

# Joel Stein

\* While simplistic, his use of the word but helps clarify + separate his argument from what has come immediately before

\* Appeals to humor - I like him more

\* Appeals to ethos - references to high-brow literary texts are accurate and sophisticated - helps me trust he knows what he's talking about

\* Quotations from experts help him build his counter argument

\* Personal story makes him trustworthy

\* Appeals to logos - references help fill our need for logic



## How I Replaced Shakespeare

And why our kids may never read a poem as lovely as a tree

Anecdotes help establish humorous tone and credibility. Also provides background on the issue.

I WAS NOT WORRIED ABOUT THE AMERICAN education system until after I started writing a column, because that's when I found out there are English teachers who assign my column as reading material. I regularly get e-mails from students asking about my use of anastrophe, metonymy, thesis statements and other things I've never heard of. To which I respond, "Transfer high schools immediately! To one that teaches Shakespeare and Homer instead of the insightful commentary of a first-rate, unconventionally handsome modern wit! Also, don't do drugs!"

I can expect to be sending more of these e-mails thanks to the Common Core State Standards, with which public schools are encouraged to comply by 2014. The new curriculum standards dramatically shift about half the nation's high school English reading lists toward an emphasis on nonfiction. In a speech last year, David Coleman, the new president of the College Board, who was one of the chief creators of the Common Core, worried about students' focusing on opinion over analysis in their writing. "As you grow up in this world, you realize people really don't give a s--- about what you feel or what you think," he said. "It is rare in a working environment that someone says, 'Johnson, I need a market analysis by Friday, but before that I need a compelling account of your childhood.'" I agree with this, but only because no one has ever asked me for a market analysis.

writing to improve, I read something that forces me to think about words differently: a novel, a poem, a George W. Bush speech. Sure, some nonfiction is beautifully written, and none of Jack London's novels are, but no nonfiction writer can teach you how to use language like William Faulkner or James Joyce can. Fiction also teaches you how to tell a story, which is how we express and remember nearly everything. If you can't tell a story, you will never, ever get people to wire you the funds you need to pay the fees to get your Nigerian inheritance out of the bank.

When I asked Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers—which, along with the National Governors Association, created the Common Core—he told me that CEOs and university professors championed the shift to nonfiction. Only a small, vocal group objected. "It upset people who love literature. That happens to be a lot of high school teachers," Wilhoit said. But students aren't reading nonfiction on their own, he added,

and their history-class assignments tend to be short textbook summaries, not primary sources. "It's not a good trend," he said. "I guess it's a by-product of the media world we live in." Students are clearly not getting examples of how to make a persuasive argument by, for instance, avoiding insulting the media world that is interviewing them.

But if you ask me, that's a failing of

history classes, not English. Among the nonfiction the Common Core curriculum suggests are FedViews by the Federal Reserve of San Francisco. I've never read FedViews, but I know that unlike my late-night high school sessions helping other kids parse "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," no amount of discussing FedViews is going to get you to second base.

School isn't merely training for work; it's training to communicate throughout our lives. If we didn't all experience Hamlet's soliloquy, we'd have to explain soul-tortured indecisiveness by saying things like "Dude, you are like Ben Bernanke in early 2012 weighing inflation vs. growth in Quantitative Easing 3." Teaching language through nonfiction is like teaching history by playing Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire" or teaching science by giving someone an unmarked test tube full of sludge and having him figure out if the white powder he distilled is salt or sugar by making Steven Baumgarten taste it, which is how I learned science and how Steven Baumgarten learned to be more careful about picking people to work with. Something he could have learned by reading Othello.

But if our nation is going to make this horrible mistake, I'd like to get something out of it, like selling copies of my book. So I asked Wilhoit if he would consider including my writing in the curriculum, to which he said, "It would be interesting to take your article on a specific subject and compare and contrast it to another author writing about the same subject. That would be ideal. We will use it. I promise you." Now I just have to find another writer who has written a compelling account of my childhood.



Unequivocal statements of argument

Tongue-in-cheek

Self-deprecating makes him likeable

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Presents the opposing view in a relatively neutral fashion before parsing through each pitfall

Coleman's idea is that by reading clear, tightly structured nonfiction, kids will learn how to write clear, tightly structured nonfiction, hopefully without hitting Reply All. And indeed, the first time I write in a new format—travel essay, screenplay, apology e-mail—I read a bunch of examples. But when I want my

Organizational Structure:

Paragraphs 1-2: Personal anecdote + establishment of background on issue  
Paragraphs 3-6: Development of opponents argument + counterclaims  
Paragraph 7: Declaration of argument



Purpose: To re-emphasize the notion that literature does have value in our day-to-day lives as well as in the classroom.

Audience: Educated; career-focused; believe in education reform; proponents of Common Core; American

Situation: America is in a state of upheaval in Education; policy reform is running rampant with increasing emphasis on STEM classes - The question has become how can English classes support STEM rather than being respected on its own merit; Common Core Standards revision; focus shift from fiction to non-fiction; motivated by a sense of duty

Tone: Passionately sardonic

Author: Educated individual who has reaped the benefits of having learned fiction in school; assumes audience has received a similar education; Educational background influences his bias

Synthesis: In a time when America's educational focus has put more value into non-fiction ~~over~~ fiction in English classes as a result of Common Core, journalist Joel Stein writes a passionately sardonic column to re-emphasize the notion that literature does have value in our day-to-day lives as well as in the classroom. His prose is directed towards well-educated, career focused individuals skeptical of Literature's true value.