

## Grades 6-12, Prompt for Argument Writing

### Common Core Standard W.CCR.1

A group of parents and teachers in your school have made a proposal to the school board. In their proposal, they are suggesting that the school join in a national movement called “Shut Down Your Screen Week.” The parents and teachers in the group believe that not using any electronic media for an entire week would be good for students for many reasons.

They have taken the proposal to a teachers’ meeting, so that teachers can discuss the issue of whether or not to ask their students to participate in the “Shut Down Your Screen Week.” The teachers have decided they would like to hear from the students before they decide.

This is not a simple issue, so you need to think very carefully about it. You have three texts to read relating to the issue: “Social Media as Community,” “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” and “Attached to Technology and Paying a Price.” As you read and re-read these texts, think about what they show you about the issue. Think about what position you will take and what evidence you will use to support your thinking.

Finally, write an essay, in the form of a letter to the teachers, explaining your thinking.

For the essay, your Focusing Question is:

**Should your school participate in the national “Shut Down Your Screen Week?” Be sure to use evidence from the texts, as well as your own knowledge, to support and develop your thinking.**

Remember, a strong and effective piece of argument writing:

- *Takes the audience into account*
- *Has a clear introduction*
- *States a focus/position statement clearly, precisely, and thoughtfully*
- *Uses specific evidence from the text(s) to support and develop the position, and explains that evidence logically*
- *Takes into account what people who disagree with you might think and tries to respond to that*
- *Concludes effectively*
- *Uses precise language*
- *Shows control over conventions*

You will have three class periods to complete this reading/thinking/writing task. The essay will have a single draft, and you may want to take some time to plan your writing before you begin work. When you have finished, be sure to proofread.

# **Argument Writing**

## **Common Core Standard W.CCR.1**

### *Teacher Directions*

- The texts provide the information needed to address the prompt, and students should independently read the texts carefully before writing. Encourage students to refer back to the text while writing and to take notes, and to mark up the text as much as is helpful to them.
  
- Students should be given three sessions for the prompt. Allow approximately 45 minutes for each, but the prompt should not be strictly timed. Students should be given as much time as needed to plan, write, and proofread.
  
- The writing must be done without help, but students may have access to personal dictionaries, or any other resources to support spelling and mechanics that they are accustomed to using while writing.
  - Be sure students have paper to take notes or do whatever pre-planning they might choose to do.
  - If students are writing by hand, provide lined paper from your classroom for writing. If they are using a word processor, make sure they save their work so it can be accessed the next day.
  
- This will be first draft writing, but encourage students to proofread and correct any errors they find.

## Social Media as Community

By Keith Hampton

[Keith Hampton](#) is an associate professor in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers, and a past chairman of the American Sociological Association's section on Communication and Information Technologies.

Updated June 18, 2012 *New York Times / Opinion Pages* Excerpt

Neither living alone nor using social media is socially isolating. In 2011, I was lead author of an article in [Information, Communication & Society](#) that found, based on a representative survey of 2,500 Americans, that regardless of whether the participants were married or single, those who used social media had more close confidants.

The constant feed from our online social circles is the modern front porch.

A recent follow-up study, "[Social Networking Sites and Our Lives](#)" (Pew Research Center), found that the average user of a social networking site had more close ties than and was half as likely to be socially isolated as the average American. Additionally, my co-authors and I, in another article published in [New Media & Society](#), found not only that social media users knew people from a greater variety of backgrounds, but also that much of this diversity was a result of people using these technologies who simultaneously spent an impressive amount of time socializing outside of the house.

A number of studies, including my own and those of [Matthew Brashears](#) (a sociologist at Cornell), have found that Americans have fewer intimate relationships today than 20 years ago. However, a loss of close friends does not mean a loss of support. Because of cellphones and social media, those we depend on are more accessible today than at any point since we lived in small, village-like settlements.

Social media has made every relationship persistent and pervasive. We no longer lose social ties over our lives; we have Facebook friends forever. The constant feed of status updates and digital photos from our online social circles is the modern front porch. This is why, in "[Social Networking Sites and Our Lives](#)," there was a clear trend for those who used these technologies to receive more social support than other people.

The data backs it up. There is little evidence that social media is responsible for a trend of isolation, or a loss of intimacy and social support.

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## Is Google Making Us Stupid?

### YES

Who doesn't love Google? In the blink of an eye, the search engine delivers useful information about pretty much any subject imaginable. I use it all the time, and I'm guessing you do too.

But I worry about what Google is doing to our brains. What really makes us intelligent isn't our ability to find lots of information quickly. It's our ability to think deeply about that information. And deep thinking, brain scientists have discovered, happens only when our minds are calm and attentive. The greater our concentration, the richer our thoughts.

If we're distracted, we understand less, remember less, and learn less.

That's the problem with Google—and with the Internet in general. When we use our computers and our cellphones all the time, we're always distracted.

The Net bombards us with messages and other bits of data, and every one of those interruptions breaks our train of thought. We end up scatterbrained. The fact is, you'll never think deeply if you're always Googling, texting, and surfing.

Google doesn't want us to slow down. The faster we zip across the Web, clicking links and skimming words and pictures, the more ads Google is able to show us and the more money it makes. So even as Google is giving us all that useful information, it's also encouraging us to think superficially. It's making us shallow.

If you're really interested in developing your mind, you should turn off your computer and your cellphone—and start thinking. Really thinking. You can Google all the facts you want, but you'll never Google your way to brilliance.

### Nicholas Carr, Author

*The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*

### NO

Any new information technology has both advocates and critics. More than 2,000 years ago, the classical Greek philosopher Socrates complained that the new technology of writing "will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls because they will not use their memories."

Today, Google is the new technology. The Internet contains the world's best writing, images, and ideas; Google lets us find the relevant pieces instantly.

Suppose I'm interested in the guidance computers on Apollo spacecraft in the 1960s. My local library has no books on that specific subject—just 18 books about the Apollo missions in general. I could hunt through those or turn to Google, which returns 45,000 pages, including a definitive encyclopedia article and instructions for building a unit.

Just as a car allows us to move faster and a telescope lets us see farther, access to the Internet's information lets us think better and faster. By considering a wide range of information, we can arrive at more creative and informed solutions. Internet users are more likely to be exposed to a diversity of ideas. In politics, for example, they are likely to see ideas from left and right, and see how news is reported in other countries.

There's no doubt the Internet can create distractions. But 81 percent of experts polled by the Pew Internet Research Project say the opportunities outweigh the distractions.

Socrates was wrong to fear the coming of the written word: Writing has improved our law, science, arts, culture, and our memory. When the history of our current age is written, it will say that Google has made us smarter—both individually and collectively—because we have ready and free access to information.

**Peter Norvig, Director of Research**  
Google Inc.

Used by permission of (*The New York Times Upfront*, Vol. 143, October 4, 2010)

## Attached to Technology and Paying a Price

By [MATT RICHEL](#) *New York Times* June 6, 2010

SAN FRANCISCO — When one of the most important e-mail messages of his life landed in his in-box a few years ago, Kord Campbell overlooked it. Not just for a day or two, but 12 days. He finally saw it while sifting through old messages: a big company wanted to buy his Internet start-up.

The message had slipped by him amid an electronic flood: two computer screens alive with e-mail, instant messages, online chats, a Web browser and the computer code he was writing. While he managed to salvage the \$1.3 million deal after apologizing to his suitor, Mr. Campbell continues to struggle with the effects of the deluge of data. Even after he unplugs, he craves the stimulation he gets from his electronic gadgets. He forgets things like dinner plans, and he has trouble focusing on his family.

This is your brain on computers.

Scientists say juggling e-mail, phone calls and other incoming information can change how people think and behave. They say our ability to focus is being undermined by bursts of information. These play to a primitive impulse to respond to immediate opportunities and threats. The stimulation provokes excitement — a [dopamine](#) squirt — that researchers say can be addictive. In its absence, people feel bored.

The resulting distractions can have deadly consequences, as when cellphone-wielding drivers and train engineers cause wrecks. And for millions of people like Mr. Campbell, these urges can inflict nicks and cuts on creativity and deep thought, interrupting work and family life.

While many people say multitasking makes them more productive, research shows otherwise. Heavy multitaskers actually have more trouble focusing and shutting out irrelevant information, scientists say, and they experience more stress. And scientists are discovering that even after the multitasking ends, fractured thinking and lack of focus persist. In other words, this is also your brain *off* computers.

“The technology is rewiring our brains,” said Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute of Drug Abuse and one of the world’s leading brain scientists. She and other researchers compare the lure of digital stimulation less to that of drugs and alcohol than to food and sex, which are essential but counterproductive in excess.

Technology use can benefit the brain in some ways, researchers say. Imaging studies show the brains of Internet users become more efficient at finding information. And players of some video games develop better visual acuity.

More broadly, cellphones and computers have transformed life. They let people escape their cubicles and work anywhere. They shrink distances and handle countless mundane tasks, freeing up time for more exciting pursuits.

For better or worse, the consumption of media, as varied as e-mail and TV, has exploded. In 2008, people consumed three times as much information each day as they did in 1960. And they are constantly shifting their attention. Computer users at work change windows or check e-mail or other programs nearly 37 times an hour, new research shows.

The nonstop interactivity is one of the most significant shifts ever in the human environment, said Adam Gazzaley, a neuroscientist at the [University of California, San Francisco](#).

“We are exposing our brains to an environment and asking them to do things we weren’t necessarily evolved to do,” he said. “We know already there are consequences.”

Mr. Campbell, 43, came of age with the personal computer, and he is a heavier user of technology than most. But researchers say the habits and struggles of Mr. Campbell and his family typify what many experience — and what many more will, if trends continue. For him, the tensions feel increasingly acute, and the effects harder to shake.

### **Always On**

Mr. Campbell, whose given name is Thomas, had an early start with technology in Oklahoma City. When he was in third grade, his parents bought him Pong, a video game. Then came a string of game consoles and PCs, which he learned to program.

Mr. Campbell loves the rush of modern life and keeping up with the latest information. “I want to be the first to hear when the aliens land,” he said, laughing. But other times, he fantasizes about living in pioneer days when things moved more slowly: “I can’t keep everything in my head.”

No wonder. As he came of age, so did a new era of data and communication. At home, people consume 12 hours of media a day on average, when an hour spent with, say, the Internet and TV simultaneously counts as two hours. That compares with five hours in 1960, say researchers at the [University of California, San Diego](#). Computer users visit an average of 40 Web sites a day, according to research by RescueTime, which offers time-management tools.

As computers have changed, so has the understanding of the human brain. Until 15 years ago, scientists thought the brain stopped developing after childhood. Now they understand that its neural networks continue to develop, influenced by things like learning skills.

So not long after Eyal Ophir arrived at Stanford in 2004, he wondered whether heavy multitasking might be leading to changes in a characteristic of the brain long thought immutable: that humans can process only a single stream of information at a time. He was startled by what he discovered.

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### **The Myth of Multitasking**

The test subjects were divided into two groups: those classified as heavy multitaskers based on their answers to questions about how they used technology, and those who were not.

In a test created by Mr. Ophir and his colleagues, subjects at a computer were briefly shown an image of red rectangles. Then they saw a similar image and were asked whether any of the rectangles had moved. It was a simple task until the addition of a twist: blue rectangles were added, and the subjects were told to ignore them.

The multitaskers then did a significantly worse job than the non-multitaskers at recognizing whether red rectangles had changed position. In other words, they had trouble filtering out the blue ones — the irrelevant information.

So, too, the multitaskers took longer than non-multitaskers to switch among tasks, like differentiating vowels from consonants and then odd from even numbers. The multitaskers were shown to be less efficient at juggling problems. Other tests at Stanford, an important center for research in this fast-growing field, showed multitaskers tended to search for new information rather than accept a reward for putting older, more valuable information to work.

Researchers say these findings point to an interesting dynamic: multitaskers seem more sensitive than non-multitaskers to incoming information.

The results also illustrate an age-old conflict in the brain, one that technology may be intensifying. A portion of the brain acts as a control tower, helping a person focus and set priorities. More primitive parts of the brain, like those that process sight and sound, demand that it pay attention to new information, bombarding the control tower when they are stimulated.

Researchers say there is an evolutionary rationale for the pressure this barrage puts on the brain. The lower-brain functions alert humans to danger, like a nearby lion, overriding goals like building a hut. In the modern world, the chime of incoming e-mail can override the goal of writing a business plan or playing catch with the children.

“Throughout evolutionary history, a big surprise would get everyone’s brain thinking,” said Clifford Nass, a communications professor at Stanford. “But we’ve got a large and



growing group of people who think the slightest hint that something interesting might be going on is like catnip. They can't ignore it."

Melina Uncapher, a neurobiologist on the Stanford team, said she and other researchers were unsure whether the muddled multitaskers were simply prone to distraction and would have had trouble focusing in any era. But she added that the idea that information overload causes distraction was supported by more and more research.

A study at the [University of California, Irvine](#), found that people interrupted by e-mail reported significantly increased stress compared with those left to focus. Stress hormones have been shown to reduce short-term memory, said Gary Small, a psychiatrist at the [University of California](#), Los Angeles.

Preliminary research shows some people can more easily juggle multiple information streams. These "supertaskers" represent less than 3 percent of the population, according to scientists at the [University of Utah](#).

Other research shows computer use has neurological advantages. In imaging studies, Dr. Small observed that Internet users showed greater brain activity than nonusers, suggesting they were growing their neural circuitry.

At the [University of Rochester](#), researchers found that players of some fast-paced video games can track the movement of a third more objects on a screen than nonplayers. They say the games can improve reaction and the ability to pick out details amid clutter.

"In a sense, those games have a very strong both rehabilitative and educational power," said the lead researcher, Daphne Bavelier, who is working with others in the field to channel these changes into real-world benefits like safer driving.

There is a vibrant debate among scientists over whether technology's influence on behavior and the brain is good or bad, and how significant it is. Mr. Ophir is loath to call the cognitive changes bad or good, though the impact on analysis and creativity worries him.

### **The Toll on Children**

The Campbells, father and son, sit in armchairs. Controllers in hand, they engage in a fierce video game battle, displayed on the nearby flat-panel TV, as Lily watches.

They are playing Super Smash Bros. Brawl, a cartoonish animated fight between characters that battle using anvils, explosives and other weapons.

"Kill him, Dad," Lily screams. To no avail. Connor regularly beats his father, prompting expletives and, once, a thrown pillow. But there is bonding and mutual respect.

Screens big and small are central to the Campbell family's leisure time. Connor and his mother relax while watching TV shows like "Heroes." Lily has an [iPod](#) Touch, a portable DVD player and her own laptop, which she uses to watch videos, listen to music and play games.

Lily, a second-grader, is allowed only an hour a day of unstructured time, which she often spends with her devices. The laptop can consume her.

"When she's on it, you can holler her name all day and she won't hear," Mrs. Campbell said.

Researchers worry that constant digital stimulation like this creates attention problems for children with brains that are still developing, who already struggle to set priorities and resist impulses.

Connor's troubles started late last year. He could not focus on homework. No wonder, perhaps. On his bedroom desk sit two monitors, one with his music collection, one with [Facebook](#) and Reddit, a social site with news links that he and his father love. His iPhone availed him to relentless texting with his girlfriend.

When he studied, "a little voice would be saying, 'Look up' at the computer, and I'd look up," Connor said. "Normally, I'd say I want to only read for a few minutes, but I'd search every corner of Reddit and then check Facebook."

His Web browsing informs him. "He's a fact hound," Mr. Campbell brags. "Connor is, other than programming, extremely technical. He's 100 percent Internet savvy."

### **No Vacations**

For spring break, the family rented a cottage in Carmel, Calif. Mrs. Campbell hoped everyone would unplug. But the day before they left, the iPad from [Apple](#) came out, and Mr. Campbell snapped one up. The next night, their first on vacation, "We didn't go out to dinner," Mrs. Campbell mourned. "We just sat there on our devices."

She rallied the troops the next day to the aquarium. Her husband joined them for a bit but then begged out to do e-mail on his phone. Later she found him playing video games.

On Thursday, their fourth day in Carmel, Mr. Campbell spent the day at the beach with his family. They flew a kite and played whiffle ball. Connor unplugged too. "It changes the mood of everything when everybody is present," Mrs. Campbell said. The next day, the family drove home, and Mr. Campbell disappeared into his office.

Mr. Nass at Stanford thinks the ultimate risk of heavy technology use is that it diminishes empathy by limiting how much people engage with one another, even in the same room.

“The way we become more human is by paying attention to each other,” he said. “It shows how much you care.”

That empathy, Mr. Nass said, is essential to the human condition. “We are at an inflection point,” he said. “A significant fraction of people’s experiences are now fragmented.”

**File Name: A8P Shut Down Your Screen**

**Argument/Opinion**

**Grade 8**

**On-Demand Writing- Uniform Prompt**

### **Shut Down Your Screen**

Dear Teachers,

I believe that we should participate in shutdown your screen week. I think that everyone in the school should not use any electronics for one week. Since the invention of the computer, cellphone and other electronics, people have been using them more and more and more. These electronics have big upsides, you're never alone if you have cell service and Facebook allows people to talk to multiple friends at once when they're not in the same room, town, state, or country. But they also have their downsides. What makes us truly great is our ability to think deeply and focus, but when we use electronics or the internet we aren't doing either of these things. In fact, using these things makes us think more shallow and focus less. I think that we should participate in shut down your screen week.

One reason is that using electronics and multi-tasking causes focus problems, on and off computers. In *Attached to Technology and Paying a Price* by Matt Richtel, it says, "Scientists say juggling email, phone calls, and other incoming information can change how people think and behave. They say our ability to focus is being undermined by bursts of information." This ability to focus is enormously important, it's one of the things that we depend on almost every day. Like when you're driving a car to work or flying a plane. If you're distracted while doing one of these things it can have dire consequences for yourself and for others. Multi-tasking can also affect creativity, deep thought, causing problems for work and family life. By participating we could give

**Introduces a claim:**  
The introduction gives specific context for the proposal about "Shut Down Your Screen Week" and then states a claim

**Organizes the reasons and evidence logically**

**Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence,** including direct quotations, **from accurate, credible sources,** thereby **demonstrating understanding of the topic**

**Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence**

people a chance to develop new habits of not using their phone or computer all the time.

A second reason that we should participate is that heavy multitaskers have trouble filtering out irrelevant information on and off the computer. In *Attached to Technology and Paying the Price* by Matt Richtel it says the multitaskers “had trouble filtering out the blue ones – the irrelevant information.”

If we participated, we could give these people a chance to develop new habits that would help them filter out irrelevant information and only pay attention to the things that are important. For example, if someone’s playing with their daughter, they would check their email every time they received an email instead of focusing on playing with their daughter.

Now, some people say that we shouldn’t participate because technology makes you smarter, why stop doing something that’s helping yourself. In an imaging study by Dr. Small, he found that “Internet users showed greater brain activity than nonusers, suggesting they were growing their neural circuitry.” While they may be growing their neural circuitry, they were also changing a characteristic of the brain that was thought to be unchangeable, the ability to only process one stream of information at a time. This ability allows humans to think deeply, an important characteristic in today’s society. By changing it, they were preventing themselves from having the ability to think deeply.

Technology is a new thing, and it has many advantages and conveniences. But for many it becomes more than a convenience, it becomes an obsession. For this reason I believe that we should participate in shut down your screen week, to give people a chance to make new habits and make technology a convenience again, not a necessity.

**Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, including direct quotations, from accurate, credible sources, thereby demonstrating understanding of the topic**

**Acknowledges an opposing claim, which the writer distinguishes from the claim and then counters with logical reasoning and relevant evidence**

**Establishes and maintains a formal style**

**Provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the argument presented**

In this on-demand assignment, students were asked to take a position on whether their school should participate in the national “Shut Down Your Screen Week.” This writer begins by offering specific, well-developed context concerning the issue and then asserts the claim that, in his view, the school should participate.

The writer develops his claim with several reasons, which he supports with some relevant, credible evidence, demonstrating his understanding of the topic and the texts he has read. The evidence in this piece comes from those texts. The writer organizes his ideas clearly and supports his claim with logical reasoning. In addition, he acknowledges a counterclaim, distinguishes it from his own claim, and refutes it with support for his own position, even though this development of a counterclaim is not stated in the Standards at this grade level, and again includes evidence from the texts. Throughout the essay, the writer uses words, phrases, and clauses as transitions to clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence and to create cohesion.

The writer maintains a formal style throughout the piece. The conclusion follows from and supports the argument presented.

**File Name: A8P Shut Down Your Screen**

**Argument/Opinion**

**Grade 8**

**On-Demand Writing- Uniform Prompt**

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A second reason that we should participate is that heavy multitaskers have trouble filtering out irrelevant information on and off the computer. In *Attached to Technology and Paying the Price* by Matt Richtel it says the multitaskers "had trouble filtering out the blue ones – the irrelevant information." If we participated, we could give these people a chance to develop new habits that would help them filter out irrelevant information and only pay attention to the

things that are important. For example, if someone's playing with their daughter, they would check their email every time they received an email instead of focusing on playing with their daughter.

Now, some people say that we shouldn't participate because technology makes you smarter, why stop doing something that's helping yourself. In an imaging study by Dr. Small, he found that "Internet users showed greater brain activity than nonusers, suggesting they were growing their neural circuitry." While they may be growing their neural circuitry, they were also changing a characteristic of the brain that was thought to be unchangeable, the ability to only process one stream of information at a time. This ability allows humans to think deeply, an important characteristic in today's society. By changing it, they were preventing themselves from having the ability to think deeply.

Technology is a new thing, and it has many advantages and conveniences. But for many it becomes more than a convenience, it becomes an obsession. For this reason I believe that we should participate in shut down your screen week, to give people a chance to make new habits and make technology a convenience again, not a necessity.



**File Name: A8R Years Gone By**

**Argument/Opinion**

**Grade 8**

**Range of Writing**

### **Years Gone By;**

#### **The Importance of Great Literature**

“That one day little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

As years have gone by, as we take actions and feel emotions, we embark upon a search for something to describe the indescribable, to understand the most complicated of thoughts, and to ease unrelenting pain. It is in this search that we stumble upon literature, and we have learned that it can be one of the most effective tools to both spiritually and bodily heal the wounds of human nature.

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s message of equality is one that has stayed rooted deep in American history. He speaks of a problem that must not be neglected. In many cases, the key to problems such as these is understanding and awareness. Through literature we find that we benefit through both. Really great literature speaks to you forever, despite years of actions taken and emotions felt.

An example of such literature is the book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain. Through its main character, Huckleberry Finn, a young, boisterous white boy who has recently run away, and his friend Jim, a runaway slave, live the values of America and the values of a very turbulent, but loyal friendship.

Regardless of its message, Mark Twain’s talent and its ability to withstand, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is at risk of being taken off the shelves of schools across the country. As an American student, I firmly believe that we must make a stand against this potentially great loss, and make sure that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is kept in our schools

#### **Introduces a claim:**

Introduction sets stage for claim to follow, connecting the purpose of great literature with the American ideal of equality

Defines problem / issue at hand (*Huckleberry Finn* being challenged in curriculum)

States focus / claim

and in our minds for the sake of describing the indescribable, understanding the most complicated of thoughts and easing pain.

Some may disagree with the message conveyed by Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. With fire in their eyes they say that such a book encourages bad behavior and addresses racism in such a way that it should not be on school shelves.

First, they find that Huck is too unlawful a child to be portrayed as a hero. He steals, lies, and runs away. He has no problem going against the law or his own conscience and takes pride in achievements he has been taught not to strive for, they point out. However, to this point we shake our head. Many, many books have characters that lead lives that today's children are taught against. Among the pages of The Old Testament, Cain, brother of Able, stands clearly as a wrong-doer in order to help us better understand the negative forces of human nature. Though some may believe that Huck is among these undying wrong-doers, he may well be, like Cain, an example of how not to act. Yet you cannot classify Huck as a bad or good person, he is one of the many complicated characters that call the pages of great literature home. When stealing, Huck is actually "borrowing", his lies cause him great stress and come back to haunt him. When he runs away, he is running from an abusive father, taking control of a situation that was headed for disaster. When he goes against his conscience it is for the sake of a friend. In that case, Huck decides that the laws of human nature are more important than the laws that are ignorant, laws that discriminate, laws that could undeservingly take away what is yours. Huck is indeed no criminal, and if anything his values are something to be admired.

Those who still believe that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* should be taken off our schools' shelves say that it addresses racism in a way that is inappropriate for students. But that point, like the other, holds no water. It addresses racism in an appropriate and indeed necessary format. Like Martin Luther King Jr.'s message, it enables us to understand

**Distinguishes claim from opposing claims in a series of counterclaims**

**Explains counterclaim thoroughly**

**Phrases and clauses clarify relationships within reasons and evidence.**

**Acknowledges an opposing claim, which the writer distinguishes from the claim and then counters with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, demonstrating a deep understanding of the text and topic**

**Organizes the reasons and evidence logically  
Establishes and maintains a formal style.**

**Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence**

and at the same time helps us become aware of how poorly African-Americans were treated during the time the book was set, and it does this in a true-to-life and very real layout. Also, Huck and Jim strike a friendship that white people and slaves could not have in the limits of society during the time period and this reminds the reader in many places that everyone deserves the same freedom and equality.

You must also take into account that if there is any place to read a book with possibly risky content it would be inside classrooms, classrooms where the material would certainly be discussed and explained. In class is perhaps the safest place for one to read this book, or any book that could result in conflicting viewpoints. To take it off the shelves of schools would be to take away the ability to help children understand and be aware of the deeper meaning, and therefore they would be worse off than if it were to be in their schools.

In light of the past arguments, we must now press on to show you what an excellent book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain really is. It is a book that contains important illustrations of racism and how to overcome it, as well as many American values.

First, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* illustrates a struggle that has been deeply rooted in our past, and remains deeply rooted in the present. Though we have come a long way, a wall built of racial cloud still stands. Huck and Jim find a way to get past this wall and despite slavery and the examples set in society, treat each other as equals. In Chapter 15, titled “Fooling Poor Old Jim” Huck tries to play a trick on Jim to make fun of him, not thinking about Jim’s feelings. When Jim discovers the truth he is deeply hurt, but is able to express that to Huck. Hearing of his friend’s sadness, Huck in turn apologizes for his actions.

“En when I wake up en fine you back agin, all safe en soun’, de tears come, en I could ‘a’ got down on my knees en kiss yo’ foot, I’s so thankful. En all you wuz thinking’ ‘bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts

**Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence**, thereby demonstrating deep understanding of the text and topic, including broader ideas about education

**Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence**

**Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence**, including direct quotations, thereby demonstrating deep understanding of the text and topic; uses precise references to text which are thoroughly analyzed and explained

dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed.' Then he got up slow and walked to the wigwam, and went in there without saying anything but that. But that was enough. It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed *his* foot to get him to take it back. It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger – but I done it and I wahren't every sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way.”

It is a very important time in this book when Jim is able to express to Huck how being lied to hurt him, especially when he thought of Huck as a friend. After Jim has spoken of feelings and retired for bed, Huck takes time to reflect upon his actions, and how they made Jim feel. Fifteen minutes later, despite what society taught him, Huck apologies to Jim as only a friend would, and takes what Jim says to heart.

Not only does *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* address racism in an appropriate way and remarkably find a way to overcome it, but in many ways it reminds the reader of the important values that can only too often be forgotten in America. One of the biggest is freedom. Both Huck and Jim are searching for freedom, escaping the imprisonment of slavery and an abusive father. Another value that is evident is equality. As expressed in the quote above, Huck and Jim find that equality is an essential in their friendship. Through this understanding, they manage to stay friends despite all that life throws their way.

One clear and significant value shows in this book is perseverance. Both Huck and Jim set a valiant and enduring example of this value throughout the book. Despite Huck's father and slave catchers close on their trail; a rattlesnake skin that constantly brings them bad luck; a wrecked ship that accommodated a murder plot; a tumultuous friendship and a family blinded by bloodshed, Huck and Jim find themselves pushing that much harder to reach the freedom that their hearts desire. They find courage and want within each other, and as a heroic duo conquer all that flows to them

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upon the river of life.

There are many values evident in this book that are set down in the Declaration of Independence, and values that have stood the test of time. This brings us back to the fact that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* must be taught in schools. As Huck and Jim lead their lives they set the examples that are crucial to students' education. When people learn how to treat each other and learn significant values at a young age, they are given the opportunity to apply those lessons to their future and in turn teach their children. To leave these lessons behind would be doing these students a disservice, for it is lessons like these that teach us who we are, who we need to be.

Great literature is a food that is scarce, but it will always be universal. Do your part to foster its presence in your life, and the life of the youth of America. As years have gone by, as actions are taken and emotions are felt, we all search for something to describe the indescribable, to understand an idea that is conflicting, or to ease unrelenting pain. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain is a possible outcome of that search, teaching the significance of friendship, freedom and equality. Under the nose of a visceral world, two differing runaways find shelter in a friendship banned from society. In this friendship, they teach the world the importance of understanding and the importance of great literature.

**Provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the argument presented**

In this assignment from a language arts class, the student was asked, after studying *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, to take a position on whether or not the book should continue to be included in the school curriculum. She gives an introduction of some background / context on the issue, and makes a claim that the book should continue to be included.

The writer develops her claim with several reasons, which she supports thoroughly and thoughtfully with relevant, accurate evidence from the text, showing deep understanding of both the text and the issue, and even of broader connections to bigger ideas like equality and the purpose of education. In a clearly organized essay, she relies on logical reasoning to develop her claim and persuade her audience of the correctness of her position. In addition, she thoroughly and thoughtfully acknowledges the counterclaim that there are reasons to eliminate the book, then refutes that counterclaim with clear and logical, text-based reasoning.

The writer maintains a formal style throughout the piece. The conclusion follows from the argument presented and synthesizes the key points.

**File Name: A8R Years Gone By**

**Argument/Opinion**

**Grade 8**

**Range of Writing**

**Years Gone By;  
The Importance of Great Literature**

“That one day little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

As years have gone by, as we take actions and feel emotions, we embark upon a search for something to describe the indescribable, to understand the most complicated of thoughts, and to ease unrelenting pain. It is in this search that we stumble upon literature, and we have learned that it can be one of the most effective tools to both spiritually and bodily heal the wounds of human nature.

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s message of equality is one that has stayed rooted deep in American history. He speaks of a problem that must not be neglected. In many cases, the key to problems such as these is understanding and awareness. Through literature we find that we benefit through both. Really great literature speaks to you forever, despite years of actions taken and emotions felt.

An example of such literature is the book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain. Through its main character, Huckleberry Finn, a young, boisterous white boy who has recently run away, and his friend Jim, a runaway slave, live the values of America and the values of a very turbulent, but loyal friendship.

Regardless of its message, Mark Twain’s talent and its ability to withstand, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is at risk of being taken off the shelves of schools across the country. As an American student, I firmly believe that we must make a stand against this potentially great loss, and make sure that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is kept in our schools and in our minds for the sake of describing the indescribable, understanding the most complicated of thoughts and easing pain.

Some may disagree with the message conveyed by Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. With fire in their eyes they say that such a book encourages bad behavior and addresses racism in such a way that it should not be on school shelves.

First, they find that Huck is too unlawful a child to be portrayed as a hero. He steals, lies, and runs away. He has no problem going against the law or his own conscience and takes pride in achievements he has been taught not to strive for, they point out. However, to this point we shake our head. Many, many books have characters that lead lives that today's children are taught against. Among the pages of The Old Testament, Cain, brother of Able, stands clearly as a wrong-doer in order to help us better understand the negative forces of human nature. Though some may believe that Huck is among these undying wrong-doers, he may well be, like Cain, an example of how not to act. Yet you cannot classify Huck as a bad or good person, he is one of the many complicated characters that call the pages of great literature home. When stealing, Huck is actually "borrowing", his lies cause him great stress and come back to haunt him. When he runs away, he is running from an abusive father, taking control of a situation that was headed for disaster. When he goes against his conscience it is for the sake of a friend. In that case, Huck decides that the laws of human nature are more important than the laws that are ignorant, laws that discriminate, laws that could undeservingly take away what is yours. Huck is indeed no criminal, and if anything his values are something to be admired.

Those who still believe that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* should be taken off our schools' shelves say that it addresses racism in a way that is inappropriate for students. But that point, like the other, holds no water. It addresses racism in an appropriate and indeed necessary format. Like Martin Luther King Jr.'s message, it enables us to understand and at the same time helps us become aware of how poorly African-Americans were treated during the time the book was set, and it does this in a true-to-life and very real layout. Also, Huck and Jim strike a friendship that white people and slaves could not have in the limits of society during the time period and this reminds the reader in many places that everyone deserves the same freedom and equality.

You must also take into account that if there is any place to read a book with possibly risky content it would be inside classrooms, classrooms where the material would certainly be discussed and explained. In class is perhaps the safest place for one to read this book, or any book that could result in conflicting viewpoints. To take it off the shelves of schools would be to



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**File Name: A8R We Need the League**

**Argument/Opinion**

**Grade 8**

**Range of Writing**

### **We Need the League**

Great people of North Dakota,

I, Senator McCumber, [an actual Senator from 1919 in the League of Nations debate], have just participated in a debate regarding whether or not America should sign the Treaty of Versailles, and in doing so, join the League of Nations. The League of Nations is a unified group of nations dedicated to the preservation of peace. The League is designed to deal with international issues, adjudicating differences between countries instead of them going directly to combat.

Now, in the interests of the great state of North Dakota, I voted in favor of the treaty with no reservations. We need a fair treaty to prevent future wars as horrible as the Great War was. After the war, the central powers composed the Treaty of Versailles to create the League of Nations in an attempt to ward off future conflicts. We cannot have another war as horrible as this one. I believe, because of that, that we need a fair treaty, equal to all its members, that will restrict the use of new weapons, and prevent future wars from breaking out.

First, the Treaty and the League will control the use of new weapons. As stated in Article VII, “One of its (the League’s) jobs will be to come up with a plan for reducing the number of weapons around the world (arms reduction).” This means that the League will be in charge of weapons issues. This will cause heavily armed countries to demilitarize and make it less possible for war to break out. This is good because heavily armed countries generally end up using those arms in some way.

Another reason why I believe we need to sign the Treaty with no reservations is we need a treaty that is fair to all its members. Reservations

**Introduces a claim:**

The introduction gives specific context about the issue whether to join the League of Nations in 1919. Writer makes the claim of supporting U.S. entry into League of Nations and **distinguishes it from alternate claims** that the U.S. should not vote to enter League.

**States focus / claim**

Defines problem, reason for debate; gives enough background / context so that a reader can follow writer's thinking.

**Organizes the reasons and evidence logically**

**Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence**, including direct quotations, **from accurate, credible sources**, thereby **demonstrating understanding of the topic**

[proposed by the League's opponents] would give America too much power within the league, thus allowing America to bend the rules of the League to suit its own will. This would cause unrest in the League, possibly causing America to make enemies. This could lead to another war. The treaty should be as fair as possible.

**Establishes and maintains a formal style.**

Yet another reason why I voted for America to sign the treaty is the fact it would prevent future wars from breaking out. The way the League is designed, it would give plenty of time for the League to settle the countries' differences with a fair and equal compromise. If war were to break out, the council members in the League would all help in defending each other, thus ending the war as quickly as possible with as few deaths as possible. The treaty would prevent war from happening or end the fighting as quickly as possible.

**Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence**

Some people say that we shouldn't join the League because we would be intervening in foreign affairs, that it would cause another war. How can you not intervene when 8 million people died in the last war? How can you stand there with a clear conscience when you know you could have prevented all that carnage from ever happening? The League will help countries settle their differences with plenty of time to talk it over. Six months for the countries to listen to the council's advice, and after that another three months before they can mobilize. If we join the League, we will keep anything like the Great War from happening again.

**Acknowledges an opposing claim, which the writer distinguishes from the claim and then counters with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, demonstrating an understanding of the topic**

In conclusion, the Treaty of Versailles needs to be signed so the League will be put into affect. The League of Nations will prevent war from breaking out, restrict weapons development and militarism, and keep us from the horrors of another Great War.

**Provides a concluding section that follows from the argument presented**

Thank you.

In this assignment from a social studies class, the student was asked, in the persona of a senator from 1919, to take a position on whether or not the United States should join the League of Nations. He gives an introduction of some background / context on the issue, and makes a claim that in his view the United States should join the League.

The writer develops his claim with several reasons, which he develops with relevant, accurate, credible evidence. In a clearly organized essay, he relies largely on logical reasoning to develop his claim and persuade his audience of the correctness of his position. In addition, he acknowledges the counterclaim that there are reasons to not support the League, then refutes that counterclaim with an argument that is both moral (*eight million people died, so how can we not support the League?*) and practical (*the League will give countries time to talk out their differences instead of going to war*). Throughout the essay, the writer uses words, phrases, and clauses as transitions to clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence and to create cohesion.

The writer maintains a formal style throughout the piece. The conclusion is a basic restatement that follows from the argument presented.

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Another reason why I believe we need to sign the Treaty with no reservations is we need a treaty that is fair to all its members. Reservations [proposed by the League's opponents] would give America too much power within the league, thus allowing America to bend the rules of the League to suit its own will. This would cause unrest in the League, possibly causing America to make enemies. This could lead to another war. The treaty should be as fair as possible.

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In conclusion, the Treaty of Versailles needs to be signed so the League will be put into affect. The League of Nations will prevent war from breaking out, restrict weapons development and militarism, and keep us from the horrors of another Great War.

Thank you.