

Middle School (6-8) Persuasive/Argument Writing Prompts

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IntelliMetric® Prompts

1763–1775: Independence or Not?

Imagine you live in colonial America and have lived through the events of 1763–1775. Given everything that has happened, do you think it is possible for the colonies to remain faithful to Britain, or must they declare independence and fight if necessary?

In a multi-paragraph essay, present your position on the colonies remaining under British rule. Be sure to use facts and details to support your position.

A Four-Day School Week

Recently, a school district in Pennsylvania became the first in the state to change the traditional school schedule from a five-day week to a four-day week. This change is intended to save the school district money, but it may cost parents and students money and opportunities in the long run. All of the students in your class have heard this news. Some are thrilled; however, some believe that this change will have a negative impact on learning and extracurricular activities.

In a well-developed, multi-paragraph essay, state your position on this issue and then persuade your fellow classmates to join you in a call to action to either shorten your school week to four days, or to keep the five-day school week. You must provide compelling reasons for your argument, and address and rebut the counterarguments. Be sure to include facts, statistics, or any other relevant information to strengthen your view on this issue.

A Letter to Isabella and Ferdinand

In 1492, when Christopher Columbus needed funding for his risky voyage in search of a western trade route to the Orient, he wrote a letter to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in order to persuade the Spanish monarchs to sponsor his voyage. Later, Columbus accidentally sailed right into the New World.

Imagine that you are Columbus and find yourself in need of money to fund your uncertain venture across the Atlantic Ocean. Write a persuasive letter to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in which you make the case for your voyage. How will this voyage benefit Spain? What do you hope to achieve?

A Manned Mission to Mars

In the next few years, the United States plans to launch a manned spaceship to Mars to establish a human colony there. While some observers argue that such a mission is necessary for human

knowledge to advance, others fear that the costs of such a mission are too high or that it may not even be possible with our present technology. Do you think this is a wise course of action or not?

Write a letter to the President of the United States that expresses your opinion of whether the United States should proceed with this course of action.

Acting Courageous or Seeking Thrills?

What is courage? How is being courageous different from being a thrill-seeker? What activities do or do not require courage?

After reading the teacher assigned texts on different forms of courage, write an argumentative essay on the qualities that contribute to a courageous person and action. Be sure to acknowledge competing views of courage, and support your position with evidence from the assigned texts.

American Victory in the Revolutionary War

How were the American patriots able to claim victory over England in the Revolutionary War?

Write a multi-paragraph essay in which you analyze the war and defend your reasons for the colonists' victory. Be sure to cite reliable sources to support your argument.

An Electronic Tablet Device for Each Student?

Over the past decade, access to technology has flourished. As a result, popular personal electronic tablet devices are now seen as useful educational tools. In a multi-paragraph argumentative essay, construct a response that states and supports your position on schools purchasing an electronic tablet device for each student to use in the classroom and at home.

An Environmental Problem - HB Unit 4 Level A

Write a 3-paragraph article for your community newspaper. Tell about an environmental problem and persuade readers to solve it through a team effort. Present your ideas for solving the problem.

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An Important Issue – HB Unit 5 Level B

Write a letter to the editor. Tell about a topic that is important to you. State your position and give arguments to convince your readers to take action.

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Animal Abuse Laws

Many citizens believe that America's animal cruelty laws are not tough enough and that people who participate in illegal animal fighting or other forms of animal abuse should be treated in the same manner as those who abuse humans. Do you believe that the consequences for severe animal abuse should be the same as for human abuse?

In a well-developed essay, articulate your position on this issue. Be sure to provide specific reasons and examples to support your argument.

Animal Testing

Cosmetic and drug companies continually face opposition due to the fact that they use animals for the testing of their products. Some feel that this procedure goes against the rights which are given to all living beings, including animals, while others see the positive impact that animal testing brings to the lives of human beings.

Write a multi-paragraph essay in which you state and defend your position. Be sure to include specific details and examples to support your argument.

Argue For or Against Group Projects

Many teachers assign group projects. Sometimes, however, an uncooperative member can affect the entire group. Argue for or against the use of group projects using specific details and examples.

Assimilation into a New Culture

After reading Richard Rodriguez's article "The Chinese in All of Us," think about the difficulties encountered by school-age immigrants. Rodriguez believes that immigrants inevitably need to assimilate into the new culture they become a part of, which makes it increasingly difficult to maintain one's own heritage, culture, and traditions.

In a multi-paragraph essay, argue whether you agree or disagree with Rodriguez's position. Include evidence from his writing to support your position.

Banning Books

Some members of your school board want to ban certain books from the public library. They feel that these books contain topics unsuitable for young readers. Do you agree that some kinds of books should be banned from the library? Do you disagree?

Write a letter to your school board persuading the members that these books should be banned or that these books should not be banned.

Banning Dangerous Pets

While many people enjoy the company of common pets, such as fish, cats, dogs and birds, others prefer more unusual pets such as ferrets, spiders, and snakes. There are others who choose to own more dangerous pets, such as tigers, monkeys, or even sharks. Imagine your town council is concerned about people owning some of these animals and has decided that some of them should be banned.

In a multi-paragraph essay, write a letter to your town council expressing your opinion on which pets should be banned. Be sure to include specific details and examples to persuade your readers.

Banning Extreme Sports

We all enjoy participating in recreational sports from time to time, but while some sports are safe, others can be very risky. Think about a sport or activity you believe is too dangerous and should be banned. Why is this sport so risky?

Write a well-organized essay in which you argue your position on this issue. Be sure to provide specific details to persuade your readers that the sport you have chosen is so risky, it should be banned.

Breaks for Outdoor Exercise

Studies have shown that people who take short breaks throughout the day to do light, outdoor exercise are more productive than those who do not. Use specific details and examples to convince your principal whether students should have similar breaks during the school day.

Celebrity Role Models

Since celebrities are constantly in the public eye, there is a debate over what their responsibilities as role models should be. Many celebrities have stated that they do not believe they should be viewed as

role models, while others have argued that it is their responsibility to use their celebrity status to raise awareness for many social issues.

In a well-developed essay, explain your position on the responsibility of celebrities to act as role models. Use examples to support your position.

Cell Phones in School

Many schools restrict students from using their cell phones during school hours. Teachers and administrators have concerns that students will use their phones dishonestly or inappropriately. Write a letter to your school principal convincing him or her that students should be allowed to use cell phones during school hours. Use facts and examples to support your position.

Choosing an Exotic Pet

Have you ever thought about owning a really unusual pet? Some people love having an exotic pet to show off to their friends, while others think owning an exotic pet makes them special. An exotic pet might be an iguana, a gecko, a coatimundi, a serval, a kinkajou, a llama, or even a chimpanzee! There are many unique pets to consider.

When you become a pet owner, you must consider how to care for your exotic pet. What do they eat? What do they need to be comfortable in your home? Are they dangerous? Will you need to protect your family or friends? You also have to think about how much it costs to keep an exotic pet. Research an exotic pet, then develop an argument and write a multi-paragraph essay either persuading your parents to allow you to purchase an exotic pet, or convincing them it is not a good idea. Be sure to include facts and details from your research to support your argument and counterarguments.

Differences between Athens and Sparta

The city-states of Athens and Sparta had different sets of values underlying their societies. Although they were both located in the Peloponnesian Peninsula and shared language and religion, each was characterized by differences in education, daily life, and government. Each city-state presented its citizens with benefits and challenges.

In a multi-paragraph essay, support your choice of Athens or Sparta as the city-state that provided the best life for its citizens. Include details on education, daily life, and government in your argument.

Do Aliens Exist?

Read, view, and discuss different theories about the existence of aliens. Do you think that there is life on another planet? What evidence do you think proves that aliens may or may not exist?

In a multi-paragraph argumentative essay, argue for or against the existence of aliens. Remember to include and cite key details and facts from your sources that clearly elaborate on your argument and counterarguments.

Do Pro Athletes Deserve High Salaries

Many professional athletes and entertainers earn large sums of money. Do you agree or disagree with these individuals making high salaries? Use specific details and examples to convince others to support your position.

Do You Want Fame?

Some people spend their entire lives seeking the rewards of fame and fortune. Others shy away from the spotlight due to the downsides of celebrity. If you had the opportunity, would you want to be famous? Why or why not?

Write a multi-paragraph essay taking a stand on whether or not fame is really advantageous.

Dr. John Snow and the Cholera Epidemic

Imagine you are Dr. John Snow, a medical doctor living in London in the mid 1800s. Your research on the cholera epidemic gripping London indicates that it is being caused by human waste in the water supply.

Write a letter to the Department of Health suggesting a plan of action for the elimination of cholera. Include facts and details to support your plan.

Ethics and Archaeology

Should scientists be allowed to excavate ancient graves in order to gain knowledge about life in the past? Read the passage "Frozen in Time," the excerpt from the March 28, 2002 edition of The Economist entitled "Bones of Contention," and view a video on archaeology. Based on your readings and viewing, establish a claim on whether scientists should be allowed to excavate ancient graves to further our knowledge of the past.

In a well-developed essay, analyze the video and texts referred to above and develop a claim as to whether scientists should excavate ancient graves. To support your claim, consider all of the information in the passages and video. Be sure to include specific details from the resources to support for your argument.

Passage One: Frozen in Time

A Frozen Place

Most people think of snow and ice when they think of the Yukon Territory of Canada. When you hike into parks there, you often walk on glaciers that cover hundreds of acres. But as cold as the Yukon gets, the ice on these glaciers does melt. As a matter of fact, the glaciers have melted quite a lot over the last fifty years.

Not too long ago, three men who were hunting mountain sheep stumbled on a location where a glacier had been melting. They were in the Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park in Canada, near the Yukon border.

A Meltdown

The first thing the hunters saw was a wooden walking stick. That may not seem strange at first, but it seemed odd to the hunters. They knew that wood was not commonly found on a glacier. Then they spotted some fur and bone about fifty feet away. As they walked toward the fur, they discovered clothes-and a human body frozen in the ice. This man frozen in the glacier had slowly been exposed as the ice melted.

How would you feel if you were one of these hunters? You might feel a deep chill that did not come from the weather. The three hunters were teachers named Bill Hanlon, Mike Roch, and Warren Ward. They wondered if this frozen man was really old, or perhaps a victim of foul play.

A Man

The hunters did not want to touch the body. They put some small artifacts in a plastic bag and hiked out of the park. Three days later, the three men reached the Beringia Museum in Whitehorse, Yukon, and reported what they had found.

Scientists and members of the Indian nations in that area immediately decided to investigate this mystery. They returned to the site on the glacier to recover the body. Then scientists did tests that showed the man was about 550 years old. They discovered just a few facts about him. For example, he had long black hair that he wore loose. The hair itself was found on the glacier, but not the man's head. The scientists believe he died of the cold when he went to sleep, but they don't know for sure. No one has been able to figure out where he came from or why he was on this glacier.

A Final Resting Place

Researchers named the frozen man Kwaday Dan Ts'inchi, which means, "long ago person found." Scientists spent a year studying Kwaday and the place where he was found. Then Kwaday was given to the Indian nations of the area. Members of the Champagne and Aishihik tribes wondered if he was one of them, an ancestor from over 500 years ago. Maybe he was the person described in one of their tribe's many legends of the hunter who left and never returned. In case he was one of them, they gave him an Indian burial on the glacier where he was found.

Extend the School Day?

The school board plans to add one and a half hours to school each day. Do you agree or disagree with extending the school day? Use specific details and examples to convince the school board to accept your position.

Extracurricular Activities: Beneficial or Not?

Your school district has recently decided to eliminate your favorite sport, club, or performing art (soccer, chess, band, drama, etc.). These activities are fun for those who participate, but do they provide other benefits? Use iSEEK™ to research whether extracurricular activities benefit students, and then adopt a position on this issue.

In a multi-paragraph essay, use your research to argue for or against eliminating extracurricular activities. Include facts and details from your research to support your argument.

Finding an Envelope Full of Money

You and a friend are shopping in the mall when your friend finds an unmarked envelope filled with several hundred dollars. There is no identification showing the owner of the money or the envelope. You must persuade your friend to either keep it or turn it in to security.

Write a multi-paragraph essay presenting your opinion as to whether your friend should keep or turn in the envelope containing several hundred dollars. Include facts and details to support your opinion.

Funding for the Arts

Imagine the School Board is deciding whether or not to provide funding for arts education in your school district. Funding for arts education allows schools to offer elective courses such as dance, music, drama, and art. What experiences have you had with arts education? Why might some vote against funding arts education?

Write a letter to the School Board persuading them to vote either for or against funding for arts education. Include facts and examples to support your position.

Greatest American Figure

Think about the greatest American figures of past and present day. Who do you feel is the greatest American? What special qualities does this person possess that makes him or her commendable? What were his or her achievements?

Write a multi-paragraph essay in which you describe who you feel is the greatest American and persuade others to agree with your position. Be sure to include specific details and examples to support your argument.

Healthier Food Options at School

For many years, there have been snack machines in your school cafeteria, which sell things like candy bars, cupcakes, and sugary sodas. During the school year, many parents have asked the principal to have healthier food options introduced at your school. However, before making any changes to the menus in the cafeteria and the snacks in the machine, the principal must get permission from the school board.

Before asking the school board to consider these changes, your principal would like to hear students' opinions on whether or not healthier food options for lunch would be a welcome change. Do you want to see healthier foods in your cafeteria, or are you happy with your options as they are now?

Write a letter to your school principal explaining your position on healthier food options at school. Use examples, facts, and other evidence to support your point of view.

Helicopter Parents

Your school just created a new student organization called "Debate Club" which you have joined. The first topic up for debate is: Does too much parental involvement hinder a child's independence? To prepare for the first meeting, you must determine your opinion about this topic based on all of the information you have read and analyzed, as well as your own experiences.

Determine your position on the topic: Does too much parental involvement hinder a child's independence? Then write a well-developed essay in which you make a claim that clearly answers this question. Defend your claim with clear reasons and relevant evidence from the sources you have read, viewed, and analyzed, as well as from your own experience.

Homelessness in America

Last year, there were 3 million homeless people in this country. Considering the severity of the homeless problem in the United States, we are in dire need of a solution. There are many opinions regarding what is the best program or plan to help bring an end to homelessness in the United States.

What do you think can be done to help solve the problem of homelessness? In a well-organized essay, explain your solution to the homelessness problem.

Homework: Beneficial or Not?

Some students believe homework is beneficial for their educational goals, while other students believe it is not. Use iSEEK™ to research the benefits of homework, and then adopt a position on this issue.

In a multi-paragraph essay, use your research to argue whether homework is beneficial to students' educational goals. Include facts and details from your research to support your argument.

How to Handle a Bully

Imagine that one of your friends is being bullied in school and is unsure of what to do about the situation. He or she has asked for your help. Should your friend speak to an adult at school about this situation?

Write a letter to your friend in which you suggest ways that he or she could end the bullying. Be sure to support your opinion with examples and or reasons from your personal experience or readings.

Ideal Winter Getaway

Every year, many schools close for winter break. With the changing of the seasons comes the need for a change of pace. During this period of time, many families choose to get away for a little rest and relaxation before the onset of school-related activities.

Write a letter to your parents persuading them of the many ways a winter getaway would be beneficial to your family. Be sure to describe the ideal location for this getaway and what kinds of activities you could participate in during the break. Be sure to use specific details to support your ideas.

Illegal Immigration

There is much talk recently about illegal immigration from various countries. United States citizens and leaders appear to be largely divided on this issue. What is your opinion on illegal immigration? Should the government keep the U. S. borders open or closed?

After carefully reading Mario Cuomo's "Achieving the American Dream" and Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus," write a letter to the editor of your local paper persuading the readers to agree with your position on this issue. Provide convincing reasons and specific details that support your opinion. Be sure to address the concerns of those who would argue against your opinion. You may wish to conduct additional research on the topic to gather facts and statistics to further support your argument.

iPods and MP3 Players at School

People everywhere use iPods and MP3 players to listen to their favorite music while jogging, studying, driving, and working. However, the use of iPods and MP3 players while in school is frequently banned. Many students feel that they should be able to listen to music at school while studying and learning, while many adults feel that listening to music during school hours distracts students and impairs their ability to learn.

Write a multi-paragraph editorial recommending a school policy for the use of iPods and MP3 players in school. Include facts and details to support your recommendation.

Is Honesty the Best Policy?

An old proverb says honesty is the best policy. Sometimes, however, honesty might hurt a person's feelings. Explain why you either agree or disagree with being honest at all times.

Use specific details and examples to convince others to support your position.

Is Lying Always Bad?

Many people believe that lying is one of the worst things a person can do. They view it as something that hurts everyone and eventually destroys or consumes the person that lies. Others believe that lying can sometimes be the best way to handle a situation. They view it as protecting someone's feelings or calming a difficult situation. Many people in our lives share the belief that sometimes the truth is not in everyone's best interest. Have you ever been in a situation in which the truth was harmful? Is it sometimes in everyone's best interest to tell a lie?

Decide whether or not you believe that sometimes it is in everyone's best interest to lie. Then, in a detailed essay, defend your position. Include facts and examples for support.

Listening to Music in Study Hall

School rules are not always popular with students. One controversial school rule in particular has recently become the subject of two letters to the editor of the Daleworth Daily Journal. The rule forbids students to listen to music as they study, even if they use headphones and do not disturb others.

After reading the letters to the editor, decide how you feel about listening to music in study hall. In a detailed essay, argue your position on this school rule. Use details from the text to support your argument.

First Letter

To the Editor of the *Daleworth Daily Journal*:

My son is a student at Daleworth Middle School, where they have recently enacted a new study hall rule. It has been the subject of much talk among students in the halls and at lunch. The rule states that students sitting in study hall may not listen to music, even if they wear headphones. Many of the students do not agree with the school's administrators that listening to music while studying will be harmful to their grades. Admirably, a group of students decided to research this issue.

With the help of Ms. Buhpatti, the group's teacher advisor, they came up with a way to measure the effects of this new rule. They wanted to see if music helps students study better or harms them instead. They decided that the question they wanted to answer was, "Do students get better grades when they listen to music using headphones as they study in study hall?"

Since Ms. Buhpatti had taught them about researching an issue, they knew they had to choose a sample of students to study. To do this, they selected every tenth name on a list of students in study halls at Daleworth Middle School each Monday. The total number in the sample was seventy. They asked half of the sample students to wear headphones and listen to music as they studied. Names were drawn from a hat to decide who would wear the headphones and who wouldn't. They had also learned that the sample had to be large enough to ensure fairness. If students were chosen for the sample because of their opinions, then the research results would show bias.

The study lasted two weeks. During that time, every student in the sample took at least two tests. The student researchers wrote down the average grade from the last two tests students in the sample took before the research began. Then they compared those averages to the averages for the two tests the students took during the two-week study. The grades for students who wore headphones and listened to music went up an average of five points.

My son and his friends believe that the school administrators had the best interests of the students in mind when they enacted the new rule. They agree with the student researchers that students in study hall should be allowed to listen to music. It seems that the students would be best served if they were allowed to listen to their music while studying, as long as they do not disturb others in the study hall. Maybe middle school students can listen to music and study at the same time. Maybe music helps them enjoy what they study. Maybe students at Daleworth Middle School remember details of what they study better when a favorite song plays in their ears.

I would like, first, to congratulate the students who conducted the research to support their argument about the new study hall rule. Ms. Buhpatti is also to be commended, since she has taught her students how to conduct an experiment to answer a question. Their experiment may have some flaws, but it should motivate the school's administrators to look again at the effects of this new study hall rule. I would propose that the teachers also be surveyed to see if they have seen any effects of this new rule on their students' grades. Then, perhaps a more informed decision can be made about listening to music in study hall.

Concerned Parent

Second Letter

To the Editor of the *Daleworth Daily Journal*:

The recent letter to the editor, which was in favor of students listening to music during study hall, was clearly written by a parent who is easily swayed by his/her child. The student research was admirable. However, there is not enough data to argue that students' grades went up five points simply because they were allowed to listen to music in study hall.

A *USA Today College* article suggested that listening to music while studying may help students to focus. It pointed out, however, that music with lyrics distracts a person who is studying language-based subjects. The same area of the brain that listens to lyrics also controls the understanding of language. This causes a conflict between the two activities, and so studying would suffer. Research was conducted with groups of students writing with music in the background, or without music in the background. It showed that the students with music in the background wrote less than those without music. Language skills are critical for reading, writing, and even understanding math. Allowing students to listen to music while studying simply allows them to be distracted when they should be fully focused on learning.

There is other research that has shown that true multitasking is rarely possible. A single area of the brain can control only one task at a time. So when the same area of the brain controls the tasks, then multitasking is not occurring. Instead of doing two tasks, we are switching back and forth between tasks. Students listening to music in study hall are not able to both listen to music and study. Instead, they are switching back and forth between the two tasks. Can this really lead to effective learning?

The Daleworth Middle School students' research does not conclusively prove that student grades will improve if the students are allowed to listen to music while studying. The literature is full of studies presenting data that show the clearly harmful effect that music has on studying and learning. The educators at Daleworth Middle School should keep the rule against listening to music in study hall. There is simply too much data supporting that rule to allow student opinions to change it.

Another Concerned Parent

Locker Policies

Most schools allow students to use their lockers only at specific times. This policy is being reviewed by the school committee. Write an article for your school newspaper defending your opinion.

Love or Money

What would you rather have, love or money? Why?

Write an essay describing which you would rather have. Be sure to support your decision with specific details and examples from your own experiences or readings.

Making Science Fiction Real

In science-fiction movies and television shows, we often see futuristic inventions or ideas that we hope to experience one day. Did you know that cell phones, submarines, and helicopters appeared in science fiction well before their actual creation?

Research the invention of cell phones, submarines, and helicopters. Then, in a detailed essay, argue that submarines or helicopters have had a greater impact on mankind than cell phones. Be sure to include and cite evidence from your research.

Military Draft: Pro or Con?

After reading articles discussing the pros and cons of a military draft in the United States, decide which side of the issue you support.

In a multi-paragraph essay, argue whether or not you support a military draft in the United States. Use facts and details from the articles to support your position.

Nonviolence during the Civil Rights Movement of 1960

Imagine you are part of a group of African American college students in Alabama in the 1960s. In support of the civil rights movement, your group has decided to practice nonviolent protests. You have been harassed at lunch counters, physically kept from attending classes, sprayed with fire hoses, and attacked by police dogs. Some members of your group do not feel that nonviolence is working and are ready to defend themselves the next time they are physically attacked. Others, however, believe that the principles of nonviolence must be followed or the movement will fail.

You are given the deciding vote on whether or not to continue using nonviolence. In a multi-paragraph letter to the editor of the college newspaper, explain your vote, showing that you understand the opposing argument.

Persuasive Letter about Jackie Robinson

As the first African American major league baseball player, Jackie Robinson played a significant role in the history of baseball. Imagine that you work for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum and that, this month, there will be a special exhibition featuring several famous players.

In a detailed letter, persuade the president of the organization to include Jackie Robinson in this exhibition. Facts and examples regarding the role he played in the sport, as well as some of the many contributions he made to baseball during his time should be provided.

Petitioning Your Parents for a Privilege

What child hasn't asked his or her parents for a special privilege at one time or another? Think about a privilege you want that your parents are able to grant you. It may be their permission for you to stay up later, get a cell phone, or go to a special event.

Now, write a multi-paragraph essay in which you request this special privilege from your parents. Be sure to use reasons and arguments to convince your parents to grant your request.

Recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance is an oath of loyalty to the United States and to its national flag. It is regularly recited in unison at public events, and especially in public schools, where the Pledge is often part of a daily routine in the morning. The Pledge is spoken as follows: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag, of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.?"

The Pledge was written by Baptist minister Francis Bellamy on September 7, 1892, for a well-known children's magazine, *Youth's Companion*. The owners of *Youth's Companion* were selling flags to schools and approached Bellamy to write the Pledge for their advertising campaign. It was promoted as a way to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus coming to America. In 1892, President Benjamin Harrison declared that the Pledge was to be recited during Columbus Day observances in public schools. It eventually became a daily ritual in schools, with recent debate over whether this ritual should be continued.

Keeping in mind that it originated as a marketing campaign, write a persuasive essay to your principal arguing your position on students in your school reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Recommend Food to the Cafeteria

The cafeteria serves some foods people like and some they don't like. Think about three different foods that you would like the cafeteria manager to serve that you can't get now in the cafeteria. Write a letter to the cafeteria manager convincing her to serve each of the three new foods that you are suggesting.

Recommending Good Entertainment

On the recommendations of friends, people often see certain movies, read certain books, or listen to certain music. What movie have you seen, or what book have you read, or what music have you listened to on the advice of a friend that you really enjoyed, and why did you think it was enjoyable?

Write an essay to persuade your classmates to see the movie, read the book, or listen to the music that you enjoyed.

Recycling

Americans generate 4.5 pounds of waste per person every day. Certain plastics, paper products, glass, and aluminum can be recycled instead of being dumped in a landfill.

Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper persuading readers to participate in their community's recycling program. Include facts to support your position on recycling.

Rewrite the "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" Letter

In 1897, an 8-year-old girl wrote a letter to the *New York Sun* newspaper asking if there is a Santa Claus. The editor's reply has become famous as the "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" letter. If you were currently the editor of the *New York Sun*, how would you answer that letter? How would an answer in the twenty-first century differ from an answer in the nineteenth century?

In a letter written as the editor of the *New York Sun*, answer the question, "Is there a Santa Claus?" Include reasons to support and convince readers of your position.

Rising to the Challenge of Cyberbullying

Although cyberbullying does not always take place at school or during school hours, there is often a school-related link between the parties involved. Perhaps the bully and the victim are classmates, or perhaps they met through a classmate. How can a school respond to and protect students from cyberbullying, especially when the bullying occurs off campus? What are the school's limits of responsibility?

After reading the teacher assigned articles on school accountability, write a detailed essay arguing your position on the responsibility of a school to protect students from cyberbullying. Be sure to acknowledge competing views and cite evidence from the texts to support your position.

Salaries of Professional Athletes

Most professional athletes receive a very high salary to play on a professional sports team. Some people think that professional athlete salaries are too high, while others think that the high salaries are merited. How do you feel about the high salaries of professional athletes? Do you think that their unique talents make them deserving of a high income?

Write a multi-paragraph letter to the editor of your local newspaper supporting your position on whether or not you think the salaries of professional athletes are too high. Include facts, details, and examples to support your position.

School Rules: Eating in the Classroom

Your school has a rule against eating in the classroom. What is your point of view on the subject? Write an essay in which you defend your answer.

Separate Schools for Boys and Girls

Based on new research suggesting that male and female students learn differently, some school boards are considering creating separate schools for boys and girls. Do you think establishing separate schools is a good idea?

Write a multi-paragraph essay in which you persuade the Board of Education to agree with your position on this issue. Be sure to include specific details and examples to support your argument.

Soda Machines

The student council has developed a proposal for the installation of soda machines in the cafeteria. The principal has to make a decision on this. It is your job to write an editorial for your school newspaper to show why you support or oppose the installation of soda machines.

Space Shuttle Mission

Your principal has been asked to select one student from your school to go on the next space shuttle flight. The selected student will join the astronauts on their next mission to space. Why should you be selected to join this mission?

Write an essay persuading your principal to choose you to participate in the next space shuttle mission.

Spending Money

Some parents believe that children should earn their own spending money by helping out around the home. Others believe that children should receive an allowance and should not be required to earn their spending money. Should children be required to earn their spending money or should they receive an allowance to obtain their spending money?

Write an essay persuading parents to accept your opinion on whether or not children should have to earn their own spending money.

State Tests and Retention Policy

Statewide tests are administered towards the end of the school year in order to evaluate whether the students in the state have learned all that was expected in multiple core subjects during that school year. In some states, students are held back another year based on whether or not the students performed up to a certain level.

Imagine that your State Department of Education has decided that students who score less than 50 percent correct on the state test will be retained (held back) next year. What is your opinion on this policy? Write a persuasive essay to your state representative persuading him or her that students should or should not be retained based on performance on the state test.

Surveillance Cameras in Public Places

There is an ongoing debate over the use of surveillance cameras in public places. Some people feel that these cameras prevent crime, protect property, and ensure public safety. Others feel that the cameras violate an individual's right to privacy.

Write a multi-paragraph essay stating whether you agree or disagree with the use of surveillance cameras in public places. Be sure to use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

Tattoos and Body Art

Tattoos and other forms of body piercing have become increasingly popular with young people today. In many states, laws stipulate that one must be at least 18 years old in order to pierce a body part or to get a tattoo. Do you agree that such age restrictions are fair?

Write a multi-paragraph essay in which you defend your position on this issue. Be sure to support your argument with specific reasons.

Teen Curfew Laws

Are curfew laws that target teens unfair? After reading the provided texts, write an essay that argues your position, pro or con, on whether curfew laws that target teens are unfair. Support your opinion with evidence from the texts. Be sure to discuss competing views.

Teenage Responsibility

When a child becomes a teenager, some adults believe that he or she should be held responsible for his or her actions. However, other adults believe that teenagers still lack the ability and wisdom to be responsible for their actions. What do you think? At what age should teenagers be held responsible for their actions?

Write a persuasive essay in which you defend your position on this issue. Be sure to support your position with reasons or arguments from your personal experience.

The Effects of TV

Is watching television harmful or helpful? After reading the provided texts write an essay that argues your position on the effects of television viewing. Support your position with evidence from the texts. Be sure to discuss competing views.

The First Amendment

There have been many important amendments to the United States Constitution. Some people argue that the First Amendment is the most important of all because it protects some of our most fundamental freedoms.

Do you believe the First Amendment is the most important amendment to the United States Constitution? Why or why not? Write a well-developed essay in which you convince the reader to accept your position.

Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The Internet as a Tool

The Internet can be seen as a tool with many uses. Many people use the Internet to conduct research and to keep in touch with friends and family. Although there is plenty of useful information found on the Internet, you have to be aware that not everything you read is trustworthy. How do you feel about communicating and conducting research on the Internet? Do you think the Internet is a useful tool that helps or harms learning and communication? Why do you think the way you do?

Write a multi-paragraph essay explaining whether you think the Internet helps or harms learning and communication. Use details, reasons, examples, logical arguments, and/or personal experiences to support your position.

“The Monkey's Paw”

Read “The Monkey's Paw.” Movie producers are considering creating a film version of “The Monkey's Paw.” What is the story about? What are the advantages of this story that make it suitable to be a film? Why should the producers make a film version of this story?

Write a letter to the movie producers convincing them to make “The Monkey's Paw” into a movie.

The Same Team

Many people believe that boys and girls should play on the same sports team. Your school district is deciding whether or not girls and boys should be able to play on the same school sports team.

Do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea to have boys and girls play on the same team? Write an essay to persuade the coach of one particular sport to agree with your position.

The Value of Increased Cultural Awareness

Many schools spend time teaching students about the customs, values, and history of different cultures. It is said that by increasing cultural awareness, schools will be able to decrease the fear, misunderstanding, and ultimately acts of violence that erupt between different cultural groups. What do you think?

Write a letter to your principal in which you discuss your opinion on whether increased cultural awareness will lead to a more peaceful society. Support your position with reasons and evidence from you personal experience or readings.

Video Games for Physical Education Class

Video games are part of today’s youth culture and are a favorite form of recreation and entertainment. Adults worry that children do not get enough exercise because they choose to spend their time indoors playing video games instead of riding bikes, skateboarding, or playing other outdoor games. Some video game companies have developed software that encourages exercise in the form of sports and dance. Is there a place for these games in a middle-school physical education program? How might student motivation and participation, meeting physical education standards, and cost of the programs be advantages or disadvantages of their use?

In a multi-paragraph editorial, defend your position on the use of video games as part of middle-school physical education programs. Include facts and details to support your position.

Violence on Television

Some people believe that seeing violence on television can cause someone to commit a violent act. Do you feel that violent television programming contributes to violence in society?

Write an essay persuading these people to accept your opinion on whether or not violence on television leads to violence in our society.

Vote For Me!

People run for elected offices, from the President of the United States to class officers in a school. You are running for class president for your grade level. Write an essay convincing your classmates that you are the best choice for class president.

Weather-Related Makeup Days

Sometimes a snow or hurricane day can be seen as a great gift to school students, until you realize that you have to make up any days missed at the end of the year. The state requires all schools to make up any school days missed due to severe weather events. Think about how you feel about having to make those days up.

In a well-developed essay, persuade your principal to either support or not support making up any school days missed at the end of the year due to severe weather events. Include facts and details to support your position.

What Does Your School Need?

Schools do their best to accommodate students' needs by providing textbooks, well-qualified teachers, and other appropriate resources. However, students rarely get a chance to share what they really think their schools need most.

Write a letter to your principal explaining what you think your school needs to provide you with an even better educational experience. Make sure to include specific details and examples to support your arguments.

Winning Halloween Costume

You have been invited to a large Halloween contest in which there will be a \$100 reward for the best costume. You believe that your idea for a costume would be the winner, but you need your parents to help pay for the materials to create it. Write a persuasive letter to your parents asking for money to help fund your winning costume. Include reasons to support your request.

Year-Round Schooling

Your school is considering a change to a year-round school schedule. The year-round schedule would have students attend school year-round with several three-week breaks as compared to the current school year calendar which begins in the fall and ends in the spring.

Do you feel that a year-round schedule is more or less beneficial to students than the current school calendar? Write a letter to your principal persuading him or her to accept your position on a change to a year-round school schedule.

Zero Tolerance Towards Weapons in School

Due to an increase in youth violence, many school districts have adopted a "Zero Tolerance" policy towards the possession of weapons on school property or at off-campus school functions. These policies call for the mandatory expulsion of students who violate the rules. Critics contend that such policies severely punish students for relatively minor violations and fail to consider individual circumstances. Do you think your school should have a zero tolerance policy towards students found to be carrying dangerous items? Should there be exceptions to the policies?

Write a persuasive essay to be read by your principal in which you support your position on this issue. Be sure to support your stance with well-reasoned arguments and appropriate reasons.

Pilot Prompts

Ancient Traditions Influence Modern Society (pilot)

Ancient traditions often influence and are still present in modern society. In the United States, for example, our current democracy is based on ancient Greek traditions.

Analyze information gained from classroom research and personal experience to write a multi-paragraph essay in which you present your position on the extent to which ancient traditions continue to be dynamic influences on modern society. Be sure to include facts, details, and examples for support.

Banning *A Wrinkle in Time* (pilot)

Despite earning the Newbery Medal, Madeleine L'Engle's novel *A Wrinkle in Time* has been placed on many "banned books" lists. While many people enjoy L'Engle's imaginative story through space, others do not agree it is suitable for children due to its complexity and religious content.

After reading the novel, decide whether *A Wrinkle in Time* is appropriate for middle school students. Why or why not? Write a multi-paragraph essay that states your position on whether or not this novel should be banned from the classroom. Use details from the story to support your claim.

Best Defender of the Amazon Rainforest (pilot)

Many groups lay claim to the rainforest including native Amazonians, rubber tappers, loggers, settlers, cattle ranchers, environmental groups and those interested in ecotourism. From what you have learned and after conducting some research, select the group which you believe is the best for preserving the rainforest.

In a detailed essay, discuss the Amazon rainforest biome and assert your position on which group you believe is the best for preserving the rainforest. Include details that support the reason for your selection.

Can Failure Lead to Success? (pilot)

People sometimes say that failure can eventually lead to success. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Use specific examples to convince others to support your position.

Cesar Chavez National Holiday (pilot)

Cesar Chavez, founder of the National Farm Workers Association and leader of the longest protest march in United States history, nonviolently fought for the rights of farm workers across the nation. Because of his sincere dedication to helping others, several members of the United States Congress have proposed establishing a national holiday in his name. However, there are those who oppose this national holiday due to practices and actions associated with Chavez's efforts.

In a multi-paragraph essay, argue your position on the movement for a national holiday to honor Cesar Chavez. Include facts and details to support your argument.

Defending the American Revolution (pilot)

Do you believe that the colonists were justified in fighting the British during the American Revolution? Were the colonists' reactions to the events leading to the Revolutionary War appropriate or misguided?

Write a multi-paragraph essay in which you analyze the colonists' complaints against the British and defend the colonists' reasons for rebelling. Be sure to cite reliable sources to support your argument.

Source One:
"Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death"
 by Patrick Henry

No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very worthy gentlemen who have just addressed the House. But different men often see the same subject in different lights; and, therefore, I hope it will not be thought disrespectful to those gentlemen if, entertaining as I do opinions of a character very opposite to theirs, I shall speak forth my sentiments freely and without reserve. This is no time for ceremony. The question before the House is one of awful moment to this country. For my own part, I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery; and in proportion to the magnitude of the subject ought to be the freedom of the debate. It is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at truth, and fulfill the great responsibility which we hold to God and our country. Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself as guilty of treason towards my country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the Majesty of Heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings.

Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts. Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we disposed to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst, and to provide for it.

I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I wish to know what there has been in

the conduct of the British ministry for the last ten years to justify those hopes with which gentlemen have been pleased to solace themselves and the House. Is it that insidious smile with which our petition has been lately received? Trust it not, sir; it will prove a snare to your feet. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss. Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition comports with those warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land. Are fleets and armies necessary to a work of love and reconciliation? Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be reconciled that force must be called in to win back our love? Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and subjugation; the last arguments to which kings resort. I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array, if its purpose be not to force us to submission? Can gentlemen assign any other possible motive for it? Has Great Britain any enemy, in this quarter of the world, to call for all this accumulation of navies and armies? No, sir, she has none. They are meant for us: they can be meant for no other. They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the British ministry have been so long forging. And what have we to oppose to them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years. Have we anything new to offer upon the subject? Nothing. We have held the subject up in every light of which it is capable; but it has been all in vain. Shall we resort to entreaty and humble supplication? What terms shall we find which have not been already exhausted? Let us not, I beseech you, sir, deceive ourselves. Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves before the throne, and have implored its interposition to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and Parliament. Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded; and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne! In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond hope of peace and reconciliation. There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free-if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending-if we mean not basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained-we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of hosts is all that is left us!

They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot? Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. The millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable-and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come.

It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace-but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of

resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

Source Two:
Excerpt of Article from
The London Chronicle
 April 26-28, 1770

Note: This letter details the events of the Boston Massacre in which colonists attacked a group of British soldiers by throwing stones, sticks, and snowballs at them. The British soldiers retaliated by firing their weapons into the crowd, killing a handful of colonists.

The following is a substance of a letter from Boston, dated the 12th of March, relative to the unhappy affair between the Townsmen and the Soldiers on the 5th of that month:

For some time past frequent affrays have happened in the streets of this town between the inhabitants and the soldiers quartered there, and particularly on the 2nd and 3rd of March in which affrays one or two of the soldiers were much hurt. On the 5th of March, in the evening, a number of the townspeople, after insulting in the barracks, attacked a sentry upon duty at the Customhouse, and forced him from his post. Upon his requiring aid, Captain Preston (who was Captain of the day) sent a non-commissioned officer and 12 men to his assistance, and soon after followed himself. This party was also attacked, and insulted by the mob, and one of them, receiving a blow, fired his piece, after which six or seven others fired, by which three of the townspeople were killed upon the spot and several others wounded; one of which is since dead of his wounds. During this transaction there was a great tumult in the town. The people prepared to arm; expresses had been sent to the neighboring towns for assistance; and a resolution taken to give a general alarm, by firing the beacon; but by the persuasion of the Lieutenant Governor, the people were prevailed upon, after some time, to disperse; A barrel of tar, which was carrying to the beacon, was brought back, and the troops, which were under arms, retired to their barracks.

On the next morning the Council assembled to deliberate on the measures it might be advisable to pursue. It having been declared, by several of the members, that it was the determination of the people to have the troops removed from the town at all events, that this was the sense of the whole province, that the inhabitants of the other towns stood ready to come in, in order to affect this, and that they had formed their plan, of which this was only a part. And the inhabitants, assembled in town meeting, having by their selectmen, and by messages repeatedly represented, that nothing would satisfy the people, but a total and immediate removal of the troops. The Lieutenant-Governor thought fit to request the commanding officer, to cause both the regiments to remove to the barracks at the castle, which was accordingly done without further disturbance. Upon examinations before two Justices of the Peace, Captain Preston being charged with ordering the troops to fire, was committed to prison: as were also seven or eight private men, charged with having fired in consequence of those orders.

Source Three:
Excerpt from "Common Sense"
 by Thomas Paine
 January 10, 1776

In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense; and have no other Preliminaries to settle with the reader, than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves; that he will put ON, or rather that he will not put OFF the true character of a man, and generously enlarge his views beyond the present day.

Volumes have been written on the subject of the struggle between England and America. Men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy, from different motives, and with various designs; but all have been ineffectual, and the period of debate is closed. Arms, as the last resource, decide this contest; the appeal was the choice of the king, and the continent hath accepted the challenge.

It hath been reported of the late Mr. Pelham (who tho' an able minister was not without his faults) that on his being attacked in the house of commons, on the score, that his measures were only of a temporary kind, replied "THEY WILL LAST MY TIME." Should a thought so fatal and unmanly possess the colonies in the present contest, the name of ancestors will be remembered by future generations with detestation.

The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent-of at least one eighth part of the habitable globe. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. Now is the seed-time of continental union, faith and honour. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound will enlarge with the tree, and posterity read it in full grown characters.

By referring the matter from argument to arms, a new aera for politics is struck; a new method of thinking hath arisen. All plans, proposals, & prior to the nineteenth of April, i. e. to the commencement of hostilities, are like the almanacs of the last year; which, though proper then are superseded and useless now. Whatever was advanced by the advocates on either side of the question then, terminated in one and the same point. viz. a union with Great-Britain: the only difference between the parties was the method of effecting it; the one proposing force, the other friendship; but it hath so far happened that the first hath failed, and the second hath withdrawn her influence.

As much hath been said of the advantages of reconciliation which, like an agreeable dream, hath passed away and left us as we were, it is but right, that we should examine the contrary side of the argument, and inquire into some of the many material injuries which these colonies sustain, and always will sustain, by being connected with, and dependent on Great Britain: To examine that connection and dependence, on the principles of nature and common sense, to see what we have to trust to, if separated, and what we are to expect, if dependant.

I have heard it asserted by some, that as America hath flourished under her former connection with Great Britain that the same connection is necessary towards her future happiness, and will always have

the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk that it is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true, for I answer roundly, that America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power had any thing to do with her. The commerce, by which she hath enriched herself, are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.

But she has protected us, say some. That she has engrossed us is true, and defended the continent at our expense as well as her own is admitted, and she would have defended Turkey from the same motive, viz. the sake of trade and dominion.

Alas, we have been long led away by ancient prejudices, and made large sacrifices to superstition. We have boasted the protection of Great Britain, without considering, that her motive was INTEREST not ATTACHMENT; that she did not protect us from OUR ENEMIES on OUR ACCOUNT, but from HER ENEMIES on HER OWN ACCOUNT, from those who had no quarrel with us on any OTHER ACCOUNT, and who will always be our enemies on the SAME ACCOUNT. Let Britain wave her pretensions to the continent, or the continent throw off the dependence, and we should be at peace with France and Spain were they at war with Britain. The miseries of Hanover last war ought to warn us against connections.

Source Four:
"The Bostonian's Paying the Excise-man, or Tarring & Feathering"
 by Philip Dawe
 1774

Note: A loyalist named John Malcolm is tarred and feathered (a process in which a person is covered in sticky tar and covered with feathers as a form of public humiliation) by a group of patriots while tea is dumped into the Boston Harbor in the background.

https://myaccess.com/myaccess/materials/Source_Four_AmRev.pdf

Direct vs. Indirect Democracy (pilot)

Imagine you are part of the Greek Assembly. A citizen has argued that the country move from direct to indirect democracy. Do you support him/her?

In a multi-paragraph essay, present your position as a member of the Greek Assembly on the issue of moving from direct to indirect democracy. Be sure to support your position with facts and details.

Discontinue Production of the Penny? (pilot)

There is an ongoing debate as to whether the United States should continue to produce the penny. At the root of the issue are the cost of penny production, the effects on consumers of rounding prices up or down if the penny is eliminated, and the time wasted by consumers when counting out pennies at the

cash register. It has also been suggested that there is great sentimental value for the penny, and it has value for fundraisers and savings.

Research the effects of eliminating the penny to decide your position on this issue. Write an essay in which you support your position and address the counterarguments to your position. Use information from your sources to support your arguments.

Donner Party Decisions' Impact on the Journey to California (pilot)

The Donner Party is infamous for the desperate measures it took to survive the winter of 1846 in the Sierra Nevada mountains, but what caused the members of the group to be stranded in the first place? Research the Donner Party's journey and the decisions made by the group as they attempted to reach California from Illinois.

After researching the Donner Party's journey, write a detailed essay arguing which decision had the most negative impact on their journey to California. Include facts and details from your research to support your argument.

Driverless Cars for Everyday Use? (pilot)

Can you imagine a highway full of cars and no human drivers in sight? Certainly, there are advantages and disadvantages to the driverless car concept. The military currently uses driverless vehicles and finds that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, but in our everyday lives, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using driverless cars? After researching the issue, write a multi-paragraph essay presenting your position on whether driverless cars will make everyday life better in the future or cause new problems.

E-Books or Paper Books for School Libraries (pilot)

The Internet has given us unprecedented access to all sorts of reading materials. With electronic tablet devices or e-readers, people can download as many books as they want and carry them wherever they travel. However, the physical feeling of holding a book and turning its pages cannot be replaced for many readers. Your principal is thinking about expanding your school library's inventory. He or she is deciding whether to purchase more electronic tablet devices (or e-readers) for e-books or more paper books.

After reading the resources, write a letter to your principal arguing your position on the issue of purchasing more electronic tablet devices (or e-readers) for e-books or more paper books for your school library. Be sure to cite the text to strengthen your argument and address opposing sides.

Source One:
"E-Reading"
by Vantage Learning

Any bookworm would love to have a library at his or her fingertips. This is exactly what is available with an electronic tablet device or e-reader. A single e-reader can hold hundreds of electronic books (e-books), magazines, comic books, and newspapers. Anyone can pull out his or her favorite story anywhere.

E-books offer a few unique advantages over paper books. Some e-readers have a built-in dictionary and text-highlighting tool. By interacting with the text, a person can gain a better understanding of what they are reading (Miranda, Johnson, Rossi-Williams). In addition, e-books can force a reader to read more slowly. The typical layout of an e-book on an electronic tablet device is one book page per screen. This allows readers to take in the information before moving on to the next page in the e-book.

Even though people are only reading one page at a time with an electronic tablet device, studies show that people are still reading more books. Rainie, Zickuhr, Purcell, et al. from the Pew Research Center found that the average person who reads e-books read 24 books in a year. That is exactly two books per month. The same study found that a person who does not read e-books only reads a little more than half of that number in the same amount of time.

E-books are good for the environment as well. Even though the production of an e-book uses more energy in the form of natural gas and coal than a paper book, the e-book still saves trees. Bob Schildgren calculated in *Sierra* magazine that 10,000 to 20,000 sheets of paper can come from a single tree. That means if a book has about 200 pages, one tree would make about 50 books. Since an electronic tablet device or e-reader holds about 1,000 books (around 200,000 pages), publishing e-books could save an average of 20 trees per book!

Yet, e-books are not perfect. One reason is that the backlighting from the electronic screens can damage a reader's vision. Amir Khan of Everyday Health explained that 70% of people have eye strain symptoms from electronic screens. This can result in itchy and dry eyes or headaches.

E-readers could hurt a person's health in other ways as well. William Herkewitz from Mental Floss reported that Richard Stevens, a medical researcher at the University of Connecticut, studied how humans wake up or go to sleep based on the amount of blue light they see. Blue light is one of the main colors in sunlight. Electronic devices also give off a blue light, so using these devices at night can keep a person from falling asleep. Then, even if he or she falls asleep, he or she may not get enough sleep. Scientists are not sure how tablet devices and e-readers will affect a person's health over time. Yet, technology is clearly getting in the way of a good night's sleep for now.

Other drawbacks to tablet devices and e-readers include their inability to travel. E-books cannot be taken everywhere like paper books. If a person is near water, he or she may accidentally get an e-reader or tablet device wet, which could damage the device. If a person leaves the device out in the open, it could be stolen. Also, tablet devices and e-readers can and will run out of battery power at some point. These are issues that are not true of paper books.

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Source Two:

"Ink and Paper"

by Vantage Learning

Many readers remain loyal to paper books for all sorts of reasons. A paper book is small enough to travel in a suitcase. A reader can write in the margins or highlight the text to make notes for later. A person can still buy more books without having to remove old favorites. In many ways, the e-book cannot replace the paper book.

In fact, reading paper books could still be the better way. Alison Flood from *The Guardian* explained that a researcher at Stavanger University in Norway found the feeling of holding a book helps people to remember information. This is partly because a person can flip back through the pages to find a specific part. On a tablet device or e-reader, a reader may not be able to easily search through the text. For this reason, an e-book can certainly have drawbacks when used for activities like studying.

Even when not used for studying, paper books may still be the best choice. Lescia Bushak of *MedicalDaily* reported that research has shown that reading paper books can relax people in about six minutes. Yet, electronic tablet devices or e-readers can be stressful to readers. Tablet devices offer distractions within the text, like hyperlinks. This can cause the reader to lose focus.

A paper book is also better than an e-book in terms of value. It can be resold online or at a yard sale while an e-book cannot. If e-books could be reused, people could read the book and then immediately return it to the store for a full refund like they could with a paper book. Unfortunately, this means that many users have to keep e-books they did not like or no longer want.

However, paper books are not always the best option for many. For publishers, the main cost of a paper book is its production. With an e-book, publishers can cut out the expense of paper altogether, making the book itself cheaper and increasing their profit.

Paper books seem to be taking a backseat to e-books in other ways, too. E-books can be instantly downloaded for a lower price. An e-book can cost anywhere from \$1 to \$15 in 2015, and the prices could go down in the future. The average price of a hardback book for a school to buy, depending on the genre, was around \$20 in 2013 (*School Library Journal*).

The technology for e-books is always improving. In a few years, health risks and the cost of electronic tablet devices and e-readers could be completely gone. The blue light may be removed so that people do not hurt their eyes or sleep cycle.

Typically, technology gets cheaper the longer that it is available as well. In the future, e-books and the devices they are downloaded to may be less costly than paper books altogether.

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Source Three:

"Electronic or Paper Books in Schools"

by Vantage Learning

Most schools still do not have e-books in every classroom. Yet, some have seen success when buying a few for their students. Teachers saw that students were more excited to read e-books than paper books (Miranda, Johnson, Rossi-Williams). Jim Dalrymple from The Loop also explained how studies have shown that students who read from tablet devices had better scores on their literacy tests than those who did not.

Students are enjoying e-books for other reasons as well. Katie Linendoll of CNN reported that the organization Worldreader had to give e-readers, instead of paper books, to students around the world for several reasons. For one, paper books were too expensive to ship. For another, students found them to be too heavy when they had to walk long distances to their schools. E-books and e-readers were the perfect solution because they were cheaper and lighter. With e-readers, students could carry hundreds of books at a time.

Yet, in terms of e-readers for school libraries, there is no way for e-readers to replace paper books right now. It is not currently possible to load multiple copies of the same book on multiple devices. There is also the question of who actually owns the e-book once it is bought for a library. If the school does not own it, it is possible that they will have to pay a fee each time it is read.

Price is also a problem for schools. In 2015, e-readers or tablet devices can cost \$70 to \$200. For a school with 500 students, there would need to be at least one e-reader for every two students. At the low end, this would cost \$35,000. After purchasing the e-readers, the schools would then have to purchase the books. If a librarian wanted to buy 50 books from one of the larger e-book retailers, it may cost the school \$1 to \$15 per book, depending on the publication date. Even then, libraries would need more than just 50 books to cater to an entire school, so costs would go up further.

For now, many schools are still thinking about the future of books in their classrooms and libraries.

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Source Four:

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by DFE Group A15

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Source Five:

"The Making of a Textbook"

by National Association of College Stores

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http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/32/Fig.3_Wikiversity_A15.JPG

Establish Homework Clubs? (pilot)

Studies have shown that one way to improve student achievement is to start an afterschool homework club. Teachers and students volunteer to meet with those who either have difficulty in certain subjects or who want to finish their homework early. Use specific details and examples to argue for or against the idea of establishing homework clubs in your school.

Foster Care for Pony Boy? (pilot)

Imagine you are the judge in *The Outsiders* who must determine whether Pony Boy should be allowed to remain in the care of his older brothers, Darry and Soda Pop, or whether he should be sent to foster care. Would Darry and Soda Pop provide a suitable environment for raising Pony Boy?

In a multi-paragraph essay, present your position on whether Pony Boy should remain in the care of his brothers or be placed in foster care. Include references to the novel to support your position, and address counterarguments or opposing points of view.

Getting Americans to Vote (pilot)

In the United States, around 60% of U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote actually did vote in the 2004 Presidential Election. The candidates try to attract and excite voters by making promises, highlighting their own accomplishments, and attacking their opponent. But how can we actually make sure that all of the people who are eligible to vote actually do VOTE? Who should lead this effort and how will it be accomplished?

In a persuasive essay, discuss the best methods that will encourage all Americans to vote if they have the right to.

Handicapped Students and Intramural Sports (pilot)

Imagine that a handicapped student has entered your class and would like to play an intramural sport. Some of your friends are in favor of the student's participation, but others are not. Which intramural sports might a handicapped student be able to play? How might the handicap affect the student's participation?

In a detailed essay, persuade classmates of your position on a handicapped student participating in an intramural sport. Support your argument with details on the student's handicap and its possible effect on the student's participation.

Helping the Victims of Hurricane Katrina (pilot)

In August of 2005, Hurricane Katrina became one of the deadliest and most destructive natural disasters in America's history. Originally, Katrina formed over the Bahamas and passed through the southern region of Florida as a Category 1 hurricane. Katrina gained strength while going through the Gulf of Mexico and quickly became one of the strongest hurricanes recorded. By the time the storm reached the Louisiana area it was listed as Category 3 and consequently devastated everything in its path. Much of the Gulf Region was destroyed due to flooding, massive winds, and severe and heavy rainfall. The severity of Katrina caused 53 levee breaks or overflows in the New Orleans area, which led to eighty percent of the city being underwater. This storm also severely damaged the coasts of Mississippi and Alabama, making Katrina the most destructive and costliest natural disaster in the history of the United States. The total damage from Katrina is estimated at \$81.2 billion, with a confirmed death toll of 1,836, and 705 people yet to be found. The damage of this storm went beyond property, taking many lives, separating families, and displacing many residents of the Louisiana and Mississippi area permanently. To this day, the Gulf Coast Region continues to rebuild itself and many disenfranchised people are without homes, jobs, or their family members.

Imagine that you have been asked to write a persuasive letter to the people of America asking them to donate one dollar to a relief fund established for the hurricane survivors. What are some of the ways in which money donated can be used to best help those in need?

Write a persuasive letter to the people of America asking them to donate one dollar to a hurricane survivors' relief fund. Include facts and details to support your request and the manner in which the funds will be used.

Highway or No Highway? (pilot)

The Department of Transportation wants to build a highway that passes through your town within eyesight of your school. The new highway will improve the local economy by creating jobs in your town and will help people get around more easily. School teachers say it will be too noisy and may cause distractions. Planners have promised they will build a wall to block the sound, but teachers say this will be ugly and ineffective.

Take a position on this issue. Write a well-developed persuasive essay to representatives of the local government to convince them to agree with your position.

How Many Dogs is Too Many? (pilot)

Many families have dogs for pets. To show that they are responsible pet owners who care for their dogs, they walk them twice a day, feed them, love them, groom them, pick up after them, and train them to obey. Some people are so busy that they aren't able to pay as much attention to their dogs. Dogs that are neglected often bark excessively, escape from their yards and roam neighborhoods, or even become aggressive and attack. Many cities have laws limiting the number of dogs one family or household can own. What do you think is a reasonable number of dogs one family should be allowed to keep in their house or yard?

In a multi-paragraph editorial, defend your opinion on how many dogs are reasonable to keep within one household. Include facts, details, and examples to support your opinion.

How Would You Change the Dress Code? (pilot)

Your school is considering making a change to the dress code. What is one change that you would recommend, and why is it important? Use specific details and examples to justify this change.

How Would You Improve Your Community? (pilot)

What improvement would make your community better? Use specific details and examples to convince the mayor of your community to accept your idea for improving where you live.

Important to Own a Pet? (pilot)

Some people believe owning a pet is important, while others do not. Using specific details and examples to support your position, argue for or against owning a pet.

Individuals Affecting Government Actions (pilot)

People often feel powerless when it comes to having an effect on government decisions. However, history contains many examples of individuals or community groups that have affected changes in government policies and laws.

In a well-developed essay, persuade your classmates that they can influence government decisions and actions. Include facts and details to support your argument.

Is Imagination More Important than Knowledge? (pilot)

Scientist Albert Einstein said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Include specific details and examples to convince others to support your position.

Is Milk Good for Your Health? (pilot)

It is common knowledge that milk is a great source of calcium, which can promote bone health. Many people add milk to their diets to remain healthy. Yet, is drinking milk really necessary? Could the health risks outweigh the benefits?

Read the sources about the benefits and risks of drinking milk, and then write a multi-paragraph essay in which you discuss whether milk is helpful or harmful to your health. Use specific evidence from the sources to support your argument.

Source One:
"You Should Pass on the Milk"
 by Vantage Learning

Growing up, many people were told to drink milk. They were told that it would make their bones strong and their bodies healthy. Yet, this is no longer true. Now, there is more evidence that milk is bad for you.

Of course, milk gives us calcium, which builds strong bones. Strong bones can mean less breaks or fractures when a person grows old. However, according to Harvard School of Public Health, researchers do not know how much calcium people should be getting for the best results. In fact, in certain studies, Harvard School of Public Health reports that high amounts of calcium were not shown to lower the chance of having weaker bones. This is then added to the fact that people in Asian countries, like India and Japan, do not get as much calcium and still remain at a low risk for fractures (Harvard School of Public Health). More calcium does not necessarily mean stronger bones.

Yet, bone health is not the only concern for milk drinkers. The British Medical Journal reports that people who drank milk were more likely to die from cancer or heart disease (Flam).

Not drinking milk can help a person be healthy in other ways too. There is a possibility that the antibiotics that are fed to cows to make them fatter are then going into milk (Neuman). This could mean that antibiotics would not help to cure certain diseases because the bacteria would grow stronger against the illnesses they are used to fight against. This could seriously change how humans treat other diseases, simply from drinking milk.

Aside from milk's negative long-term effects, there are also issues with milk that could cause health problems right now. For one, milk is very high in calories. Peter Jaret, a writer for the medical information website WebMD, explains that one glass of 2% milk is 138 calories, but if we drink three glasses (the recommended amount), it amounts to 336 calories. That is almost as many calories as a medium order of fries! Three glasses of milk is also a very unrealistic amount of dairy to have to drink daily. In fact, this would mean that people would have to drink a glass of milk at every meal.

Luckily, some people are unable to drink milk at all, so they do not have to worry about these negative health effects. People that have lactose intolerance or a milk allergy often feel sick after drinking or eating dairy products. Yet, they still do not worry about their bone health because they receive calcium from other foods like spinach and kale. In fact, there are even milk substitutes that are rich in calcium (like soy milk or rice milk) if someone is reluctant to give up milk completely.

The truth is we are not supposed to drink milk all of our lives. As children, we drink milk and formula to grow quickly. Yet, as we grow older, milk only causes health problems. Milk may have been a main part of diets in the past, but it should now be avoided. In milk's case, the risks far outweigh the benefits.

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Source Two: "Can You Pass the Milk?" by Vantage Learning

From birth, people drink milk to get the nutrients they need. It is important to drink milk throughout your life, no matter if it is cow's milk or a milk substitute. It is difficult to find another drink that gives you more vitamins in a single glass.

Calcium is one of the most critical nutrients that a person can get from drinking milk. It helps everything from weight loss to blood pressure (Medical News Today). Yet, most importantly, calcium keeps the risk of bone fractures at a minimum. Without milk, the bones in your body can become weak

and brittle as you grow older. In addition to calcium helping to keep your bones healthy, it can also prevent certain diseases and conditions. For example, according to Medical News Today, the risks for some types of cancer can be reduced with high amounts of calcium and vitamin D in a person's diet. Milk is also the best source of calcium, making it easy to get your daily requirement at one time. Although other foods like leafy green vegetables can help you get some calcium, milk has the most.

The difficulty for some people is being able to get the recommended amount of dairy products in a day so that they have enough calcium in their diet. However, there are plenty of options to choose from. Cheese, yogurt, and butter are all good sources of calcium and vitamin D if milk is not an option.

Even if people are allergic or intolerant to milk, they will typically have a "limit" to dairy. This means that they are able to eat or drink some dairy without feeling sick afterward, so there is really no reason for someone to avoid milk altogether (Dairy Council of California). This is important to know because the National Institutes of Health reports that many people do not get the calcium they need to support their body on a daily basis. Everyone is able to drink some milk, and it is the easiest way to receive the nutrients you need.

Aside from health benefits, milk has always been the right choice because it is natural. Although there are some growth hormones in milk, the Dairy Council of California explains that milk from untreated cows and treated cows is exactly the same. In fact, the Dairy Council of California reports that 90 percent of the growth hormone is destroyed by pasteurization, which is the process that milk goes through to make sure it is safe to drink. The remaining 10 percent is then broken down during pasteurization, as are all proteins (Dairy Council of California).

Thankfully, milk has always been relatively cheap, which makes it the obvious choice for anyone who wants to remain healthy. No other drink can provide as much benefit to the body as milk.

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Source Four:

"Worldwide Prevalence of Lactose Intolerance in Recent Populations"

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/27/Worldwide_prevalence_of_lactose_intolerance_in_recent_populations.jpg

Is Napping Beneficial? (pilot)

How much sleep do we need? Do we need different amounts of sleep depending on our age? Is it possible to sleep too much or too little? Can we make up for too little sleep by napping? People of all ages suffer from sleep deprivation sooner or later, so answers to the questions about the amount of sleep necessary to stay healthy are important to us all. Naps are sometimes suggested for making up for lost sleep, but there are opposing views on the value of naps.

Research the value of naps and establish a position on whether napping is beneficial for people. Write a multi-paragraph essay using facts and details from your sources to support your position and to address the opposing point of view.

Jefferson vs. Hamilton on Economics or Federalism (pilot)

Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, rival founding fathers of the U.S. Constitution, disagreed on a number of issues, including the formation of the National Bank, the national economic vision, and federalism. The core of their disagreement centered on the extent of power that the federal government would wield. How would these men feel about current topics such as trade, education, the nation's infrastructure, and government subsidies? How are their beliefs relevant today?

Research an issue related to the beliefs of either Jefferson or Hamilton on economics or federalism using iSEEK™. Decide which side you support. Then, in a multi-paragraph essay, present your argument supporting Jefferson's or Hamilton's beliefs on the issue. Use evidence from your research to support your position.

Keep the Movie Theater Open (pilot)

Going to movies is a major source of entertainment for many students. Imagine that the only discount movie theater in your area is closing. Write a persuasive essay in support of keeping the discount movie theater open.

Learning Language Arts Using Videos (pilot)

Suppose that instead of using textbooks, language arts teachers were being encouraged to use videos to teach such topics as fiction, nonfiction, listening and speaking, parts of speech, and research. After viewing one or more videos from a series like *Discovering Language Arts*, think about learning from a

video instead of a textbook. Which language arts topic was easier to learn from the video? Why was it easier to learn this way?

In a well-developed essay, discuss the language arts topic(s) that would be easier to learn through videos than from a textbook. Include information from the video(s) to support your discussion.

Mandatory Participation in Extracurricular Activity? (pilot)

Your principal has decided that all students must participate in at least one extracurricular activity. For example, students could participate in sports, work on the yearbook, or serve on the student council. Do you agree or disagree with this decision? Use specific details and examples to convince others to support your position.

Multiple Religious Traditions in the Middle East (pilot)

Religion and religious traditions have profoundly influenced the world. The Middle East region, for example, is central to at least three major religions.

In a multi-paragraph essay, present your position on the religious traditions that have had the most influence on the cultural mosaic of the Middle East today. Include facts, details, and examples to support your position.

Opinion on Having a Local Teen Center (pilot)

Some communities maintain a local teen center where teenagers can get together after school hours. Think about having a local teen center where teenagers can get together after school hours. Now write to convince your local government whether or not to provide a local teen center.

Parking Lot Construction (pilot)

The town council is discussing the idea of paving over a park in the middle of your town to provide more parking for local businesses. There is a shortage of parking downtown, and there is no open space to build more parking lots. On the other hand, the park is the only large grassy space downtown. Do you think it is more important to keep the park or to have more parking?

Write a letter to persuade the town council to accept your recommendation on whether the town should pave over the park or keep the park as it is.

Pep Rallies (pilot)

School administrators want to eliminate pep rallies for school sports teams held during school hours. They argue the pep rallies disrupt teachers' schedules and provide no tangible benefits. Some of the teachers and students disagree; they say that pep rallies help promote school pride and are a good stress reliever.

Take a position on this issue. Write a well-developed persuasive essay to the school administrators to convince them to either cancel or continue the pep rallies.

Permission to Visit a Workplace (pilot)

Many schools have partnerships with local companies and organizations that allow students to explore certain professions. Write a letter to the manager of a local workplace that performs the type of work you would like to pursue. Convince the employer to allow you to visit. Include details about why you chose that workplace and the specific job.

Prayer in School (pilot)

Many public schools allow groups of students to hold prayer meetings on an informal basis, but they do not allow prayer to be included in school-sanctioned ceremonies or events. Write a letter to your local school board proposing a school district policy on prayer in school. Be sure to include specific details and examples to support your position.

Preparing for Natural Disasters (pilot)

Think about a natural disaster that affected a specific country and the lives of its people. Imagine you live in this country. What can be done to better prepare for another disaster? Is there anything that the government and citizens can do to be ready?

Analyze a country's previous experiences in dealing with a natural disaster and possible future actions that could be taken to prepare for another. Then, in a multi-paragraph essay, persuade readers of the measures you think the government and the people of this country should take to prepare for another natural disaster. Be sure to include reasons, details, and examples to support your argument.

Providing the Basic Needs (pilot)

We live in a world where the basic necessities of life now come at a cost that many cannot afford. Whether it is food, shelter, or medicine, millions of people struggle to have basic needs met for themselves or their loved ones. Do you believe that all people have the right to have certain needs met whether they can afford them or not?

Decide whether or not you think basic needs should be met for all people, regardless of their financial situation. In a persuasive essay, write an editorial to your local paper arguing either for or against the requirement of this basic need for all people.

Public vs. Private Schools (pilot)

Although most students in the United States attend public schools, there are a number of students who attend private schools for smaller classes and an enriched educational experience. Which type of school are you in favor of? Which do you think provides a better experience for students and why?

In a detailed essay, persuade the reader that either public or private schools provide a better educational experience for students. Give examples to support your response.

Resources of China, Japan, and World Economies (pilot)

China and Japan have a profound effect on world economies. Having two of the most powerful economies in the world, they set the standard for success and impact every country. Analyze the resources of Japan and China and their impact on world economies. Write a multi-paragraph essay in which you support your position on the resources that you believe have the greatest influence on world economies. Be sure to include facts, details, and examples to support your choice of resources.

Ride the Magic School Bus (pilot)

After viewing a *Magic School Bus* video, write a letter to your classmates convincing them to take a ride with Ms. Frizzle and her class to discover the exciting scientific concepts that are presented in the video.

Be sure to address some of the many fun-filled facts they would learn if they were to take a trip on the Magic School Bus.

Rubber Tappers vs. Cattle Ranchers (pilot)

Imagine you are either a rubber tapper or a cattle rancher living in a Brazilian rainforest. A proposal has been made to develop a piece of the rainforest into a cattle ranch.

Choose a role (rubber tapper or cattle rancher) and write a multi-paragraph letter to the Brazilian government either for or against this proposal. Be sure to support your arguments with facts and details.

School Lunches: Healthy and Tasty? (pilot)

Over the years, adults have been concerned about the foods served to children as part of school lunches. While past school lunches followed legal guidelines for healthy meals, they often contained too much fat and salt and too many calories. Recent changes have been made to make all food available at school healthier.

There are some changes you may have noticed on your school campus:

Elimination of soda, candy, and chips in vending machines

Replacement of fried foods with baked versions (for example, French fries or chips)

Prohibition of the sale of donuts, candy, cookies, or cupcakes for fundraisers

Other improvements have included adding salads or salad bars to some menus, or now you may be able to choose vegetables and dip, fresh fruit, or yogurt for snacks. Many school cafeterias are using more whole grains in things like hamburger buns, taco shells, and pasta noodles.

What should the guidelines be for your school cafeteria? Is it possible to serve healthy foods that taste good? Is there a place for choices, even if some choices aren't healthy? Who should decide: the schools, parents, or students?

In a multi-paragraph essay, craft an argument to support a School Lunch Program that you think is best for students. Be sure to state your opinion clearly, and use examples, facts, and other evidence to support your point of view.

Seat Belts on School Buses (pilot)

Cars have seat belts, but why not school buses? Buses are supposed to be safe without seat belts. Yet, many parents are still worried that students could be hurt in bus accidents.

What if your school wanted to buy seat belts for school buses? How would you react? Write a letter to your principal presenting your argument about seat belts on school buses. Be sure to include support from the sources below to strengthen your argument and address opposing sides.

Source One:
"No Need for Seat Belts"
 by Vantage Learning

Buses are built for safety. They are painted yellow so that other cars can see them. Their seats are soft to protect passengers during accidents. According to the Canada Safety Council, buses are 16 times safer than cars. This means that buses do not need seat belts to make them safer.

In fact, seat belts can mean less safety inside of buses. The National Education Association (NEA) reports that bus drivers are worried that students will use the buckles as weapons. They are also concerned that students may become trapped in the event of a bus fire due to jammed seat belts. There is also no way for bus drivers to make sure that passengers are wearing their seat belts at all times. Bus

drivers, according to the NEA, believe hiring bus aides to watch students would be safer than spending money on the seat belts themselves.

Seat belts can be costly for many schools. Andrew Johnson, a reporter for NBC News, writes that seat belts would cost anywhere from \$8,000 to \$15,000 to install on a new bus. To replace old buses with new ones that have seat belts can be even more expensive and can mean less money for schools to spend on activities or resources. They can also mean that fewer students are able to take the bus because seat belts can take up more room.

Millions of students take the bus to school each year. Yet, according to Johnson of NBC News, only about six students die in accidents inside buses. Many more students are hurt when getting on and off the bus. Some research has even shown that seat belts can actually cause head injuries. This could mean that even students who wear their seat belts are still at a great risk of injury. In the end, buses are already safe enough without seat belts. In some cases, seat belts can do more harm than good.

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Source Two:

"Seat Belts Mean Safety"

by Vantage Learning

Most vehicles on the road have seat belts. Yet, for school buses, seat belts are optional. All school buses could be made safer with seat belts. For example, according to an article in the Daily Herald entitled "Seat Belts in All School Buses? Experts Debate If It Should Be State Law," school buses are supposed to be safe in many types of crashes, but not rollovers. Without seat belts, students can be thrown from the bus and seriously hurt. Students not wearing seat belts can also be thrown into other students. When used correctly, seat belts can be life savers.

In addition, students already use seat belts in cars. When there are seat belts in school buses, studies reported by CBS Local in Minnesota show that students wear them over half the time. This number could grow if students are taught to use them from a young age. This will also mean that bus drivers do not have to always check that students are wearing them. Students will already know it is safer to do so.

Seat belts do not have to become weapons, either. There are types of seat belts that are built into the seat so that students are not able to hit each other with them. Instead, seat belts will help students remain in their seats, so a bus driver will be less distracted and will be less likely to get into an accident. Student safety should not be left to a bus driver alone, and seat belts could help.

There are many arguments that seat belts are too expensive. Yet, Rachel E. Montes, an attorney from the Montes Law Group, explains that it would only cost about \$2.00 per student to have seat belts, making it relatively cheap to make sure that students are safe. Additionally, many parents feel that seat belts would give them peace of mind about their students' well-being, which is priceless. Not having seat belts could mean risking students' lives simply to save a few dollars.

In the end, it does not matter how safe school buses are meant to be. When even one student dies in an accident, it is a tragedy. School buses may be somewhat safe, but seat belts can make them safer.

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Source Three: **"A Letter from a Concerned Parent"** by Vantage Learning

Dear Principal Jeffries,

My name is Maria Jenson. My son is a student at your elementary school. He told me that the school board was considering buying seat belts for all of the school buses in the district, and I think this is a great idea. I have often worried about my son's safety on the school bus. He has a short ride to and from school, but he plays baseball, and he has to ride the bus to the away games. I am scared that the bus will get in an accident, and I will not be able to reach him because I work over an hour away. I think seat belts in buses would make many parents feel better knowing that their son or daughter is safe.

I have read about a lot of school bus accidents in the news. Many students are hurt when they do not have seat belts. I read in the Daily Herald that a young student lost her front teeth when she hit the back of a bus seat in an accident. The seat was supposed to protect her, and it hurt her. This has changed her life, and it could have been much worse.

I am told that school buses are the safest type of vehicle. This may be true, but I know that many students can be loud or distracting. How is a bus driver supposed to keep driving when he or she is trying to control the students? Seat belts would help students stay in their seats and avoid accidents.

I know that seat belts can be costly. It can be hard to find money in the school budget, but student safety must come first. We cannot risk our children's safety simply because it costs a lot of money. We should not have to compromise when it comes to our needs as a community.

I hope that you will make the right decision for our students. I hope that you understand the risks we are taking with our students' safety by not buying seat belts.

Sincerely,
Maria Jenson

**Source Four:
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
2009**

https://myaccess.com/myaccess/materials/Source_Four_Seatbelts.pdf

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Secession and States' Rights vs. Federal Power (pilot)

In December of 1860, South Carolina seceded from the Union, and many other Southern states considered breaking away as well. At the root of South Carolina's dissatisfaction with the Union was the threat to their slave ownership rights.

After reading the teacher-provided sources, write an argument-based report that justifies a position supporting either states' rights or federal power. Use specific details from the sources provided as well as prior knowledge of the Missouri Compromise, the Wilmot Proviso, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott v. Sandford decision, and the Lincoln-Douglas debates to support your arguments and reasoning.

Should We Move? (pilot)

Sometimes parents get a new job in another country or state and have to relocate. Other times, they want to move closer to family and friends. Whatever the reason, moving away from your old home can be a very big decision.

Consider the positives and negatives of moving to a new area. Then, write a letter to your family to convince them why you should or should not move. Be sure to use details to support your argument.

Sports Requirement (Spanish Pilot)

Los deportes tienen un papel importante en la educación. ¿Crees que los estudiantes deben ser obligados a participar en un deporte como parte de su educación? Escribe un ensayo que esté bien desarrollado para el director de tu escuela en el cual defiendas o critiques tus ideas al respecto.

Status of an Endangered Ecosystem (pilot)

Imagine you are a member of a research team that has spent several years studying the condition of a valuable and possibly endangered ecosystem similar to the Great Lakes or Everglades. It is your job to write a report to the governor outlining the condition of the ecosystem and the possibility that it is endangered.

In a multi-paragraph essay, discuss the condition of a valuable ecosystem and your position on its status as endangered. Be sure to support your position with facts and details.

Substitute Nutritious Drinks (pilot)

Some people think that schools should offer only nutritious drinks such as white milk, water, and natural fruit juice. Do you agree or disagree with this policy? Use specific details and examples to convince your principal to accept your position.

Survival in *Snowbound* (pilot)

The book *Snowbound* describes the journey of the Donner Party and the difficult moral decisions they were forced to make in order to survive. Do you believe their actions were justified under the circumstances?

In a well-developed essay, write to convince the reader of your position on this issue. Be sure to use details of the journey to support your argument.

Televisions in the Classroom (pilot)

Many schools provide televisions in classrooms because they believe teachers can supplement lessons with educational programming and films. Some schools, however, are opposed to this idea because they feel there is no need for television in a learning environment. What do you think?

Write a letter to your principal convincing him or her to agree with your position on this issue. Be sure to include specific details and examples to support your argument.

The Lincoln Assassination: Guilt by Association? (pilot)

History reveals that the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln was carried out by John Wilkes Booth. However, he did not act alone. There were many co-conspirators who were captured, found guilty, and sentenced to death. In particular, one of these co-conspirators was Mary Surratt, who was the first woman to be hanged by the United States government. She owned the boarding-house where Booth and his co-conspirators met. Questions linger, however, as to whether Mary Surratt was actually guilty of the crime or if she was simply guilty of associating with John Wilkes Booth.

After reading and analyzing the resources, write a multi-paragraph essay in which you argue whether Mary Surratt was rightfully executed or wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death due to her guilt by association. Be sure to include information from the resources to support your ideas, and address those who may disagree with your stance on the issue.

Source One:

"Mary Surratt: A Just Verdict or a Wronged Victim?"

by Vantage Learning
October 31, 2014

https://www.youtube.com/watch?edit=vd&v=Lw_RmVc6hio

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Source Two:

"Argument In Defense of Mrs. Mary Surratt"

In Trial of the Assassins and Conspirators for the Murder of Abraham Lincoln
1865

by Fred A. Aiken

The first striking fact proved is her acquaintance with J. Wilkes Booth-that he was an occasional visitor at her house. From the evidence, if it is to be relied on, it distinctly appears that this

acquaintance commenced the latter part of last January, in the vicinage of three months only before the assassination of the President, and, with slight interruptions, it was continued down to the day of the assassination of the President. Whether he was first invited to the house and introduced to the family by Weichmann, John H. Surratt, or some other person, the evidence does not disclose. When asked by the Judge Advocate "whom did he call to see," the witness, Weichmann, responded, "He generally called for Mr. Surratt-John H. Surratt-and, in the absence of John H. Surratt, he would call for Mrs. Surratt."

Before calling the attention of the Commission to the next evidence of importance against Mrs. Surratt, we desire to refresh the recollection of the Court as to the time and manner, and by whom, according to the testimony of Lloyd, the carbines were first brought to his (Lloyd's) house.

From the official record the following is taken:

Q. Will you state whether or not, some five or six weeks before the assassination of the President, any, or all of these men, about whom I have inquired, came to your home?

A. They were there.

Q. All three together?

A. Yes; John H. Surratt, Herold and Atzerodt were there together.

Q. What did they bring to your house, and what did they do there?

A. When they drove up there, in the morning, John H. Surratt and Atzerodt came first; they went from my house, and went toward T. B., a post-office kept about five miles below there. They had not been gone more than half an hour when they returned with Herold; then the three were together-Herold, Surratt and Atzerodt.

Q. What did they bring to your house?

A. I saw nothing until they all three came into the bar-room. I noticed one of the buggies-the one I supposed Herold was driving or went down in-standing at the front gate. All three of them, when they came into the bar-room, drank, I think, and then John Surratt called me into the front parlor, and on the sofa were two carbines, with ammunition. I think he told me they were carbines.

Q. Anything beside the carbines and ammunition?

A. There was a rope and also a monkey-wrench.

Q. How long a rope?

A. I can not tell. It was in a coil-a right smart bundle-probably sixteen or twenty feet.

Q. Were those articles left at your house?

A. Yes, sir; Surratt asked me to take care of them, to conceal the carbines. I told him there was no place there to conceal them, and I did not wish to keep such things in the house.

Q. You say that he asked you to conceal those articles for him?

A. Yes, sir; he asked me to conceal them. I told him there was no place to conceal them. He then carried me into a room that I had never been in, which was just immediately above the store room, as it were in the back building of the house. I had never been in that room previous to that time. He showed

me where I could put them, underneath the joists of the house-the joists of the second floor of the main building. This little unfinished room will admit of anything between the joists.

Q. Were they put in that place?

A. They were put in there according to his directions.

Q. Were they concealed in that condition?

A. Yes, sir; I put them in there. I stated to Colonel Wells through mistake, that Surratt put them there; but I put them in there myself. I carried the arms up myself.

Q. How much ammunition was there?

A. One cartridge-box.

Q. For what purpose, and for how long, did he ask you to keep these articles?

A. I am very positive that he said he would call for them in a few days. He said he just wanted them to stay for a few days and he would call for them.

It also appears in evidence against Mrs. Surratt, if the testimony is to be relied on, that on the Tuesday previous to the murder of the President, the 11th of April, she met John M. Lloyd, a witness for the prosecution, at Uniontown, when the following took place:

Question by the Judge Advocate:

Q. Did she say anything to you in regard to those carbines?

A. When she first broached the subject to me, I did not know what she had reference to; then she came out plainer, and I am quite positive she asked me about the "shooting irons." I am quite positive about that, but not altogether positive. I think she named "shooting irons," or something to call my attention to those things, for I had almost forgotten about their being there. I told her that they were hid away far back-that I was afraid the house would be searched, and they were shoved far back. She told me to get them out ready; they would be wanted soon.

Q. Was her question to you first, whether they were still there, or what was it?

A. Really, I can not recollect the first question she put to me. I could not do it to save my life. On the afternoon of the 14th of April, at about half-past five, Lloyd again met Mrs. Surratt, at Surrattsville, at which time, according to his version, she met him by the wood-pile, near the house, and told him to have those shooting irons ready that night, there would be some parties calling for them, and that she gave him something wrapped in a piece of paper, and asked him to get two bottles of whisky ready also. This message to Mr. Lloyd is the second item of importance against Mrs. Surratt, and in support of the specification against her. The third and last fact that makes against her in the minds of the Court, is the one narrated by Major H. W. Smith, a witness for the prosecution, who states that while at the house of Mrs. Surratt, on the night of the 17th of April, assisting in making the arrest of its inmates, the prisoner, Payne, came in. He (Smith) stepped to the door of the parlor and said: "Mrs. Surratt, will you step here a minute?" As Mrs. Surratt came forward, he asked her the question, "Do you know this man?" She replied, quoting the witness language, "Before God, sir, I do not know this man, and I have never seen him." An addition to this is found in the testimony of the same witness, as he was drawn out by the Judge Advocate. The witness repeats the language of Mrs. Surratt, "Before

God, I do not know this man, and have never seen him, and did not hire him to dig a gutter for me." The fact of the photographs and card of the State arms of Virginia have ceased to be of the slightest importance, since the explanations given in evidence concerning them, and need not be alluded to. If there is any doubt as to whom they all belonged, reference to the testimony of Misses Surratt and Fitzpatrick will settle it.

These three circumstances constitute the part played by the accused, Mary E. Surratt, in this great conspiracy. They are the acts she has done. They are all that two months of patient and unwearingly investigation, and the most thorough search for evidence that was probably ever made, has been able to develop against her. The acquaintance with Booth, the message to Lloyd, the non-recognition of Payne, constitute the sum total of her receiving, entertaining, harboring, and concealing, aiding, and assisting those named as conspirators and their confederates, with knowledge of the murderous and traitorous conspiracy, and with intent to aid, abet, and assist them in the execution thereof, and in escaping from justice. The acts she has done, in and of themselves, are perfectly innocent. Of themselves they constitute no crime. They are what you or I, or any of us might have done. She received and entertained Booth, the assassin, and so did a hundred others. She may have delivered a message to Lloyd-so have a hundred others. She might have said she did not know Payne-and who within the sound of my voice can say that they know him now? They are ordinary and commonplace transactions, such as occur everyday and to almost everybody.

Source Three

In Trial of the Assassins and Conspirators for the Murder of Abraham Lincoln by Barclay and Co.

Witness [Lewis A. Weichmann] testified that on Tuesday previous Mrs. Surratt sent him to the National Hotel to get Booth's buggy, as she wanted to drive out in the country. Booth said he had sold his buggy, but gave witness \$10 to hire one. Drove Mrs. Surratt out to Surrattsville. On Friday, the day of the assassination, also drove her there. Witness testified that in March, the prisoner Payne, under the name of Wood, stopped at Mrs. Surratt's house all night, and left early in the morning for Baltimore. Three weeks afterward he called again, representing himself as a Baptist preacher, and said he had taken the oath of allegiance, and was going to become a good, loyal citizen. Heard no explanation why he said he was a Baptist minister. Mrs. Surratt said he was a meek-looking Baptist preacher. The ladies seemed to recognize him as the former Wood. One day I found a false mustache on the table in my room; I threw it in a little toilet box, and Payne searched for it and inquired for his mustache; I was sitting on the chair and didn't say anything; I retained it ever since; it was found in my baggage among a box of paints I had in my trunk; on the same day saw him and Surratt in the third story sitting on a bed, playing with bowie-knives; saw also revolvers and four sets of new spurs

...

Witness stated that previous to his driving Mrs. Surratt into the country on the day of the assassination, Booth held a short interview with her. Witness was cross-examined by Reverdy Johnson. Was on very intimate terms with John Surratt; never knew him to go to Canada before; told me he was going to Europe on a cotton speculation; saw him every day, occupied the same room, and slept with him; never received any intimation of the assassination from him. Witness first heard of the assassination at 3 o'clock A.M. of the 15th; before that time the door-bell rung; Mrs. Surratt answered it; someone came into the parlor and immediately went out again; don't know who it was; this was about 10 o'clock P.M. of the 14th. Witness stated that Mrs. Surratt's character was exemplary and lady-like, and she was a

member of the Catholic Church. Mr. Johnson then left the room and the cross-examination was continued by the other counsel. Being questioned sharply in reference to the envelope on which Booth was writing at his first interview with him, witness said Booth traced lines on the back of an envelope, and that Surratt and Mudd were looking at it, and they were engaged in deep private conversation, scarcely audible; had heard the name of Mudd mentioned in the Surratt family; was sure that Mudd and Surratt were looking at the envelope when Booth was marking it, went to Canada for the purpose of seeking Surratt; knew of interviews between Atzerodt and Surratt; also between Payne and Atzerodt, at Mrs. Surratt's house. Witness stated that he recognized the spur handed him as one of the four pair he saw in the room with Payne and Atzerodt, because he had them in his hand. The cross-examination developed nothing further new...

Mr. Floyd, of Surrattsville, was then sworn. Counsel for the defence wished Mr. Floyd's examination postponed on account of Mr. Reverdy Johnson's absence, but the Court refused it. Mr. Floyd testified that he knew Surratt, Harold, and Atzerodt, and that they were at his house in Surrattsville some five weeks before the assassination. They left at witness's house two carbines, some ammunition, and a rope sixteen or twenty feet long. "Surratt asked me to take care of them, and I told him I didn't like to have these things in the house; he then carried me into a room I had never been into before, and showed me where I could place them under a joist." Witness concealed them with a cartridge-box, as directed. On Monday preceding the murder Mrs. Surratt visited the prisoner, and, after referring to the "shooting irons," said they would be wanted soon. About 5 P.M., of the day of the assassination, Mrs. Surratt met witness at his wood-pile, and told him to have them shooting irons ready that night, and said there would be some parties call for them that night; she gave him something in a piece of paper to keep for her, and he found it was a field-glass; she asked him also to have two bottles of whiskey ready, saying they would be called for that night. They both came, Booth and Herold; they took their whiskey out of the bottles; Booth didn't come in, but Herold did; it was not over 12 ¼ o'clock; Booth was a stranger to witness; Herold came in and took the whiskey, but don't think he asked for the whiskey; he said, "Get me these things." Gave him all the articles with a field-glass and a monkey-wrench; they re-mained about five minutes, taking but one carbine, Booth saying he could not take his, as his leg was broken. As they were about leaving, Booth said: "I will tell you some news; I am pretty sure we have assassinated the President and Secretary Seward." The first witness heard of the assassination afterward, was at 9 A.M., of the 15th. On cross-examination witness stated that when he met Mrs. Surratt on the day of the murder, the first thing she said was: "Talk about the Devil and one of his imps appear." Then she said: "Mr. Floyd, I want you to have those shooting-irons ready. Some parties will call for them to-night." She gave me a bundle, but I did not undo it until up-stairs, and found it was a field-glass. Witness said the first time he related these particulars was on the Saturday week following, to three army officers, telling them that it was through the Surratt's he got himself into difficulty; witness learned of the murder next morning from the soldiers; did not tell them of Booth and Herold's midnight visit, and was sorry he did not; witness was arrested on the Thursday following; on the night in question Booth rode a white horse and Herold a bay; nothing of interest was hereafter elicited, though the cross-examination was very lengthy, three of the counsel being engaged therein.

Source Four
"Mrs. Mary E. Surratt"
In *Trial of the Assassins and Conspirators for the Murder of Abraham Lincoln*
 by Barclay and Co.

Mrs. Mary E. Surratt is the mother of John H. Surratt, and the evidence adduced during the trial, proves her to have been one of the most active and energetic of the conspirators. There is no doubt that she aided them in every manner in her power. She had the carbines prepared and the bottles of whiskey ready for Booth and Herold when they arrived at her old tavern in their flight. She is a woman of great nerve and energy, and an out-and-out rebel at heart. Mrs. Surratt is a Marylander, about forty-five or forty-eight years of age. Mrs. Surratt shut up her house after the murder, and waited with her daughters till the officers came. She was imperturbable and rebuked her girls for weeping, and would have gone to jail like a statue, but that in his extremity Payne knocked at her door. He had come he said, to dig a ditch for Mrs. Surratt whom he very well knew. But Mrs. Surratt protested that she had never seen the man at all, and had no ditch to clean.

"How fortunate, girls," she said, "that these officers are here; this man might have murdered us all!"

Her effrontery stamps her as worthy of companionship with Booth.

The Most Advanced Civilization (pilot)

Consider the ancient civilizations you have recently studied and select the one that you feel was the most highly developed.

Write a multi-paragraph essay in which you persuade a historian that this civilization was the most advanced. Be sure to include specific examples and details to support your position.

"Thumbprint" by Eve Merriam (pilot)

In Eve Merriam's "Thumbprint," the author emphasizes the importance of individuality and uniqueness. Merriam uses the image of a thumbprint to define her own uniqueness in the world.

Write a multi-paragraph letter to your parents convincing them to allow you to decorate a room in your home based on your own thumbprint, using Merriam's ideas on individuality and uniqueness. Be sure to include specific details and examples to support your argument.

Unsuitable Content in *The Outsiders* (pilot)

Consider moral/ethical issues within the novel *The Outsiders*. For example, the young characters drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and engage in routine violence. Do these behaviors constitute unsuitable content for middle school students? Would you defend or oppose the removal of *The Outsiders* from the list of approved middle school novels?

Write a letter to your local Board of Education presenting your position on the suitability of *The Outsiders* for middle school students and whether it should remain on or be removed from the approved novel list. Include references to the novel to support your position, and address counterarguments or opposing points of view.

Was Andrew Jackson a President of the People? (pilot)

Some historians claim Andrew Jackson was a "President of the People." Orphaned at just 13, Jackson was determined not to be like wealthy politicians who did not understand the hardships of most Americans; he was a common man who worked his way up from poverty to become a military hero and President. Yet, some people strongly objected when he replaced government employees with his supporters or sided with white settlers during land disputes with Native Americans. These objections to Jackson's actions during his presidency bring into question the notion of whether Jackson really represented the American public. Do you think Andrew Jackson was a "President of the People?"

Write a multi-paragraph essay defending or refuting the notion that Andrew Jackson was a "President of the People." Support your position with specific examples and arguments from your readings and research.

Which Form of Art to Start? (pilot)

The *Art Start* video series teaches the basics of various artistic media, including collage, drawing, fiber, painting, mood painting, pastels, sculpture, symbols, and sketching. After viewing one or more videos in the series, pretend you are speaking to a group of students who do not know much about art. Which medium would you select to persuade your audience to learn about and create?

In a persuasive essay, convince your audience to take up a specific artistic medium. Remember to support your argument with information you have read or viewed in a video, observations you have made, or with personal experiences.

Would You Like to Be a Wild Animal Keeper? (pilot)

A wild animal keeper is in charge of taking care of animals in a zoo. This person is responsible for feeding the animals, keeping them healthy, and providing visitors with information. Would you like this job?

In a multi-paragraph essay, discuss whether you would or would not like to be a wild animal keeper. Make sure to use details and examples to support your argument.

Writing: The Best Invention Ever (pilot)

Imagine that you live in the Ice Age, and you and your tribe are trekking across the tundra of what are now the Himalayan Mountains, looking for shelter. A white wall of blinding sleet is making your search nearly impossible. Suddenly, a saber tooth tiger leaps out and attacks your tribe. You could not have known that the ferocious beast lived in that area, because there were not any signs to warn you. Just picture how life would have been different if there were signs posted with: Danger-Saber tooth tigers on the loose! The invention of writing enables us to share information in many ways, including through signs, newspapers, books, and blogs.

In a well-developed essay, explain why you think writing is the best invention ever. Use facts and examples to support your views.