

CHAPTER

7

Exploring Concepts



On some level we can't help but write about concepts, those thoughts and general ideas that we infer from specific instances or events. Every essay you have written so far and every episode you have thought about so far has had, at its core, a concept. In earlier chapters, you have been encouraged to explore your thoughts as well as your feelings by starting with yourself, with events, with other people, and with relationships. When we start with a concept as the subject for an exploratory essay, the kinds of issues we encounter can sometimes differ from those we find when writing about other topics. For example, when exploring a concept, we need to be very clear about the definitions of important terms. In fact, sometimes a whole essay is an extended definition of one key term. In exploratory essays about concepts, we often resort to various sources for confirmation or for information about points of contention. As our understanding of a concept grows, that concept becomes one of the tools to help us dig even deeper into our present and past experiences. And the more sophisticated and detailed the sources we explore, the deeper and more sophisticated will be our understanding of the concept. Exploring concepts allows us to expand our knowledge by looking outward at sources as well as inward at ourselves.

Writer-Based Goals

There are two writer-based goals for exploring concepts: (1) to learn more about a concept that interests you; (2) to expand your knowledge about yourself. You achieve these goals by expanding your search beyond your personal experience, moving outward to include other sources such as books, articles, newspapers, computer databases, and interviews with experts. Such research deepens your experience of the concept and becomes part of your knowledge of the world. Along the way, you may discover connections between concepts that you never realized existed before, or you may discover that what you thought you believed isn't supported by your own experiences or by those of others. Exploring concepts can be very exciting.

Reader-Based Goals

There are four reader-based goals for exploring concepts: (1) to deepen your readers' knowledge of the concept; (2) to place your understanding of it in the wider context of the sources that you consulted; (3) to explore your thoughts and feelings about the particular concept; (4) to explain the sources of your understanding (for example, a personal experience, something you read or saw or heard).

The Process for Exploring Concepts

As with all exploratory writing, the process for exploring concepts can be exciting. First, find a concept that interests you. It does not have to be one that you believe in; it may simply be one that you want to learn more about or even one that you oppose and wish to explore in order to expose all of its dangerous implications. Second, by thinking and writing, discover what you already know about the concept. Third, explore other sources for additional information you need and to learn how others understand the concept. Once the prewriting is completed, you are ready to draft and revise your essay.

Select an Idea That Interests You

We all have personal definitions of concepts that affect or interest us, even if we haven't verbalized them yet. In fact, putting them into words is one way we learn about ourselves and find out what we really understand. In addition to the idea-generation techniques mentioned in Chapter 2 (for example, freewriting, listing, brainstorming), two other techniques can help prime the pump—"Dictionary Seek-and-Write" and "Titles."

Dictionary Seek-and-Write

With your eyes closed, randomly open a dictionary and place your finger on a page. Whatever word you find under your finger is your topic for this exercise. Write for 10 minutes about that word. Let your mind play. If you find yourself going off on a tangent, follow it since tangents often lead to interesting insights. Sometimes you'll get an "easy" word like *truth* or *justice*; at times, though, you might get unusual words such as *lute* or *repellent* or *splurge*. Whatever the word, try writing about it. If your finger finds a word about which you have nothing to say, however, feel free to select another word (perhaps take the word above or below the original selection, or start all over).

Titles

Using titles is a particularly effective approach because it not only stimulates thinking but also suggests at least a first source to read. The technique is simple but powerful: Use the titles of existing essays to spark your own exploratory writing.

Your task here is not to duplicate or approximate what the original author wrote about a concept. Instead, your task is to find out what *you* think about the concept. Later you can read the author's essay as part of your research into what other people have thought about it. If a title doesn't apply literally to you, see if it applies figuratively. Suppose that I were using the title of Nancy Mairs' "On Being a Cripple" to spark my writing. I am not a cripple

in the literal sense (although I have had my leg in a cast twice). But, in the figurative sense, I am a cripple (probably we all are in some way). For instance, I'm a "social cripple": In large gatherings of strangers, I can't make small talk; I can't ask provocative questions that get other people rambling on about themselves—instead, I stand around holding a glass and wondering when I can politely bolt for the door. In short, taking a title figuratively can be as productive as taking it literally.

Sample of Directed Freewriting

For the sake of illustration, let's select one concept; how we approach defining it will illustrate the process of exploring any concept. Here is a sample of the directed freewriting that I did for the concept of *mothering*:

Mothering is all about the female parent's job. So it is about tasks and doing. What does a mother do? Or is the concept connected somehow to biological birth as well? No, *mothering* is what happens after the birth—the birth itself is something else—maybe just birthing. Of course, the opposite is true of fathers. Why do we never say *fathering* or "he *fathered* his son or daughter"—except to mean *impregnating the mother*? Yet she "mothered" her son never means "gave birth to." Apparently there has been no historical equivalent to *mothering* on the part of men, or at least none that society has acknowledged with an official term.

Anyway, *mothering* is the process that follows conception and birth. Usually it has a positive sense—caring for the child, helping him or her, giving advice and support, nurturing. Does it include the idea of *unconditional love*? Does anything include the idea of unconditional love? It is hard for me to see this yet; maybe I'll return to the idea later.

The concept of *mothering* acquires negative connotations if it continues past the point when society assumes the child no longer needs it. Or, at least, no longer needs such attention from his or her actual mother. People certainly say that a man's wife "mothers" him—sometimes that is said as a positive thing about the wife suggesting that she "takes good care of him" and sometimes as a negative thing about the husband suggesting that he's not "man enough" to prevent her from "babying" him—a very negative term for *inappropriate mothering*. *Attention* is a key idea too, I think, for that can include psychological as well as physical stuff. Maybe most mothers would like to continue *mothering* when it is no longer appropriate, but most of us have carved out our own lives. When mothers do overstep the boundaries, it might simply be that we don't have that day-to-day connection with them that we did when we were children, so they can't know anymore what an appropriate area for their attention is and what isn't.

Maybe *mothering* is a comfortable and fulfilling role for mothers to play. Perhaps it gives the illusion of protecting the child and keeping the bad things away. Folksy examples abound in TV ads—the whole idea of “Dr. Mom,” of mothers putting adhesive bandages on children’s skinned knees and cooking that special dinner when the child gets a good report card.

Discover What You Already Know about the Concept

After selecting a concept and getting some of your initial thoughts about it down on paper (or in the computer’s memory), discover what you already know about the concept. Such discovery includes at least four elements:

- Define the concept clearly and explicitly.
- Explore the origins and sources of your definition of the concept.
- Explore any experiences from your life that illustrate the concept.
- Explore any experiences from the lives of your family or friends that illustrate the concept.

Defining the Concept

There are several strategies of definition. For example, you can write a one-sentence definition of the concept, give examples to illustrate the concept (for instance, my mother, famous mothers in history or literature, the concept of mothers in various cultures and eras), trace the roots and history of the word that names the concept, compare and contrast the concept with other concepts (for example, *mothering* with *fathering*), give negative definitions (for example, *mothering* is *not birthing*). A combination of such techniques will often produce an exploratory essay about the concept.

One-Sentence Definitions

Any good one-sentence definition accomplishes at least two things: It sets the object to be defined in a context of similar things (the *class* to which it belongs) and then shows how it differs from each of those other things (its *distinguishing characteristics*). Let’s say that we want to define the concept *chair*. First, the class. My first thought was that a chair is “a piece of furniture.” Okay. But the concept *furniture* includes many objects—for example, beds, sofas, chairs, tables, bureaus, and desks. A more useful (because smaller) class, then, would be “furniture designed for sitting.” That eliminates beds, tables, desks, and bureaus.

We have located the concept *chair* within a workable class that includes only four other items: stools, sofas, love seats, and benches. However, now we need to find the characteristics that separate the chair from those other four items. Often the best method for achieving this is to proceed one item at

a time. For example, what separates a *chair* from a *sofa*? The latter is designed to hold more than one person whereas a chair is designed to hold only one person. That is our first distinguishing characteristic, and it eliminates everything in the list except *stool*. What separates a *chair* from a *stool*? Well, a chair always has a seat and a back; it sometimes has arms; it sometimes has four legs (beanbag chairs, of course, are legless). By definition, a stool, on the other hand, has legs but never a back or arms. Some bar stools, however, do have some sort of back, but they are always high off the ground. A final distinguishing characteristic, then, is that the seat of a chair is low enough to the ground that an average-sized adult can sit against the chair's back and her feet will still rest on the ground. So our information gathering is complete. We structure the sentence definition by introducing the item to be defined first, then the class to which it belongs, and then the distinguishing characteristics:

A chair is a piece of furniture designed to be sat in by one person; it always has a back, its seat is low enough to the ground so that an average-sized adult can sit with against its back and her feet will rest on the floor, and it may or may not have arms and legs.

Of course, there are other ways of setting up the sentence, ways that are less direct but still effective. For example, we might use subordinate clauses:

Although designed to be sat in by only one person, a chair can sometimes hold two persons if one sits on top of the other since the chair's back prevents the two from toppling backwards and the person sitting directly on the chair has her feet planted on the ground.

As you can see from this rather silly example, the first subordinate clause provides basic information and the other subordinating clauses provide additional information.

Another structural device that is useful for definition is the appositive phrase. An appositive is a noun which renames a previous noun, and it is usually located next to that noun. Consider the following example:

He quickly drew a sketch of a chair, a piece of furniture which always has a back and which is designed to be sat in by one person whose feet touch the ground.

Another strategy of definition is the comparative definition. Here two or more terms are used to define each other. You might use contrasting clauses that start with words such as *although*, *despite*, *even though*, or you might use parallel phrases that follow a colon or a verb:

Although both have backs, the love seat is designed to be sat in by two people whereas the chair is designed to be sat in by only one person.

The chair is designed to be sat in by one person; the love seat is designed for two.

The Mothering Example

Let's return to the more abstract concept of *mothering*. How would we define this concept? It might make sense to begin with the root word, *mother*. The first place to look is a dictionary (either a print or online dictionary). *Webster's New World Dictionary* (2nd edition), for example, says *mother* (both noun and verb) has the following meanings:

n[oun]. 1. a woman who has borne a child; esp., a woman as she is related to her child or children 2. a) a stepmother b) a mother-in-law 3. the female parent of a plant or animal 4. that which gives birth to something, is the origin or source of something, or nurtures in the manner of a mother 5. a) a woman having the responsibility and authority of a mother b) a woman who is the head (mother superior) of a religious establishment 6. an elderly woman: used as a title of affectionate respect 7. the qualities of a mother

v[erb] t[ransitive]. 1. to be the mother or giving birth to: often used figuratively 2. to look after or care for as a mother does 3. to acknowledge or admit that one is the mother, author, or originator of.

In addition, we could consult the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, which features extensive definitions as well as numerous quotations to illustrate the shades of meaning that a term has. We might consult a book of quotations such as *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* to see what famous people have said about *mothering*. Ultimately, we might come up with the following one-sentence definition, which will require a lot of expansion via examples, word history, negative definition, comparison and contrast, and other sources and might even explore related issues such as the various types of mothers (biological, foster, adoptive, and step):

Mothering is the process in which a female parents a child, a process that includes raising, nurturing, educating, supporting, and loving that child.

Exploring the Sources of Your Personal Definition

This is one of the ways that this type of essay is deeply exploratory. Where did your original understanding of this concept come from? No idea pops full-grown into our minds. Each idea comes from someplace, or, rather, from many places. Discovering and exploring those sources are important and

sometimes crucial endeavors. Some obvious sources to consider are your own experiences and reading, your parents and other family members, your friends, co-workers, and acquaintances. Especially be aware that our concepts and beliefs are sometimes ruthlessly shaped and manipulated by public figures and by the media, often for their own unstated ends. Every book, movie, television show, and advertisement that we encounter is trying to define concepts for us—everything from masculinity and femininity to courage and cowardice. Only when we make ourselves aware of the subtexts and hidden messages can we see how we have been influenced by them.

Examining Experiences That Illustrate the Concept

Whatever concept you have chosen to explore, you must have had some experience with it or you wouldn't have chosen it. Again you might start with freewriting to discover that experience and explore its significance. Or perhaps some experience you have already written about in another context involved the concept you are exploring. Examine that experience again. Don't forget about experiences which your family members and friends have told you; they, too, can be useful.

Gather Information from Outside Sources

After formulating your thoughts and ideas, it is time to turn to outside sources. Explore books, movies, or television shows for illustrations and for complementary or competing definitions of the concept.

Often sources with which we are familiar will illustrate a concept for us in surprising ways. Stephen King's horror novel *Carrie*, for instance, provides examples of *fanaticism* and *isolation* and the *tribe mentality*, as well as an interesting example of *mothering*. Other sources might also help. Take a moment to consider what academic disciplines might be involved with the concept you have selected. For our example of *mothering*, psychology, sociology, anthropology, women's studies, feminist studies, literature, and folklore all spring immediately to mind. No doubt there are others. You should consider at least two types of sources for each discipline you can think of: texts and people.

Texts

In addition to dictionaries and books of quotations (online or in print) mentioned earlier, popular and specialized academic journals might be useful. Biographical and autobiographical texts also are wonderful sources. Don't forget about diaries, letters, and private journals (some families have attics loaded with rich material, and some libraries now are gathering such materials). Works which discuss famous (or infamous) examples in history, myth, and literature are helpful as well. All of these texts can help you develop a context for the concept you are exploring, as well as help you understand the global significance of that concept.

People

In addition to gathering the insights and examples of family members and friends, you may find it useful to conduct surveys and interview experts. For example, you might conduct an informal survey of your fellow students (on your dorm floor, in a particular class, or in the dining hall) for their ideas about a concept like *fairness* or *procrastination*. Your essay would have more credibility, however, if you could also interview an expert; for *fairness*, you might interview a professor in some department such as philosophy, political science, anthropology, art, literature, or religion. For *procrastination*, you might interview a member of the psychology department or perhaps one of the on-campus counselors, who no doubt daily helps clients afflicted with the problem.

Conducting an Interview

Interviewing an expert might seem overwhelming at first, but it isn't. Briefly, here's how to arrange and conduct a successful interview. First, contact the person you wish to interview ahead of time to set up an appointment. State exactly what your topic is (for instance, *mothering*) and, as specifically as possible, the kinds of information you would like (suggestions about sources, facts, opinions).

Go to the interview with your questions written out on the first page of the notebook you will use to take notes. This technique will prevent your forgetting to ask something. But remember that an interview is really a conversation, not a question-and-answer session. Often the expert will surprise you with an idea or a fact that leads you away from your written questions. Follow such tangents as far as they go. One advantage of having written questions is that they free you to follow conversational tangents without fear of losing your focus since you can always flip back to the first page and ask any questions not already covered.

It is also a good idea to take notes during the interview (memories are not dependable). This activity may seem impolite, but it isn't. Experts are usually familiar with the interview process, and, in any event, they prefer to be quoted accurately. To get used to the process, try interviewing a couple of your friends first, taking notes. Then you will feel at ease with the process when you interview the expert. Even better, if you have access to a small tape recorder and if the expert agrees, tape the interview and then you can get the quotations and facts exactly right. Many journalists who use tape recorders, however, still take notes during the interview in order to highlight important insights on the spot.

Conducting a Survey

Conducting surveys might be less useful than interviewing, but it is an option that you should at least consider. For exploratory writing, the point of a sur-

vey is to set a context or to establish global significance. With *mothering*, for example, you might survey your dorm floor to find out what students think the term means or to find out how many people on the floor believe they received appropriate *mothering*. Anonymous surveys will always produce more reliable data than those which require the people surveyed to identify themselves. Revealing our real thoughts and feelings is always easier if they can't be used against us at a later period. So if you survey people in your class or dorm, for example, be sure to show them the way you will guarantee anonymity. One significant point about surveys: the phrasing of the questions as well as the questions you ask will inevitably influence the answers you receive. Creating effective surveys is, in fact, an art form all its own. Consider the type of answers you might receive with the following:

1. Have you always hated your mother?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Which of the following words best describes your overall feelings toward your mother? (circle all that apply)
 - a. Love
 - b. Hate
 - c. Like
 - d. Dislike
 - e. Admire
 - f. Do not admire
 - g. Respect
 - h. Do not respect
 - i. Enjoy spending time with her
 - j. Do not enjoy spending time with her

Obviously question 1 does not leave open the possibility that the responder never hated his mother. Question 2 is better, but it limits the responder to the choices provided. Unless you are surveying a great number of people, open-ended questions will produce more complete and accurate data. Here's an example:

1. What words or phrases would you use to describe your feelings about your mother during your pre-adolescent years?

Responding to Others' Visions of the Concept

Once you have gathered information, it is time to assess and respond to it. For example, you might agree with someone else's definition of *mothering* and therefore decide to broaden your own definition to accommodate it. Or you might argue against someone else's definition, thus extending your own. Exploring why you reject a particular definition reveals you and your thought processes as well as expanding your readers' understanding of the concept. In short, once you've done the research, use it creatively.

Structure of an Essay Exploring a Concept

An essay exploring a concept affords you the same freedom of structure as any other exploratory essay. As with other such essays, however, you must consider your readers' needs as you begin to revise. You may need to use a process narration if, for instance, the concept you are explaining is something like "how to become a friend after being an acquaintance" or if you wish to dramatize the process of coming to your present understanding of the concept. You may need to define the concept negatively first in order to clear away the deadwood assumptions you feel your readers might have. At times you will find yourself comparing and contrasting concepts or elements (how is a *friend* different from an *acquaintance*?). Or you might be looking for causes or effects or both. Often you will be classifying or dividing. If you use the ideas or words of other people, be sure to indicate any quotations correctly and to give your sources proper credit, following an accepted form of documentation such as that recommended by the Modern Language Association (MLA) or the American Psychological Association (APA)—these formats are readily available online at dozens of sites, including at <http://web.mit.edu/writing>.

Among the elements your essays might include are the following (but the order is determined by your particular approach to the concept you are exploring):

- Your personal definition of the concept
- Your analysis of its implications
- Examples drawn from your personal experience
- An explanation of the sources of your definition (sources could range from Aristotle to Aunt Agnes, from an advertisement to a Bible verse)
- Definitions by other people who have thought deeply about this concept and its implications

- An exploration of the difference between your definition and theirs
- An explanation of how your definition has changed to accommodate or to include the definitions of others

Possible Places to Expand Your Draft

As with all exploratory essays, the further you probe into the topic and the more you reveal about yourself, the better (and more interesting) the essay is likely to be. In the case of essays that explore concepts, the problems that most often require attention once a draft is done are the following: (1) Your definition of the concept is not complete enough; (2) your exploration of the concept's implications (for you, for other people in your life, for relationships, for the world) is not extensive enough; (3) you haven't discussed (or discussed fully enough) other sources of your personal definition; (4) you haven't offered a satisfactory answer to the question of why this particular concept is important to you; (5) you haven't done enough research to broaden your understanding of the concept and its significance; (6) an assumption that "everyone knows what this concept means" has prevented you from delving far enough into it; (7) your essay doesn't explore the global significance of the concept enough for your audience (why should they care about *your* definition of this concept?) (8) your essay could be structured more effectively for your readers.

Such areas for revision, however, are opportunities to increase even more your understanding of the concept. Perceiving the nuances of a concept can be one of the essayist's most exciting and useful accomplishments and is, after all, one of the reasons why we write in the first place—to deepen our knowledge.

Suggestions for Writing

1. Open a dictionary at random and let your finger land on a word. Write for 10 minutes about that word. Be inventive, considering the word metaphorically, symbolically, or figuratively as well as literally. Play with the concept.
2. Select a concept that interests you. Write briefly explaining why it interests you. Then fully investigate the concept. Write an essay about it, explaining it for your readers, its implications, and why it interested or still interests you.
3. Select one or more of the titles that follow, and write for 10 minutes on the concept in the title. The end product will not be a full-fledged

essay, but it will be the start of exploring a concept. If you get off onto a fruitful tangent, follow it. You can always play with the concept in the original title later. Here are some of Nancy Mairs' titles:

- “On Having Adventures”
- “On Being a Cripple”
- “On Touching by Accident”
- “On Being a Scientific Booby”
- “On Being Raised by a Daughter”
- “On Not Liking Sex”
- “On Loving Men”
- “On Living Behind Bars.”

Here are some of Michel de Montaigne's titles:

- “Of Cannibals”
- “Of Idleness”
- “Of Liars”
- “Of Friendship”
- “Of Moderation”
- “Of Sleep”
- “Of Names”
- “Of the Power of the Imagination.”

Here are some of Francis Bacon's titles:

- “Of Truth”
- “Of Death”
- “Of Revenge”
- “Of Envy”
- “Of Nobility”
- “Of Superstition”
- “Of Cunning”
- “Of Innovations”
- “Of Deformity”
- “Of Studies”
- “Of Suitors.”

Other possibilities include:

- “On Education”
- “On Responsibility”
- “On Justice”
- “On Fairness”
- “On Beauty”
- “On Reading”
- “On Conversing”

“On Laughing”
“On Crying”
“On Freedom”
“On Moving”
“On Staying Still”
“On the Perfect Day”
“On April” (substitute any month)
“On *Can*”
“On *Can’t*”
“On *Should*”
“On Hot or Cold Weather”
“On Farms or Cities or Towns”
“On Siblings”
“On Fathers”
“On Fathers and Sons”
“On Mothers”
“On Mothers and Daughters”
“On Fathers and Daughters”
“On Mothers and Sons”
“On Pets”
“On Dogs or Cats or Fish or Tame or Wild Birds”
“On Winnie the Pooh”
“On Harry Potter”
“On Rock and Roll”
“On Drinking”
“On Drugs”
“On Sex”
“On Jazz”
“On the Seashore”
“On Returning or Leaving”
“On Having or Losing Control”
“On Self-Respect”
“On Cheating”
“On Honesty”
“On Books”
“On Movies”
“On Video Games”
“On Nature”
“On Truth”
“On Organization”
“On Procrastination”
“On TV”
“On Arguing”

“On Being Happy or Depressed”

“On Horror Movies”

“On Love Songs.”

This list, of course, is hardly exhaustive.

Readings

On the Decay of the Art of Lying

Mark Twain

Mark Twain (1835–1910) is one of America's most famous humorists. Born Samuel Clemens, he adopted the pseudonym of Mark Twain and created a career as a satirist, journalist, novelist, and orator. Among his works are The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.

Inward Exploration

Write at least one paragraph about telling lies. For example, you might explain when (if ever) it is all right to tell lies, or you might explain exactly what the term lying means to you.

Essay, for discussion, read at a meeting of the Historical and Antiquarian Club of Hartford, and offered for the thirty-dollar prize. Now first published.¹

[1] Observe, I do not mean to suggest that the *custom* of lying has suffered any decay or interruption—no, for the Lie, as a Virtue, a Principle, is eternal; the Lie, as a recreation, a solace, a refuge in time of need, the fourth Grace, the tenth Muse, man's best and surest friend, is immortal, and cannot perish from the earth while this Club remains. My complaint simply concerns the decay of the *art* of lying. No high-minded man, no man of right feeling, can contemplate the lumbering and slovenly lying of the present day without grieving to see a noble art so prostituted. In this veteran presence I naturally enter upon this theme with diffidence; it is like an old maid trying to teach nursery matters to the mothers in Israel. It would not become me to criticise you, gentlemen, who are nearly all my elders—and my superiors, in this thing—and so, if I should here and there *seem* to do it, I trust it will in most cases be more in a spirit of admiration than of fault-finding; indeed if this finest of the fine arts had everywhere received the attention, encouragement, and conscientious practice and development which this Club has devoted to it, I should not need to utter this lament, or shed a single tear. I do not say this to flatter: I say it in a spirit of just and appreciative recognition. [It had been my intention, at this point, to mention names and give illustrative specimens, but indications observable about me admonished me to beware of particulars and confine myself to generalities.]

1. [Twain's note] Did not take the prize.

[2] No fact is more firmly established than that lying is a necessity of our circumstances—the deduction that it is then a Virtue goes without saying. No virtue can reach its highest usefulness without careful and diligent cultivation—therefore, it goes without saying, that this one ought to be taught in the public schools—at the fireside—even in the newspapers. What chance has the ignorant, uncultivated liar against the educated expert? What chance have I against Mr. Per—against a lawyer? *Judicious* lying is what the world needs. I sometimes think it were even better and safer not to lie at all than to lie injudiciously. An awkward, unscientific lie is often as ineffectual as the truth.

[3] Now let us see what the philosophers say. Note that venerable proverb: Children and fools *always* speak the truth. The deduction is plain—adults and wise persons *never* speak it. Parkman, the historian, says, “The principle of truth may itself be carried into an absurdity.” In another place in the same chapter he says, “The saying is old that truth should not be spoken at all times; and those whom a sick conscience worries into habitual violation of the maxim are imbeciles and nuisances.” It is strong language, but true. None of us could *live* with an habitual truth-teller; but thank goodness none of us has to. An habitual truth-teller is simply an impossible creature; he does not exist; he never has existed. Of course there are people who *think* they never lie, but it is not so—and this ignorance is one of the very things that shame our so-called civilization. Everybody lies—every day; every hour; awake; asleep; in his dreams; in his joy; in his mourning; if he keeps his tongue still, his hands, his feet, his eyes, his attitude, will convey deception and purposely. Even in sermons—but that is a platitude.

[4] In a far country where I once lived the ladies used to go around paying calls, under the humane and kindly pretence of wanting to see each other; and when they returned home, they would cry out with a glad voice, saying, “We made sixteen calls and found fourteen of them out”—not meaning that they found out anything against the fourteen—no, that was only a colloquial phrase to signify that they were not at home—and their manner of saying it expressed their lively satisfaction in that fact. Now their pretence of wanting to see the fourteen—and the other two whom they had been less lucky with—was that commonest and mildest form of lying which is sufficiently described as a deflection from the truth. Is it justifiable? Most certainly. It is beautiful, it is noble; for its object is, not to reap profit, but to convey a pleasure to the sixteen. The iron-souled truth-monger would plainly manifest, or even utter the fact that he didn’t want to see those people—and he would be an ass, and inflict a totally unnecessary pain. And next, those ladies in that far country—but never mind, they had a thousand pleasant ways of lying, that grew out of gentle impulses, and were a credit to their intelligence and an honor to their hearts. Let the particulars go.

[5] The men in that far country were liars, everyone. Their mere howdy-do was a lie, because *they* didn't care how you did, except they were undertakers. To the ordinary inquirer you lied in return; for you made no conscientious diagnosis of your case, but answered at random, and usually missed it considerably: You lied to the undertaker, and said your health was failing—a wholly commendable lie, since it cost you nothing and pleased the other man. If a stranger called and interrupted you, you said with your hearty tongue, "I'm glad to see you," and said with your heartier soul, "I wish you were with the cannibals and it was dinner-time." When he went, you said regretfully, "Must you go?" and followed it with a "Call again;" but you did no harm, for you did not deceive anybody nor inflict any hurt, whereas the truth would have made you both unhappy.

[6] I think that all this courteous lying is a sweet and loving art, and should be cultivated. The highest perfection of politeness is only a beautiful edifice, built, from the base to the dome, of graceful and gilded forms of charitable and unselfish lying.

[7] What I bemoan is the growing prevalence of the brutal truth. Let us do what we can to eradicate it. An injurious truth has no merit over an injurious lie. Neither should ever be uttered. The man who speaks an injurious truth lest his soul be not saved if he do otherwise, should reflect that that sort of a soul is not strictly worth saving. The man who tells a lie to help a poor devil out of trouble, is one of whom the angels doubtless say, "Lo, here is an heroic soul who casts his own welfare into jeopardy to succor his neighbor's; let us exalt this magnanimous liar."

[8] An injurious lie is an uncommendable thing; and so, also, and in the same degree, is an injurious truth—a fact which is recognized by the law of libel.

[9] Among other common lies, we have the *silent* lie—the deception which one conveys by simply keeping still and concealing the truth. Many obstinate truth-mongers indulge in this dissipation, imagining that if they speak no lie, they lie not at all. In that far country where I once lived, there was a lovely spirit, a lady whose impulses were always high and pure, and whose character answered to them. One day I was there at dinner, and remarked, in a general way, that we are all liars. She was amazed, and said, "Not *all*?" It was before "Pinafore's" time, so I did not make the response which would naturally follow in our day, but frankly said, "Yes, *all*—we are all liars; there are no exceptions." She looked almost offended, and said, "Why, do you include *me*?" "Certainly," I said. "I think you even rank as an expert." She said, "'Sh-'sh! the children!" So the subject was changed in deference to the children's presence, and we went on talking about other things. But as soon as the young people were out of the way, the lady came warmly back to the

matter and said, "I have made it the rule of my life to never tell a lie; and I have never departed from it in a single instance." I said, "I don't mean the least harm or disrespect, but really you have been lying like smoke ever since I've been sitting here. It has caused me a good deal of pain, because I am not used to it." She required of me an instance—just a single instance. So I said—

[10] "Well, here is the unfilled duplicate of the blank which the Oakland hospital people sent to you by the hand of the sick-nurse when she came here to nurse your little nephew through his dangerous illness. This blank asks all manner of questions as to the conduct of that sick-nurse: 'Did she ever sleep on her watch? Did she ever forget to give the medicine?' and so forth and so on. You are warned to be very careful and explicit in your answers, for the welfare of the service requires that the nurses be promptly fined or otherwise punished for derelictions. You told me you were perfectly delighted with that nurse—that she had a thousand perfections and only one fault: you found you never could depend on her wrapping Johnny up half sufficiently while he waited in a chilly chair for her to rearrange the warm bed. You filled up the duplicate of this paper, and sent it back to the hospital by the hand of the nurse. How did you answer this question—'Was the nurse at any time guilty of a negligence which was likely to result in the patient's taking cold?' Come—everything is decided by a bet here in California: ten dollars to ten cents you lied when you answered that question." She said, "I didn't; *I left it blank!*" "Just so—you have told a *silent* lie; you have left it to be inferred that you had no fault to find in that matter." She said, "Oh, was that a lie? And how *could* I mention her one single fault, and she so good?—it would have been cruel." I said, "One ought always to lie, when one can do good by it; your impulse was right, but your judgment was crude; this comes of unintelligent practice. Now observe the result of this inexpert deflection of yours. You know Mr. Jones's Willie is lying very low with scarlet-fever; well, your recommendation was so enthusiastic that that girl is there nursing him, and the worn-out family have all been trustingly sound asleep for the last fourteen hours, leaving their darling with full confidence in those fatal hands, because you, like young George Washington, have a repute—However, if you are not going to have anything to do, I will come around tomorrow and we'll attend the funeral together, for, of course, you'll naturally feel a peculiar interest in Willie's case—as personal a one, in fact, as the undertaker."

[11] But that was all lost. Before I was half-way through she was in a carriage and making thirty miles an hour toward the Jones mansion to save what was left of Willie and tell all she knew about the deadly nurse. All of which was unnecessary, as Willie wasn't sick, I had been lying myself. But that same day, all the same, she sent a line to the hospital which filled up the neglected blank, and stated the *facts*, too, in the squarest possible manner.

[12] Now, you see, this lady's fault was *not* in lying, but only in lying injudiciously. She should have told the truth, *there*, and made it up to the nurse with a fraudulent compliment further along in the paper. She could have said, "In one respect this sick-nurse is perfection—when she is on watch, she never snores." Almost any little pleasant lie would have taken the sting out of that troublesome but necessary expression of the truth.

[13] Lying is universal—we *all* do it; we all *must* do it. Therefore, the wise thing is for us diligently to train ourselves to lie thoughtfully, judiciously; to lie with a good object, and not an evil one; to lie for others' advantage, and not our own; to lie healingly, charitably, humanely, not cruelly, hurtfully, maliciously; to lie gracefully and graciously, not awkwardly and clumsily; to lie firmly, frankly, squarely, with head erect, not haltingly, tortuously, with pusillanimous mien, as being ashamed of our high calling. Then shall we be rid of the rank and pestilent truth that is rotting the land; then shall we be great and good and beautiful, and worthy dwellers in a world where even benign Nature habitually lies, except when she promises execrable weather. Then—But I am but a new and feeble student in this gracious art; I cannot instruct *this* Club.

[14] Joking aside, I think there is much need of wise examination into what sort of lies are best and wholesomest to be indulged, seeing we must all lie and do all lie, and what sorts it may be best to avoid—and this is a thing which I feel I can confidently put into the hands of this experienced Club—a ripe body, who may be termed, in this regard, and without undue flattery, Old Masters.

Outward Exploration: Discussion

1. Explain exactly what Twain means by "judicious lying."
2. What is Twain's attitude toward his immediate audience, members of the Historical and Antiquarian Club of Hartford?
3. In paragraph 2, Twain says that the truth is often ineffectual. Is that true? Explain.
4. According to Twain, what is a "silent lie"? Have you ever been guilty of such silent lies? Are they as "bad" or "wrong" as actual lies that you speak? Explain.
5. In paragraph 11, Twain ends the story of the woman and the nurse by saying that he himself had lied to the woman about the Jones's son being ill. Why did he lie?
6. Is Twain right about the desirability of lying? Give some examples from your own experience.

7. If Twain is right that everyone lies, how does that make you feel as the receiver of possible lies?

Outward Exploration: Writing

1. Write a humorous essay of your own in which you follow Twain's lead but on a different topic. Try to select a topic which will seem outrageous at first but which has some defensible points in its favor as does lying.
2. Write a serious essay about some moral issue, arguing that it should be taken more seriously or less seriously.
3. Write a rebuttal of Twain's essay.
4. Write an essay that describes a personal experience in which you found lying was preferable to telling the truth. Explore the implications of the situation. If you can, derive a general rule-of-thumb from the experience about lying and truth-telling.
5. List the lies you heard last week. Can they be classified in some way (for example, malicious lies and polite lies)? Write an essay about lying that explores areas that Twain does not develop at length.

Rhetoric and Style

Twain's actual performance of this address is not available to us. Yet, from the printed page, we can still see the importance of the rhetorical canon of Delivery. In particular, notice Twain's liberal use of italics throughout the essay. Write an exploratory analysis of the various purposes for which Twain uses italics in this essay.

Selections from The Devil's Dictionary

Ambrose Bierce

Ambrose Bierce (1842–?) was the son of a poor Ohio farmer; he became a journalist after serving with the Union army during the Civil War. His cynical and at times nihilistic outlook led to his nickname “Bitter Bierce.” He wrote numerous short stories and newspaper columns. In 1913 he disappeared in revolutionary-torn Mexico and was never heard from again. Among his works are In The Midst of Life, Can Such Things Be? and The Devil’s Dictionary, from which the following selection was taken.

Inward Exploration

Write at least one paragraph defining your understanding of the term *dictionary*. Consider, for example, what exactly you expect to find in a dictionary. What is appropriate and inappropriate for inclusion in a dictionary?

abdication, *n.* An act whereby a sovereign attests his sense of the high temperature of the throne.

abscond, *v.i.* To “move in a mysterious way,” commonly with the property of another.

absent, *adj.* Peculiarly exposed to the tooth of detraction; vilified; hopelessly in the wrong; superseded in the consideration and affection of another.

accident, *n.* An inevitable occurrence due to the action of immutable natural laws.

accordion, *n.* An instrument in harmony with the sentiments of an assassin.

achievement, *n.* The death of endeavor and the birth of disgust.

admiration, *n.* Our polite recognition of another’s resemblance to ourselves.

alone, *adj.* In bad company.

applause, *n.* The echo of a platitude.

ardor, *n.* The quality that distinguishes love without knowledge.

bore, *n.* A person who talks when you wish him to listen.

cemetery, *n.* An isolated suburban spot where mourners match lies, poets write at a target and stone-cutters spell for a wager. The inscription following will serve to illustrate the success attained in these Olympian games:

His virtues were so conspicuous that his enemies, unable to overlook them, denied them, and his friends, to whose loose lives they were a rebuke, represented them as vices. They are here commemorated by his family, who shared them.

childhood, *n.* The period of human life intermediate between the idiocy of infancy and the folly of youth—two removes from the sin of manhood and three from the remorse of age.

Christian, *n.* One who believes that the New Testament is a divinely inspired book admirably suited to the spiritual needs of his neighbor. One who follows the teachings of Christ in so far as they are not inconsistent with a life of sin.

compulsion, *n.* The eloquence of power.

congratulation, *n.* The civility of envy.

conservative, *n.* A statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguished from the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others.

consult, *v.t.* To seek another's approval of a course already decided on.

contempt, *n.* The feeling of a prudent man for an enemy who is too formidable safely to be opposed.

coward, *n.* One who in a perilous emergency thinks with his legs.

debauchee, *n.* One who has so earnestly pursued pleasure that he has had the misfortune to overtake it.

destiny, *n.* A tyrant's authority for crime and a fool's excuse for failure.

diplomacy, *n.* The patriotic art of lying for one's country.

distance, *n.* The only thing that the rich are willing for the poor to call theirs and keep.

duty, *n.* That which sternly impels us in the direction of profit, along the line of desire.

education, *n.* That which discloses to the wise and disguises from the foolish their lack of understanding.

erudition, *n.* Dust shaken out of a book into an empty skull.

extinction, *n.* The raw material out of which theology created the future state.

faith, *n.* Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel.

genealogy, *n.* An account of one's descent from an ancestor who did not particularly care to trace his own.

ghost, *n.* The outward and visible sign of an inward fear.

habit, *n.* A shackle for the free.

heaven, *n.* A place where the wicked cease from troubling you with talk of their personal affairs, and the good listen with attention while you expound your own.

historian, *n.* A broad-gauge gossip.

hope, *n.* Desire and expectation rolled into one.

hypocrite, *n.* One who, professing virtues that he does not respect, secures the advantage of seeming to be what he despises.

impiety, *n.* Your irreverence toward my deity.

impunity, *n.* Wealth.

language, *n.* The music with which we charm the serpents guarding another's treasure.

logic, *n.* The art of thinking and reasoning in strict accordance with the limitations and incapacities of the human misunderstanding. The basis of logic is the syllogism, consisting of a major and a minor premise and a conclusion—thus:

Major premise: Sixty men can do a piece of work sixty times as quickly as one man.

Minor premise: One man can dig a post-hole in sixty seconds; therefore—

Conclusion: Sixty men can dig a post-hole in one second.

This may be called the syllogism arithmetical, in which, by combining logic and mathematics, we obtain a double certainty and are twice blessed.

love, *n.* A temporary insanity curable by marriage or by removal of the patient from the influences under which he incurred the disorder. This disease, like *caries* and many other ailments, is prevalent only among civilized races living under artificial conditions; barbarous nations breathing pure air and eating simple food enjoy immunity from its ravages. It is sometimes fatal, but more frequently to the physician than to the patient.

miracle, *n.* An act or event out of the order of nature and unaccountable, as beating a normal hand of four kings and an ace with four aces and a king.

monkey, *n.* An arboreal animal which makes itself at home in genealogical trees.

mouth, *n.* In man, the gateway to the soul; in woman, the outlet of the heart.

non-combatant, *n.* A dead Quaker.

platitude, *n.* The fundamental element and special glory of popular literature. A thought that snores in words that smoke. The wisdom of a million fools in the diction of a dullard. A fossil sentiment in artificial rock. A moral without the fable. All that is mortal of a departed truth. A demitasse of milk-and-morality. The Pope's-nose of a featherless peacock. A jelly-fish withering on the shore of the sea of thought. The cackle surviving the egg. A desiccated epigram.

pray, *v.* To ask that the laws of the universe be annulled in behalf of a single petitioner confessedly unworthy.

presidency, *n.* The greased pig in the field game of American politics.

prude, *n.* A bawd hiding behind the back of her demeanor.

rapacity, *n.* Providence without industry. The thrift of power.

reason, *v.i.* To weigh probabilities in the scales of desire.

religion, *n.* A daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable.

resolute, *adj.* Obstinate in a course that we approve.

retaliation, *n.* The natural rock upon which is reared the Temple of Law.

saint, *n.* A dead sinner revised and edited.

The Duchess of Orleans relates that the irreverent old calumniator, Marshal Villeroi, who in his youth had known St. Francis de Sales, said, on hearing him called saint: "I am delighted to hear that Monsieur de Sales is a saint. He was fond of saying indelicate things, and used to cheat at cards. In other respects he was a perfect gentleman, though a fool."

valor, *n.* A soldierly compound of vanity, duty and the gambler's hope:

"Why have you halted?" roared the commander of a division at Chickamauga, who had ordered a charge; "move forward, sir, at once."

"General," said the commander of the delinquent brigade, "I am persuaded that any further display of valor by my troops will bring them into collision with the enemy."

Outward Exploration: Discussion

1. What topics does Bierce seem to return to several times? Do you find any consistency in his vision of these topics?
2. Assume (for the sake of discussion) that the inscription included in the definition of cemetery was meant to refer to Bierce. What does it suggest about his vision of himself and of his relationship to the world?
3. For discussion, pick out two or three definitions that particularly strike you.

Outward Exploration: Writing

1. Using this selection from *The Devil's Dictionary*, write an essay exploring Bierce's vision of life. You may use other texts by Bierce if you wish.
2. Select one of Bierce's definitions (or a collection of definitions that share a common topic or attitude) and write an essay exploring them.
3. Select a term of your own, and write an imaginative and revealing definition in the manner of Bierce. Then write an essay explaining the implications of your definition.
4. Write an essay exploring your reactions to Bierce's definitions.
5. Write an essay on the nature of education. As part of that essay, compare Bierce's definition of education with that of Huxley. Use your own personal experiences and vision of education as well.

Rhetoric and Style

1. The rhetorical canon of Delivery is important in this text. What did Bierce gain (rhetorically) from using a dictionary format? What did he lose? Why did he create the title that he did?
2. Using your own material, write several sarcastic or ironic definitions of terms.

From A Liberal Education [A Game of Chess]

Thomas Henry Huxley

Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895) was a distinguished zoologist and advocate of Darwinism (he called himself “Darwin’s bulldog”). In addition to his work in science, he wrote many important essays and addresses on philosophy, religion, and politics. The following was first given as an address at the South London Working Men’s College in 1868 and was published in 1870.

Inward Exploration

Write at least a paragraph that defines your vision of what an education should be.

[1] Suppose it were perfectly certain that the life and fortune of every one of us would, one day or other, depend upon his winning or losing a game of chess. Don’t you think that we should all consider it to be a primary duty to learn at least the names and the moves of the pieces; to have a notion of a gambit, and a keen eye for all the means of giving and getting out of check? Do you not think that we should look with a disapprobation amounting to scorn, upon the father who allowed his son, or the state which allowed its members, to grow up without knowing a pawn from a knight?

[2] Yet it is a very plain and elementary truth that the life, the fortune, and the happiness of every one of us, and, more or less, of those who are connected with us, do depend upon our knowing something of the rules of a game infinitely more difficult and complicated than chess. It is a game which has been played for untold ages, every man and woman of us being one of the two players in a game of his or her own. The chessboard is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game are what we call the laws of Nature. The player on the other side is hidden from us. We know that his play ‘is always fair, just, and patient. But also we know, to our cost, that he never overlooks a mistake, or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance. To the man who plays well, the highest stakes are paid, with that sort of overflowing generosity with which the strong shows delight in strength. And one who plays ill is checkmated—without haste, but without remorse.

[3] My metaphor will remind some of you of the famous picture in which [German painter Friedrich A. M.] Retzsch has depicted Satan playing at chess with man for his soul. Substitute for the mocking fiend in that picture a calm, strong angel who is playing for love, as we say, and would rather lose than win—and I should accept it as an image of human life.

[4] Well, what I mean by Education is learning the rules of this mighty game. In other words, education is the instruction of the intellect in the laws of Nature, under which name I include not merely things and their forces, but men and their ways; and the fashioning of the affections and of the will into an earnest and loving desire to move in harmony with those laws. For me, education means neither more nor less than this. Anything which professes to call itself education must be tried by this standard, and if it fails to stand the test, I will not call it education, whatever may be the force of authority, or of numbers, upon the other side.

[5] It is important to remember that, in strictness, there is no such thing as an uneducated man. Take an extreme case. Suppose that an adult man, in the full vigor of his faculties, could be suddenly placed in the world, as Adam is said to have been, and then left to do as he best might. How long would he be left uneducated? Not five minutes. Nature would begin to teach him, through the eye, the ear, the touch, the properties of objects. Pain and pleasure would be at his elbow telling him to do this and avoid that; and by slow degrees the man would receive an education which, if narrow; would be thorough, real, and adequate to his circumstances, though there would be no extras and very few accomplishments.

[6] And if to this solitary man entered a second Adam or, better still, an Eve, a new and greater world, that of social and moral phenomena, would be revealed. Joys and woes, compared with which all others might seem but faint shadows, would spring from the new relations. Happiness and sorrow would take the place of the coarser monitors, pleasure and pain; but conduct would still be shaped by the observation of the natural consequences of actions; or, in other words, by the laws of the nature of man.

[7] To every one of us the world was once as fresh and new as to Adam. And then, long before we were susceptible of any other mode of instruction, Nature took us in hand, and every minute of waking life brought its educational influence, shaping our actions into rough accordance with Nature's laws, so that we might not be ended untimely by too gross disobedience. Nor should I speak of this process of education as past for anyone, be he as old as he may. For every man the world is as fresh as it was at the first day, and as full of untold novelties for him who has the eyes to see them. And Nature is still continuing her patient education of us in that great university, the universe, of which we are all members—Nature having no Test Acts [Legislation that excluded from Oxford and Cambridge any student who refused to profess faith in the 39 Articles of Church of England—it was repealed in 1854].

[8] Those who take honors in Nature's university, who learn the laws which govern men and things and obey them, are the really great and successful men in this world. The great mass of mankind are the "Poll" [pass through

college with very low grades], who pick up just enough to get through without much discredit. Those who won't learn at all are plucked [failed]; and then you can't come up again. Nature's pluck means extermination.

[9] Thus the question of compulsory education is settled so far as Nature is concerned. Her bill on that question was framed and passed long ago. But, like all compulsory legislation, that of Nature is harsh and wasteful in its operation. Ignorance is visited as sharply as willful disobedience—incapacity meets with the same punishment as crime. Nature's discipline is not even a word and a blow, and the blow first; but the blow without the word. It is left to you to find out why your ears are boxed.

[10] The object of what we commonly call education—that education in which man intervenes and which I shall distinguish as artificial education—is to make good these defects in Nature's methods; to prepare the child to receive Nature's education, neither incapably nor ignorantly, nor with willful disobedience; and to understand the preliminary symptoms of her pleasure, without waiting for the box on the ear. In short, all artificial education ought to be an anticipation of natural education. And a liberal education is an artificial education which has not only prepared a man to escape the great evils of disobedience to natural laws, but has trained him to appreciate and to seize upon the rewards which Nature scatters with as free a hand as her penalties.

[11] That man, I think, has had a liberal education who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a mechanism, it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order; ready, like a steam engine, to be turned to any kind of work, and spin the gossamers as well as forge the anchors of the mind; whose mind is stored with a knowledge of the great and fundamental truths of Nature and of the laws of her operations; one who, no stunted ascetic, is full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience; who has learned to love all beauty, whether of Nature or of art, hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself.

[12] Such a one and no other, I conceive, has had a liberal education; for he is, as completely as a man can be, in harmony Nature. He will make the best of her, and she of him. They get on together rarely; she as his ever beneficent mother; he as mouthpiece, her conscious self, her minister and interpreter.

Outward Exploration

1. What exactly are Huxley's definitions of *education* and of a *liberal education*? Explain in what ways you agree, disagree, or partially agree with Huxley. Draw on your own experiences as well as upon other texts you might have read (perhaps your college has a mission statement that defines its vision of an *education*).

2. Given the fact that Huxley saw himself as “Darwin’s bulldog,” discuss what he means by the “laws of Nature.”
3. The topic of evolution continues to stir controversy. Write an exploratory essay that analyzes one of Huxley’s essays that directly discusses evolution (most of his works are available online).
4. Research the current controversy over evolution and intelligent design. Write up your research as a “literature review” (or background section of your essay). Then write an argument essay in which you take a position on that controversy, drawing on your own beliefs as well as the arguments that you have found in your research.

Rhetoric and Style

1. Huxley uses the image of a game of chess to begin his essay, an effective rhetorical strategy for capturing readers’ attention and for making them curious about what his point might be. Try starting one of your essays with an image in a similar fashion.
2. Consider the following sentence from paragraph 8:

Those who take honors in Nature’s university, who learn the laws which govern men and things and obey them, are the really great and successful men in this world.

Its structure is as follows:

- Pronoun (“Those”—subject of the sentence)
- Restrictive clause (“who . . . university”—the clause is restrictive because it limits who “those” are; note that the verb “learn” is plural since “who” refers to the plural pronoun “those”)
- Comma separating an appositive from the words it re-names
- A second restrictive clause that acts as an appositive for the first clause (“who . . . laws”)
- An embedded restrictive clause (“which . . . things”—this clause modifies “laws”)
- The verb of the second restrictive clause (“obey”)
- The direct object of that verb (“them”)
- Comma signaling the end of the appositive clause
- Predicate verb of the sentence (“are”)
- Predicate nominative (“the . . . world”)
- Period.

What’s notable in this structure is the use of one clause as an appositive (a re-naming) of the other. Using your own material, write a sentence that imitates this structure.

Selections from Poor Richard's Almanack

Benjamin Franklin

***Benjamin Franklin** (1706–1790) was born in Boston and became one of the major figures in early American history. He was a politician, a diplomat, a statesman, an inventor (the Franklin stove, swim fins, and bifocals), a printer, a publisher, an economist, a scientist, and a writer. He was a major influence on and signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. One of his last public acts was writing an anti-slavery treatise in 1789. His works include The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin and Poor Richard's Almanack, from which the following selection is taken. The selections are grouped according to the year in which they first appeared.*

Inward Exploration

For comfort or advice, most of us turn to some maxims, proverbs, aphorisms, or adages—in short, pithy sayings that state succinctly a general truth or fundamental principle or rule of conduct. For instance, when facing a separation from a person with whom we are romantically involved, we might invoke the adage that “absence makes the heart grow fonder.” If we are worried about the relationship or simply cynical in general, we might fall back on “out of sight, out of mind.” Make a list of pithy sayings that you know. Select one of them and write a paragraph explaining how your experience has proven that it is true (or false).

From 1733

Light purse, heavy heart.

He's a fool that makes his doctor his heir.

Love well, whip well.

Hunger never saw bad bread.

Fools make feasts, and wise men eat 'em.

He that lies down with dogs, shall rise up with fleas.

He is ill clothed, who is bare of virtue.

There is no little enemy.

From 1734

Without justice courage is weak.

Where there's marriage without love, there will be love without marriage.

Do good to thy friend to keep him, to thy enemy to gain him. He that cannot obey, cannot command.

Marry your son when you will, but your daughter when you can.

From 1735

Approve not of him who commends all you say.

Necessity never made a good bargain.

Be slow in chusing a friend, slower in changing.

Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.

Deny self for self's sake.

To be humble to superiors is duty, to equals courtesy, to inferiors nobleness.

From 1736

Fish and visitors stink in three days.

Do not do that which you would not have known. Bargaining has neither friends nor relations.

Now I've a sheep and a cow, every body bids me good morrow.

God helps them that help themselves.

He that speaks much, is much mistaken.

God heals, and the doctor takes the fees.

From 1737

There are no ugly loves, nor handsome prisons.

Three good meals a day is bad living.

From 1738

Who has deceiv'd thee so oft as thyself?

Read much, but not many books.

Let thy vices die before thee.

From 1739

He that falls in love with himself, will have no rivals.

Sin is not hurtful because it is forbidden, but it is forbidden because it's hurtful.

From 1740

An empty bag cannot stand upright.

From 1741

Learn of the skilful: he that teaches himself, hath a fool for his master.

From 1742

Death takes no bribes.

From 1744

An old man in a house is a good sign.

Fear God, and your enemies will fear you.

From 1745

He's a fool that cannot conceal his wisdom.

Many complain of their memory, few of their judgment.

From 1746

When the well's dry, we know the worth of water.

The sting of a reproach is the truth of it.

From 1747

Write injuries in dust, benefits in marble.

From 1749

Nine men in ten are suicides.

A man in a passion rides a mad horse.

From 1750

He is a governor that governs his passions, and he is a servant that serves them.

Sorrow is good for nothing but sin.

From 1752

Calamity and prosperity are the touchstones of integrity.

Generous minds are all of kin.

From 1753

Haste makes waste.

From 1755

The doors of wisdom are never shut.

From 1757

The way to be safe, is never to be secure.

Outward Exploration: Discussion

1. Comment on Franklin's ideas about love.
2. Comment on Franklin's ideas about friendship.
3. Comment on Franklin's political ideas.
4. Comment on Franklin's vision of human nature.
5. Comment on Franklin's moral advice.
6. Comment on Franklin's religious ideas.

Outward Exploration: Writing

1. Using these selections from *Poor Richard's Almanack* (or more if you like), write an essay exploring Franklin's vision of humankind and of the world.
2. The pithy saying is a popular form of literature. Compare and contrast Franklin's sayings with those of some other writer (for instance, Ambrose Bierce or William Blake). You might consider such things as their structure, style, subject matter, or tone.
3. Select one of Franklin's maxims that seems to speak particularly to you. After explaining its implications, show how it relates to your personal experience.
4. Select several of Franklin's related maxims that seem to speak particularly to you. After explaining their implications, show how they relate to your personal experience.