



Eighth Grade

ELA

Satirical Humor

Learning Targets

- Analyze how authors use satire to expose human folly.

Preview

In this activity, you will read a satirical article and think about how the author uses satire to express disapproval on a particular topic.

Learning Strategies

Marking the Text
Discussion Groups
Rereading
Revisiting
Adding
Substituting

Setting a Purpose for Reading

- As you read the article, underline words and phrases that make you laugh or that you recognize as humor.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

About the Author

The Onion is an American digital media company and news satire organization that publishes articles on international, national, and local news. Based in Chicago, the company originated as a weekly print publication on August 29, 1988, in Madison, Wisconsin. *The Onion's* articles cover current events, both real and fictional, satirizing the tone and format of traditional news organizations with stories, editorials, op-ed pieces, and person-in-the-street interviews using a traditional news website layout and a formal editorial voice.

LITERARY

ACADEMIC

Derision is the strong disapproval or mocking of an attitude or topic.

To **denounce** something is to publicly declare something to be wrong.

VOCABULARY

GRAMMAR & USAGE

Active and Passive Voice

Remember that writers use active and passive voice to emphasize different ideas in their writing. The active voice emphasizes who or what is doing the action. For example:

“The past tense provides students with a unique and consistent outlet for self-expression.” In this example, *past tense* is the thing doing the providing.

On the other hand, passive voice emphasizes the person or thing being acted upon. Passive voice can be used effectively when the actor in the situation is unknown or not important. For example:

“School districts in California have been forced to cut addition and subtraction from their math departments.” The emphasis is on the school districts, the things being acted upon. We don’t need to know who forced them to cut addition and subtraction.

As you read, look for other examples of active and passive voice and notice the different effects they create.

Article

Underfunded Schools Forced to Cut Past Tense from Language Programs

from **The Onion**

1 WASHINGTON—Faced with ongoing budget crises, underfunded schools nationwide are increasingly left with no option but to cut the past tense—a grammatical construction traditionally used to relate all actions and states that have **transpired** at an earlier point in time—from their standard English and language arts programs.

2 A part of American school curricula for more than 200 years, the past tense was deemed by school administrators to be too expensive to keep in primary and secondary education.

3 “This was by no means an easy decision, but teaching our students how to conjugate verbs in a way that would allow them to describe events that have already occurred is a luxury that we can no longer afford,” Phoenix-area high school principal Sam Pennock said.

4 “With our current budget, the past tense must unfortunately become a thing of the past.”

5 In the most dramatic display of the new trend yet, the Tennessee Department of Education decided Monday to remove “-ed” endings from all of the state’s English classrooms, saving struggling schools an estimated \$3 million each year. Officials say they plan to slowly phase out the tense by first eliminating the past perfect; once students have adjusted to the change, the past progressive, the past continuous, the past perfect progressive, and the simple past will be cut. Hundreds of school districts across the country are expected to follow suit.

6 “This is the end of an era,” said Alicia Reynolds, a school district director in Tuscaloosa, AL. “For some, reading and writing about things not immediately taking place was almost as much a part of school as history class and social studies.”

7 “That is, until we were forced to drop history class and social studies a couple of months ago,” Reynolds added.

8 Nevertheless, a number of educators are coming out against the cuts, claiming that the embattled verb tense, while **outmoded**, still plays an important role in the development of today’s youth.

transpired: taken place
outmoded: out of style

9 “Much like art and music, the past tense provides students with a unique and consistent outlet for self-expression,” South Boston English teacher David Floen said. “Without it I fear many of our students will lack a number of important creative skills. Like being able to describe anything that happened earlier in the day.”

10 Despite concerns that cutting the past tense will prevent graduates from communicating effectively in the workplace, the home, the grocery store, church, and various other public spaces, a number of lawmakers, such as Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch, have welcomed the cuts as proof that the American school system is taking a more forward-thinking approach to education. “Our tax dollars should be spent preparing our children for the future, not for what has already happened,” Hatch said at a recent press conference. “It’s about time we stopped wasting everyone’s time with who ‘did’ what or ‘went’ where. The past tense is, by definition, outdated.” Said Hatch, “I can’t even remember the last time I had to use it.”

11 Past-tense instruction is only the latest school program to face the chopping block. School districts in California have been forced to cut addition and subtraction from their math departments, while nearly all high schools have reduced foreign language courses to only the most basic phrases, including “May I please use the bathroom?” and “No, I do not want to go to the beach.” Some legislators are even calling for an end to teaching grammar itself, saying that in many school districts, where funding is lacking, students rarely learn grammar at all.

12 Regardless of the recent upheaval, students throughout the country are learning to accept, and even embrace, the change to their curriculum.

13 “At first I think the decision to drop the past tense from class is ridiculous, and I feel very upset by it,” said David Keller, a seventh-grade student at Hampstead School in Fort Meyers, FL. “But now, it’s almost like it never happens.”

Making Observations

- What do you notice about the details in this essay?
- What do you notice in the essay that someone skimming over it might miss?

Returning to the Text

- Return to the text as you respond to the following questions. Use text evidence to support your responses.
- Write any additional questions you have about the article.

2. What role does the first paragraph play in the structure of this article?

3. How do quotes from specific people throughout the article add to the development of ideas?

4. How does the use of present tense in the last quote in paragraph 13 emphasize the satire?

Working from the Text

5. Work collaboratively to diffuse and paraphrase the definition of satire.

Satire, a form of high comedy, is the use of irony, sarcasm, and/or ridicule in exposing, denouncing, and/or deriding human vice and folly.

6. Highly connotative diction is language that contains a strong positive or negative meaning. For example, saying that you are angry has a negative connotation. However, saying you are livid has a much stronger connotation and effect. Reread the text and place an exclamation point by the highly connotative diction that stands out to you. Note the effect of those words in the My Notes space.

7. Circle and explain your response to this text. I think this text is:

hilarious funny clever ridiculous because ...

Discuss the parts of the text that made you laugh, and describe how the connotative words help create the humor.

8. Use the graphic organizer to explore the satire.

<p>The vice or folly exposed in the text:</p>	<p>Textual Evidence:</p> <p>Irony:</p> <p>Sarcasm:</p> <p>Ridicule:</p>
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