.

The actresses would have the choice of being paid either in money or in books. For example, oral sex could earn the actress a Mercury Reader (which is required for all first-year composition students), vaginal sex could earn the actress a calculus textbook, and anal sex could earn the actress an engineering textbook. The pornographic films could then be sold at a profit. The police department could make arrangements to purchase the books at a discount from the bookstores, thus increasing the police department's profits. In addition, the police department will not have to pay male students to appear in the films. Trust me. They will be enthusiastic volunteers.

My modest proposal has many benefits.

First, Ohio University's age 18-and-over female students will be able to get the books that Ohio University requires them to purchase. They will have the books that they need each quarter in just a few sessions of making pornographic films. Of course, an especially gag-proof female student with endurance can earn her books for a quarter in just one long session. And the female students will earn the books without running up credit-card debt or depriving parents of their retirement.

Second, Ohio University female students will learn a job skill. All of us are aware that the economy is very bad and unemployment is very high. Many of us also are aware that degrees in many majors at Ohio University are unlikely to lead to jobs. As you know, Ohio University does not guarantee that students will find a job even if they graduate with a degree. Fortunately, the porn industry is always looking for new actresses and offering them paychecks. Getting an Ohio University degree assures few people of a paycheck in this economy. Often, students even find it difficult to get badly paid internships.

Third, the Ohio University Police Department will benefit from the extra income. No one likes to pay taxes, even when that person acknowledges that taxes are the price of civilization. As you know, as a state university, Ohio University is supported in part by tax money. In this economy, police officers, fire fighters, and teachers are being laid off, and many Republican politicians oppose extending unemployment benefits to the desperate. Many people will favor my modest proposal because of their belief in personal responsibility, low or no taxes, and the free market. After all, making pornographic films is a business for many people.

Fourth, Ohio University professors will benefit because many more students will be able to afford the books that we require them to buy. Of course, we still have to find a way to get students to actually read the books, but at least we will have fewer students tell us that they have to make a choice: pay for books or pay for food.

Fifth, if my modest proposal works for textbooks, Ohio University can expand it to include tuition, room and board, etc.

That is my admittedly partial solution. Male students will still have to work one or more jobs unless they are built like the star of the cable TV series *Hung* or unless the Ohio University

Police Department needs extra cameramen. That is, until Ohio University decides to make gay porn.

Of course, everyone who tries to help solve a problem will meet with the critics' cry of "But that won't fully solve the problem!" But all of us should realize that a partial solution is better than no solution.

Of course, the federal government has taken action to help reduce the cost of textbooks. That is why bookstores and publishers are no longer allowed to bundle books; instead, books must be sold separately so that students can buy only the books that they need. Also, the law now states that universities must make available to students the required course book titles and the books' ISBN numbers so that students can shop around for the lowest prices. But these solutions, like my solution, are only partial.

Some people may object to my modest proposal by pointing out that professors could, when possible, choose lower-cost rather than higher-cost books for their courses. For example, e-books are often cheaper than printed books. In addition, much public domain material is available. And online Web sites such as <curriki.org> are devoting themselves to finding ways to make free or cheap textbooks available.

Such people may say, for example, that instead of requiring its first-year composition students to buy a Mercury Reader that costs approximately \$44 new at campus bookstores (it's a few dollars cheaper at Little Professor — joy!), the Ohio University English Department could easily require a Dover thrift edition of a classic that costs under \$5 or that is available for free online. After all, last year it required students to buy the novel *Cion* by Zakes Mda, a book that is much less expensive than the Mercury Reader.

To such people I say this: Dream on. Yes, the English Department could have made that decision, but obviously it didn't. Smart people work in the English Department. (I work there, but I'm not bragging about my intelligence. I'm not all that sure that many people — especially my students — think I'm smart.) The smart people in the English Department must have good reasons to do what they do, just as that calculus professor has a good reason for requiring his or her students to buy a new \$150 calculus textbook that has the same calculus as the older, cheaper edition.

So there you have it: This is my modest proposal for getting textbooks into the hands of female Ohio University students. However, if you have better ideas, please email a letter to the Athens News editor at this address: news@athensnews.com.

In conclusion, I wish to say that I will not benefit in any way from my modest proposal (other than being happy that my female students are able to get their books): I am not female, I am not a student, I don't watch pornography, and as a Ohio University instructor, I get my books for free.

Note: Google "sex work tuition" for essays about female students turning to sex work to pay for college. These days, satire cannot keep up with reality. By the way, if any female student is harassed by anyone reading my modest proposal, she (or someone else) should call the Ohio University Office of Institutional Equity at 593-2620 or call the Ohio University Police Department at 593-1911.

Letter To Dr. Laura

Dear Dr. Laura,

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to best follow them.

a) When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odour for the Lord (Lev. 1:9). The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odour is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

b) I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

c) I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Lev. 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offence.

d) Lev. 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighbouring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own a few Canadians?

e) I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obliged to kill him myself?

f) A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Lev. 11:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?

g) Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

h) Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

i) I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

j) My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev. 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? (Lev. 24:10-16) Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your devoted disciple and adoring fan.

Source: This satire has been emailed many times and has appeared on many places on the WWW. No one is sure who its author is.

Questions:

- State your honest reaction to what you read.
- How do we know that this is satire? How do we know that this is not to be taken literally?
- What is the main point of the satire?
- Is it possible that the writer of the satire is a Christian?
- If God is omnibenevolent, can God ever will something that is unethical?
- Is gay-bashing unethical?

Top 10 Reasons Gay Marriage Should Be Illegal

1. Being gay is not natural. Real Americans always reject unnatural things like eyeglasses, polyester, and air conditioning.
2. Gay marriage will encourage people to be gay, in the same way that hanging around tall people will make you tall.
3. Legalizing gay marriage will open the door to all kinds of crazy behavior. People may even wish to marry their pets because a dog has legal standing and can sign a marriage contract.
4. Straight marriage has been around a long time and hasn't changed at all; women are still property, blacks still can't marry whites, and divorce is still illegal.
5. Straight marriage will be less meaningful if gay marriage were allowed; the sanctity of Britany Spears' 55-hour just-for-fun marriage would be destroyed.
6. Straight marriages are valid because they produce children. Gay couples, infertile couples, and old people shouldn't be allowed to marry because our orphanages aren't full yet, and the world needs more children.
7. Obviously, gay parents will raise gay children, since straight parents only raise straight children.
8. Gay marriage is not supported by religion. In a theocracy like ours, the values of one religion are imposed on the entire country. That's why we have only one religion in America.
9. Children can never succeed without a male and a female role model at home. That's why we as a society expressly forbid single parents to raise children.
10. Gay marriage will change the foundation of society; we could never adapt to new social norms. Just like we haven't adapted to cars, the service-sector economy, or longer life spans.

Source: This satire has been emailed many times and has appeared on many places on the WWW. No one is sure who its author is.

Anecdote

- Marion Dane Bauer once invited fellow young adult writers to submit short stories for a book about gay teenagers. Bruce Coville wrote "Am I Blue?" — which became the title story of the book, whose full title is *Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence*. Mr. Coville is a happily married heterosexual, and his story is about a narrator who is beaten up by the school bully, Butch, because Butch thinks that the narrator is gay. An effeminate fairy godfather named Melvin, visits the narrator and gives him the power of seeing whether someone is gay. A person who is totally gay will be dark blue, and a person who is wondering if he or she is gay will be light blue. The narrator's skin is light blue, and as he looks around he sees that a man whom everyone "knows" is straight is dark blue and he sees that a woman whom everyone "knows" is a lesbian is not blue at all. When the narrator looks at Butch, he sees that Butch is dark blue.

About the Author

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy — me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine's brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka "The Joker," decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name — David — ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn't been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don't often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for "sounds like" and "two words," then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn't let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor's degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a master's degree in English and a master's degree in Philosophy. Currently, and for a long time to come, I publish a weekly humorous column titled "Wise Up!" for *The Athens News* and I am an English instructor at Ohio U.

If all goes well, I will publish one or two books a year for the rest of my life. (On the other hand, a good way to make God laugh is to tell Her your plans.)

Some Other Books by David Bruce

Author: Discussion Guides Series

Dante's Inferno: A Discussion Guide

Dante's Paradise: A Discussion Guide

Dante's Purgatory: A Discussion Guide

Forrest Carter's The Education of Little Tree: A Discussion Guide

Homer's Iliad: A Discussion Guide

Homer's Odyssey: A Discussion Guide

Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice: A Discussion Guide

Jerry Spinelli's Maniac Magee: A Discussion Guide

Jerry Spinelli's Stargirl: A Discussion Guide

Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal": A Discussion Guide

Lloyd Alexander's The Black Cauldron: A Discussion Guide

Lloyd Alexander's The Book of Three: A Discussion Guide

Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Discussion Guide

Mark Twain's The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: A Discussion Guide

Mark Twain's A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court: A Discussion Guide

Mark Twain's The Prince and the Pauper: A Discussion Guide

Nancy Garden's Annie on My Mind: A Discussion Guide

Nicholas Sparks' A Walk to Remember: A Discussion Guide

Virgil's Aeneid: A Discussion Guide

Virgil's "The Fall of Troy": A Discussion Guide

Voltaire's Candide: A Discussion Guide

William Shakespeare's 1 Henry IV: A Discussion Guide

William Shakespeare's Macbeth: A Discussion Guide

William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Discussion Guide

William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: A Discussion Guide

William Sleator's Oddballs: A Discussion Guide

(Oddballs is an excellent source for teaching how to write autobiographical essays/personal narratives.)

Retellings of a Classic Work of Literature

Dante's Inferno: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Purgatory: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Paradise: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Divine Comedy: A Retelling in Prose

From the Iliad to the Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose of Quintus of Smyrna's Posthomerica

Homer's Iliad: A Retelling in Prose

Homer's Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose

Jason and the Argonauts: A Retelling in Prose of Apollonius of Rhodes' Argonautica

Virgil's Aeneid: A Retelling in Prose

Author: Kindest People Series

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 1

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 2

Author: (Free) Kindest People Volumes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 3

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 4

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 5

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 6

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds: Volume 7

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 1)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 2)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 3)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 4)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 5)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 6)

The Kindest People: Heroes and Good Samaritans (Volume 7)

The Kindest People: Be Excellent to Each Other (Volume 1)

The Kindest People: Be Excellent to Each Other (Volume 2)

The Kindest People: Be Excellent to Each Other (Volume 3)

Anecdote Books by David Bruce

250 Anecdotes About Opera

250 Anecdotes About Religion

250 Anecdotes About Religion: Volume 2

The Coolest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

Don't Fear the Reaper: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Dance: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 4: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 5: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 6: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Neighborhoods: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Relationships: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Television and Radio: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Theater: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 1: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Maximum Cool: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Religion: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Nadia Comaneci: Perfect Ten

Resist Psychic Death: 250 Anecdotes

Seize the Day: 250 Anecdotes and Stories