

JOHN GOLDEN

FOREWORD BY ALAN B. TEASLEY

Reading in the Reel World

TEACHING DOCUMENTARIES AND OTHER NONFICTION TEXTS



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2 Nonfiction Reading Skills and Strategies

I don't know about your state tests, but well over half of my standardized reading test deals with nonfiction texts. This bugs me every year I give the test because I know that as an English teacher I went into this business for the money, the fame, and the chance to teach Keats any time I wanted. I mean, isn't teaching nonfiction texts the social studies and science teachers' job? And why is it that the English teachers always get the dirty looks at faculty meetings when student scores go down? Are the math teachers teaching their students to read those word problems? The critical reading skills that students need to demonstrate on standardized tests are, for the most part, the same ones that will help them to understand *Beowulf*, but we have to get at them a little differently. While the skills might be similar, the processes that students use to make sense of a nonfiction text are different from those for a fictional one.

But the real point of this chapter is that since the skills students use to understand a *nonfiction print text* are nearly identical to those they use to understand a *nonfiction visual text* (documentary), we should use the inherent interest students have in film by identifying and practicing these skills first with the visual texts and then transferring those skills to print texts. I've included here some activities that allow students to practice crucial skills—compare/contrast, problem/solution, and cause/effect—they need to employ as they read nonfiction texts, and I've also included some of my favorite nonfiction reading strategies—SOAPStone, Levels of Questioning, and Cornell Notes—so that students can practice with a few documentary clips and then transfer the skills effectively to print texts. These activities are most successful when you are able to use both the film clips suggested here and a nonfiction piece of your own choosing within the same class period. The clips I have suggested in this and the next section are ones I have used successfully in my own classes, and they are all widely available, but this is certainly not meant to be an exhaustive list of film clips; as you work with these activities, you'll find yourself thinking of other clips that should work as well and probably better.

Nonfiction Reading Skills

Compare and Contrast

Comparing and contrasting is an essential skill that students need to improve in any number of subject areas. The ability to see the similarities and differences between two subjects, genres, themes, and so on is crucial for understanding nonfiction. Venn diagrams (see Figure 2.1) continue to be one of the most effective graphic organizers, though it's important to note that the Venn should not be an end point, but rather a tool used to generate a topic or thesis statement about the subjects being compared. Following are descriptions of clips that I like to use for compare/contrast.

Spellbound (Jeffery Blitz, 2001)

0:25:36–0:37:49; Chapters 5–6 on DVD

This documentary follows eight young people as they prepare for and compete in the National Spelling Bee. To help the audience get to know each of these contestants, the director presents short vignettes of the spellers, their families, and schools. In this sequence, we meet Ashley, from Washington, D.C., and Neil, from San Clemente, California. Their lives could not be more different and yet they are both participating in the same competition. Ask your students to focus on the similarities and differences in the following areas: parental support, school facilities, preparation for the Bee, attitude toward spelling, their houses, and so on. The filmmaker spends a lot of time on the poor academic and social conditions of the D.C. environment—illustrated by the bent sign warning that drugs and weapons are not allowed on school property—that contrast clearly with Neil's affluent home overlooking the beach and a school where he has a Latin teacher and excellent facilities. Their preparations for the Bee are also quite different (see Figure 2.2): Neil has coaches, computer programs, and parents who drill him, while Ashley uses the dictionary and did not receive her spelling materials from her school district on time. There are similarities in their parents' support and expectations for their children, though it is clear that Neil has a tremendous advantage. The film does not make any overt political statement about the distribution of wealth or inequities in the system, but a viewer certainly might.

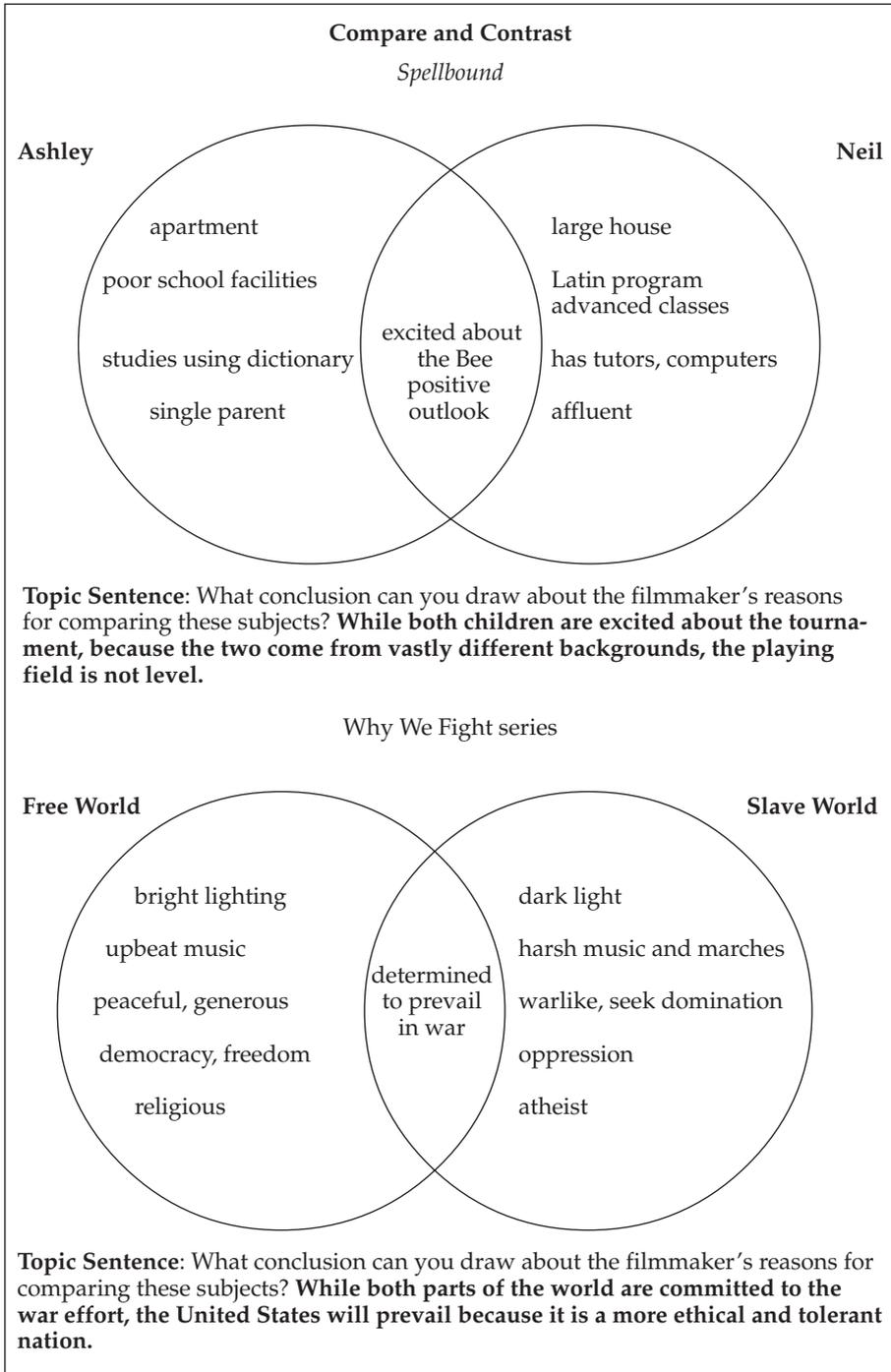


Figure 2.1. Venn diagram compare and contrast strategy.

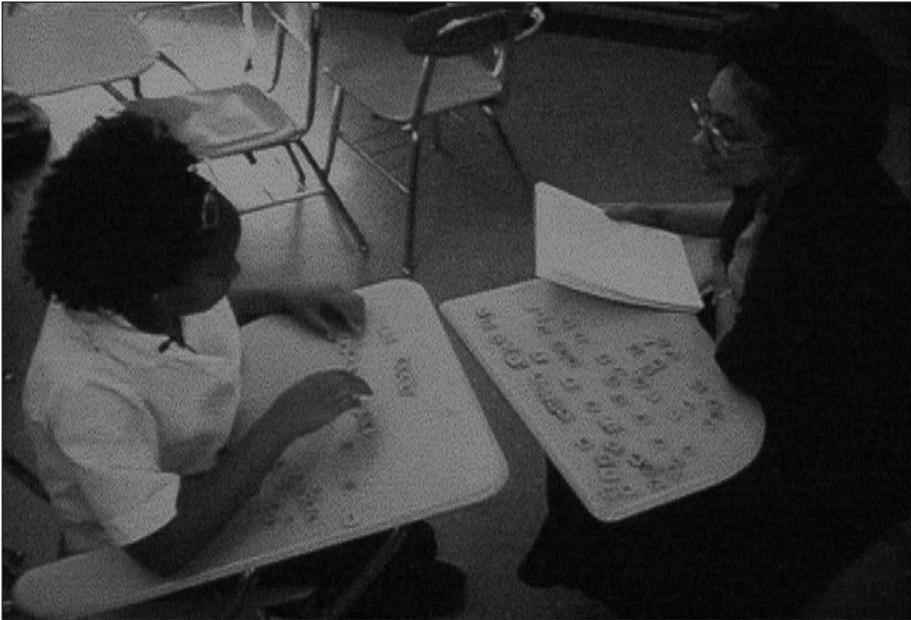


Figure 2.2. Contrasting ways in which spellers prepare for the Bee. Ashley: uses Scrabble letters with her teacher in a classroom; Neil: at home with a private spelling tutor and several computers.

Why We Fight Series (Frank Capra)

Prelude to War (1943); 0:04:40–0:09:40; Chapter 1 on first DVD in the series

During World War II, Frank Capra produced a series of informative, persuasive films for American servicemen and the general public as part of the war effort. In this short sequence from the first in the series, the film compares the United States (the free world) with Germany, Italy, and Japan (the slave world). Ask your students to focus on the roles of religion, politicians, and government in both “worlds.” If your students are somewhat sophisticated in documentary construction, you might want them to compare the representations of the two. In other words, how does the film choose to present the United States, Germany, and the other countries? They will probably notice the music and the images. They will probably also recognize the repeated references to tolerance of religion in the section on the United States and the name-calling of the leaders of the other countries (thugs, rabble-rousers, and so on). The reasons for the comparison ought to be obvious enough, though you might want to lead students into a discussion about the effectiveness of the comparison and why compare/contrast can be such an effective persuasion tool.

After your students have viewed a clip, it’s important that you give them time to draw conclusions about why the filmmaker used a compare/contrast approach. What is the director suggesting with this structure? Once they have practiced with a clip or two, provide your students with a nonfiction print text (see the end of this chapter for models) to which students can apply their newfound skills.

Problem and Solution

Much of the nonfiction that students read requires them to be able to point out an identified problem and its proposed solution. Think of your typical newspaper editorial that raises the alarm of a serious problem (gang violence in schools) and proposes a solution (school uniforms) that the writer insists will address the problem he or she brought up. These activities are designed not only to help students identify these elements of nonfiction texts, but also to help them evaluate whether the solution really does address the problem. Too often, writers, filmmakers, and politicians propose a wonderful-sounding solution that has very little to do with the actual problem stated (how exactly do school uniforms fix violence?). These activities are intended to make students more critical and aware readers (see Figure 2.3). Following are descriptions of clips I have used to practice reading for problem/solution.

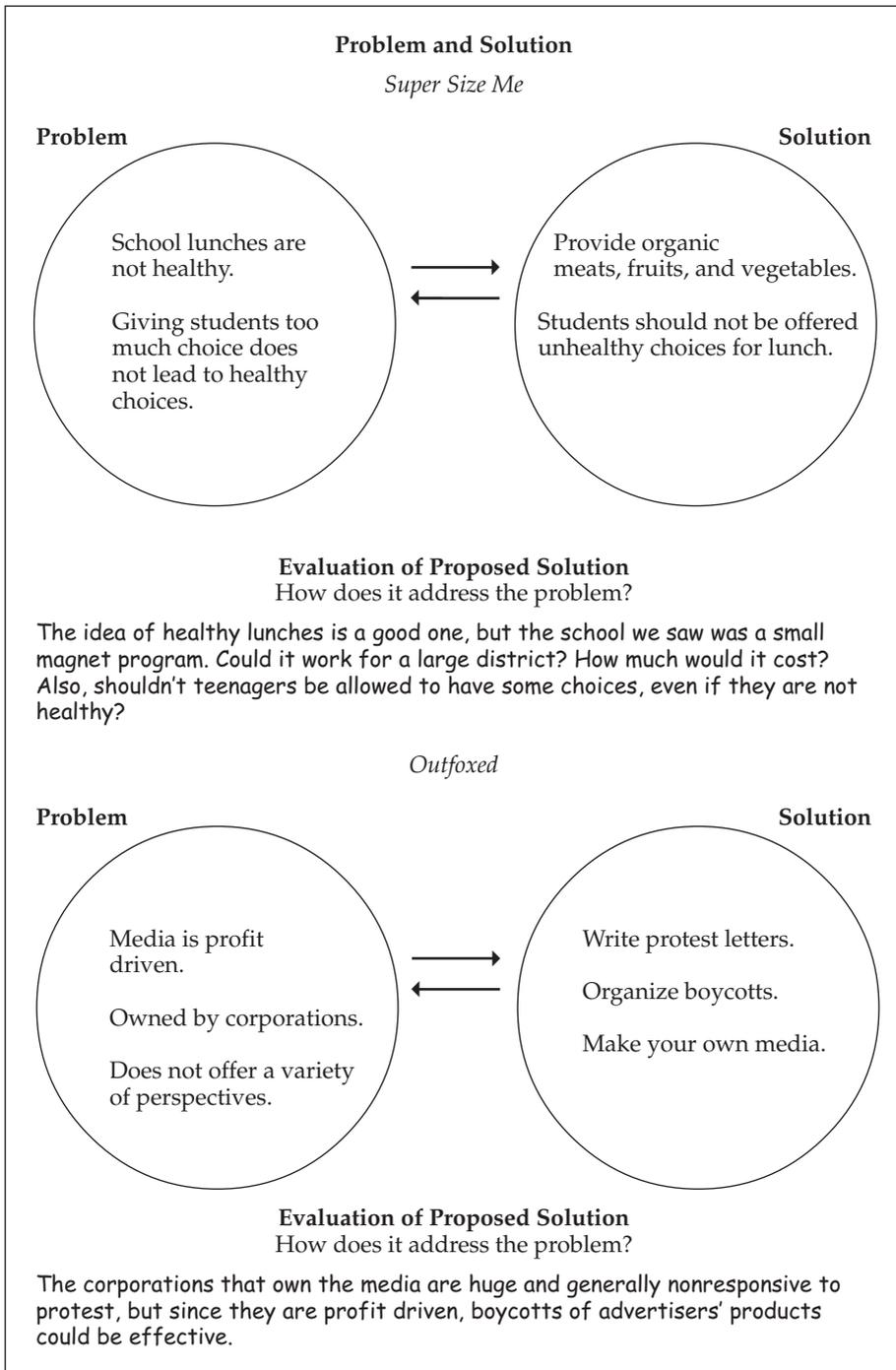


Figure 2.3. Problem and solution strategy.

Super Size Me (Morgan Spurlock, 2004)

51:13–57:50; Chapter 20 on DVD

This clip begins with a description of the problem with school lunches. The fat content is high, and the school official interviewed thinks that with proper education, students will make the proper choices and eat healthier, although, as the film demonstrates, they do not. Part of the problem is that the schools turn a blind eye to what are obviously bad student choices and to companies that make a lot of money on snack and sugared foods. An additional problem is that some schools do not even cook much of their own food anymore, but instead receive it in premade packages from the government. Notice how Spurlock presents these problems visually: dismal food and rowdy kids, with editing to clearly show that school officials do not really know what their students eat. The real solution, the film suggests, is to have a lunch program like that of Appleton Central Alternative High, a school that turned its attendance and behavior problems around through diet changes. The school serves only nonprocessed, organic foods with plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits. The film suggests that this is a real solution: school officials need to make the food choices for their students. If given a choice, kids will choose the fries; without a choice, they will be healthier and better behaved. Notice again the selected images: well-behaved kids and close-ups on beautiful fresh fruits and vegetables. The film also suggests that this alternative costs roughly the same as a typical school lunch program.

Outfoxed (Robert Greenwald, 2004)

1:06:09–1:13:03; Chapter 20 on DVD

While the entire film is a relentless attack on Rupert Murdoch's FOX News, this particular section deals mainly with the problem of the concentration of the media in the hands of a very small number of very powerful corporations. The first half of the clip lays out the problem: since corporations are driven by profit, not necessarily by the public good, the reporting of the news suffers. The media, according to this film, are no longer balanced, and they are geared more toward cheap reporting that requires less money for investigation. The solutions to this are proposed by a series of media activists and elected officials: get involved by protesting, writing to the FCC, and organizing with others. I ask my students whether these are viable solutions and whether the filmmaker thinks they are. Listen closely to the upbeat nondiegetic music for evidence of the answer. If you continue playing the film

through the closing credits, you'll see clips of interviews with media activists who have had success confronting the power of media concentration.

As with compare/contrast, the real power of using these clips is in the students' ability to transfer the analytical skills they develop here to the evaluation of proposed solutions in the print texts they encounter, such as those found at the end of this chapter or editorials from the local newspaper.

Cause and Effect

Similar to problem/solution, this type of nonfiction reading skill asks students to identify and to evaluate logically what they read. If an author makes the claim that peanut butter sandwiches cause attention deficit disorder, a reader needs to be able to determine whether one element does in fact *cause* the other, or whether lots of kids just happen to both eat peanut butter and have ADD. As students develop their cause/effect reading skills, it is important for them to learn to evaluate the connection between the stated cause and the effect (which I often refer to as "outcome" for my students). Most important, students need to practice the ability to read nonfiction texts critically in order to identify exactly what the writer or filmmaker is trying to say about the underlying causes of a situation. The following are descriptions of clips I have used to help students practice this skill.

***Cane Toads: An Unnatural History* (Mark Lewis, 1988)**

00:01:05–00:06:20 (Not available on DVD)

I first saw *Cane Toads*, probably one of the strangest nature documentaries ever produced, in a film class and thought it was an obscure relic my teacher had dug up from somewhere, until I started asking around and found that the film has a huge following among science teachers. An advertisement for the film proclaims that it is like a National Geographic special made by Monty Python, and it is very funny in places. I would wager that a science teacher in your building has either heard of it or, like biology teacher Carolyn Ames in mine, has a copy he or she can share with you. In this clip, from the beginning of the film, various causes and effects are identified about the cane toad that was introduced to Australia in order to deal with the cane grub that was destroying the sugar cane crops. The only problem was that the cane toad, through a series of biological misunderstandings, did not eat the grubs and reproduced at such an alarming rate that it caused an infestation of its own.

Students have no trouble identifying several outcomes and their causes from this clip, including how and why the cane toad reproduces the way it does. Some students even laugh.

Roger & Me (Michael Moore, 1989)

0:13:38–0:21:00; Chapter 6 on DVD

In his first documentary feature, Michael Moore investigates the causes and effects of the General Motors plant closings on his hometown of Flint, Michigan. This sequence begins with various news reports of the plant shutdowns and continues with an interview of a friend of Moore's who has had a breakdown as a result of the layoffs. Notice the ironic use of the Beach Boys' "Wouldn't It Be Nice" on the sound track, as well as his choice of headlines about layoffs, which are crosscut with shots of empty storefronts and news stories about the rat population in Flint. From there, Moore moves into a brief scene about Ronald Reagan and then to a "Great Gatsby Party" thrown by the most affluent in Flint. He then contrasts these people with the most devastating economic effect of the shutdowns: eviction from one's home. The clear juxtaposition is intended to illustrate that the greedy rich are the cause of the suffering poor. As they watch, students should observe how Moore tries to create effects that might not logically be connected to the causes he identifies. Visually, the closed-up storefronts are effective—but were they caused by the layoffs? Moore wants us to believe so.

As with each of the previous skills, the next step is to let students examine a few print texts so that they can evaluate the validity of the connection between cause and effect. Again, see the end of this chapter for sample texts.

Reading Strategies

I introduce my students to a number of strategies for reading nonfiction early in the fall so that they can employ them with a variety of texts throughout the year. I wish I could say that I invented any of these strategies, but in good teacher fashion, I stole or soaked them up from workshops over the years. Most of these are probably not new to you either, but what I've tried to do here is focus the strategies on the reading and analysis of nonfiction texts. In each case, I describe how I use the strategy in my class, and I suggest clips from documentaries that you might want to practice using the strategy with before you have students apply the strategy to a nonfiction print text. As with the previous reading skills activities, you can do these with students even if they do not have

Subject	How can you paraphrase the text in a sentence or two?
Occasion	What are the larger historical issues that inform this piece as well as the immediate need to speak at this particular time?
Audience	To whom is the piece directed? How do you know?
Purpose	What is the point or the message of this piece?
Speaker	Who is the speaker? What can you say about the speaker's age, situation, social class, etc.?
Tone	What is the attitude of the speaker to the subject? What words and phrases reveal this?
Analysis: Choose one or more of the elements above and explain them with supporting examples, and/or contrast them with another text or a similar subject.	

Figure 2.4. SOAPStone chart.

much of the background on documentaries provided in Chapter 1, but if they do, you will find that students can add another layer to their analysis because they can also comment on what the filmmaker might be saying through his or her use of various nonfiction film elements.

SOAPStone

This is one of my favorite strategies for nonfiction document analysis and it's a key strategy for many Advanced Placement classes. It asks students to analyze the significant elements of a text individually by using a simple acronym that refers to the Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, and Tone (see Figure 2.4 for questions you can use to guide your students through the strategy). The strategy can be applied just as easily to fiction texts, and I also use it sometimes as a prewriting strategy, in which students have to consider their purpose, audience, and tone before they begin writing.

To practice this strategy, I like to use clips from a film recommended by my friend and colleague Dave Lickey, *The Atomic Cafe*, which is a collection of newsreels, government archives, military training films, and newspaper headlines from the late 1940s and 1950s about the atomic bomb, the cold war, and atomic energy. The film works well for SOAPStone because it contains a series of stand-alone clips that allow students to recognize how *purpose*, *audience*, and, especially in this film, *occasion* can be effective ways to analyze a nonfiction text. Plus, when students become comfortable with the forms and styles of documentaries, they will also be able to analyze not just the tone of the speaker in the text but also the tone of the filmmakers toward the speaker and the occasion.

Atomic Cafe (Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, and Pierce Rafferty, 1982)

Clip 1: 0:05:02–6:12:00; Chapter 2 on DVD

The first clip I show is a very short one that includes two excerpts from speeches that President Truman delivered in the days after the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. I provide students with the S, O, A, and S portions of SOAPStone and then as practice ask them questions about the purpose and tone (see Figure 2.5). I ask students to key in on Truman's word choices about having "found the bomb," bearing the "awful responsibility which has *come to us*" (my emphasis), and invoking God to guide us to use it for "His purposes." Then I ask them to choose any one of the letters of the acronym and analyze its use. For instance, how does the fact that Truman was addressing the American public affect what he says and how he says it? How would his speech be different if he were addressing, say, the Japanese? Having identified purpose, *why* was this Truman's purpose at the time? How would it change after the war had been won?

Clip 2: 0:16:46–0:19:13; Chapter 4 on DVD

The second clip I like to use from this documentary is a newsreel titled "1947: The Year of Division" produced by Paramount Studios (whom I identify as the speaker for my students) about the dangers of the spread of communism. For this sequence, I ask students to complete a full SOAPStone, though I typically assign only two parts to each student at first for practice, and they share afterward with the rest of the class in order to fill in the whole chart. This particular section begins with historical information about the spread of communism and continues with coverage of one American town's enactment of what our country would be like under communism. It concludes with images of the Statue of Liberty exploding and cartoon images of marching armies and fists smashing our most trusted institutions. When discussing tone, students should refer to the images as well as the words. Students should also consider that tone here can also be used to examine the film's attitude toward the townspeople. Note: if you want to continue the clip for another minute or two, you'll see the narrator of the newsreel thanking his business sponsors and using the opportunity to contrast capitalism to communism even further; apparently it comes down to free parking!

Clip 3: 0:59:10–1:00:50

This very short clip, about the risks associated with nuclear weapons, is clearly designed to calm people's fears. It equates the risks of nuclear

<i>Clip 1: The Atomic Cafe</i>	
Subject	The acquisition and first use of the atomic bomb
Occasion	The dropping of the first atomic bomb in 1945
Audience	The American public
Purpose	What is Truman’s purpose in this speech?
Speaker	President Harry S. Truman
Tone	What is Truman’s attitude (tone) toward the subject?
Analysis: How do you know Truman’s purpose? What words and phrases reveal his tone?	
<i>Clip 2: The Atomic Cafe</i>	
Subject	
Occasion	
Audience	
Purpose	
Speaker	
Tone	
Analysis	

Figure 2.5. Using SOAPStone.

war with slipping in the shower or losing your hair and includes a pie chart that compares America’s worries with the “destroying potential” of a bomb, concluding that the fears are unfounded.

Clip 4: 1:01:28–1:05:25

The last clip I like to use for this activity includes the famous “duck and cover” defense against nuclear war and other recommended procedures for survival of a nuclear blast. It focuses on young people’s preparation

and includes a cartoon of Bert the Turtle and enactments of various people practicing the “duck and cover.”

SOAPStone works especially well when students need to compare and contrast nonfiction texts. By seeing the various elements laid out for them this way, students can easily identify topics that would be suitable for a strong analysis. I usually ask students to compare the audiences or purposes for clips 3 and 4.

Students familiar with the documentary elements discussed in Chapter 1 should be able to consider the points that the filmmakers who assembled all of these clips are making about nuclear weapons. They ought to be able to point to specific visual, audio, and text information as well as editing choices that lead us to draw conclusions about the filmmakers’ purposes. So these clips can be treated as nonfiction documents of a time period and then analyzed as contemporary films that look back at that time period. Once the SOAPStone strategy has helped students make sense of challenging texts, the discussions on these clips are wonderful.

As always, the next step after practicing with these clips is to let students try out a SOAPStone for a nonfiction print text. Speeches work well (see the Gettysburg Address in the next section), as do other historical documents and editorials.

Levels of Questioning

Another strategy that is a part of my regular tool box is to teach students about the levels of questioning. Students spend most of their days being asked questions, but they rarely get a chance to frame the discussion with questions of their own. This strategy gives students the knowledge and confidence to engage with a text independently by presenting them with the three types of questions that can be asked about a text. By teaching them how to write good and varied questions, all students have a way into any text, regardless of their own initial understanding. I use the questions they generate in a number of ways: reading quizzes, class discussions, Socratic seminars, journal entries, and so on.

I like to introduce the different levels of questions in a nonfiction text by presenting students with the Gettysburg Address, identifying one question at each level, and then soliciting others from the class (see Figure 2.6). In short, the three levels of questions are:

Level 1: Questions of Fact. These are questions that cannot be debated and the answers to which can be found within the text

itself. For the story of “The Three Little Pigs,” for example, a level 1 question might be: what did each of the pigs build their houses out of? At first glance, these types of questions might seem simplistic, but they are actually essential for identifying evidence to support a position.

Level 2: Questions of Interpretation. These are debatable questions that are answerable only after analyzing the text closely. The answers, though, should be found within the text itself. Often these questions begin with “why” or “how” and might relate to the tone, word choice, or theme of the text. For the pig story: what is the effect of the repeated refrain “I’ll huff and I’ll puff”? These are great classroom or small-group discussion questions, ones that can lead to topics for an analytical essay.

Level 3: Beyond the Text. These questions have their basis in the text, but the answers are found outside of it. The answers to level 3 questions are always debatable, but the evidence for the discussion is found out in the world, in other texts, or in one’s own personal life. A level 3 for the pigs might be: The third pig displayed patience and advanced planning. Are these qualities we value in society today? These questions are perfect for Socratic seminars or for journal topics.

Once students have an understanding of the different levels of questions with the Gettysburg Address, I play a clip or two from the films described in the following sections, ask students to come up with their own questions, and then have them hold small-group discussions that revolve around their levels 2 and 3 questions. Their questions should not be solely on the information provided but also on the construction of the documentary itself; they should be able to write questions about any of the visual, sound, and text elements you may have introduced to them from Chapter 1. After they have practiced with the documentaries, it is important for them to have a chance to apply this skill to a nonfiction print text. Editorials or letters to the editor from your local or school newspaper could work well for this activity; the Practice Nonfiction Print Texts section at the end of the chapter contains short nonfiction pieces written by students of mine that you may want to use. Although the answers to the questions are certainly worth exploring, it is really the questions themselves that encourage students to look closely at the text, which will then generate deeper thinking and productive class discussions.

***Tupac: Resurrection* (Lauren Lazin, 2003)**

These clips come from a fantastic documentary suggested by one of my students, Conor Jeans-Gail, about the late rapper Tupac Shakur, and it

Levels of Questioning

The Gettysburg Address (1863): Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. . . .

Level 1: Questions of Fact

These are questions that cannot be debated and the answers to which can be found within the text itself. For the Gettysburg Address, level 1 questions might be, “During which war was the speech delivered?” or “What does Lincoln say is his purpose for coming to Gettysburg?” At first glance, these types of questions might seem simplistic, but they are actually essential for identifying evidence to support a position.

■ Write another level 1 question:

Level 2: Questions of Interpretation

These are debatable questions that are answerable only after analyzing the text closely. The answers, though, should be found within the text itself. Often these questions begin with “why” or “how” and might relate to the tone, word choice, or theme of the text. For the Gettysburg Address, level 2 questions might be, “Why does Lincoln begin his speech by dating back to the beginning of the country?” or “What is the effect of using the word *consecrate*?”

■ Write another level 2 question:

Level 3: Beyond the Text

These are questions that have their basis in the text, but the answers are found outside of it. The answers to level 3 questions are always debatable, but the evidence for the discussion is found out in the world, in other texts, or in one’s own personal life. Examples of this level for the Gettysburg Address are, “Do soldiers really die in vain if their side does not win the war?” and “Why do people need to be persuaded to continue fighting in wars?”

■ Write another level 3 question:

Figure 2.6. Levels of Questioning exercise.

is always popular with high school students. The film traces his rise from poverty to fame and fortune, narrated, in a sense, by Tupac himself through various interviews over the years. The rapper is often quite articulate about social issues and, luckily for us, is most often not too vulgar in this film, except where noted.

Clip 1: 0:13:57–0:15:27; Chapter 2 on DVD

This first clip presents Tupac's views on poverty and racism, which the filmmaker reinforces through images of homeless people edited to juxtapose with the extravagance of the Reagan White House of the 1980s. See sample questions at each level in Figure 2.7.

Clip 2: 0:45:44–0:49:30; Chapter 8 on DVD

In this sequence, Tupac explains the philosophy called "thug life" that he popularized through his tattoos, clothing, and videos. The beginning of the section contains excerpts of a music video and Tupac talking about the pressure and the power he feels in being looked at as a role model. From there, he begins to define *thug life* by comparing it to other great American perspectives like "Give me liberty or give me death." He goes on to describe a code of conduct for regulating the violence in the ghettos, and we see a truce picnic for rival L.A. gangs. You might want to cut the clip slightly short if you are concerned about the profanity at the very end of the sequence. By the way, "OG" refers to "original gangsters." I always try to mention this off-the-cuff in class so students might accidentally think I'm cool. Possible questions for this clip are:

Level 1

1. How old is Tupac at this time?
2. What words best define *thug* according to Tupac?
3. What does Tupac say is the purpose of the "thug life code of ethics"?

Level 2

1. Why does Tupac feel pressured and scared at the beginning of this clip?
2. Why does "thug life" give Tupac pride?
3. Why does this outlook scare some people?
4. What is the filmmaker's attitude toward the thug life? How is this revealed through editing?

Level 3

1. What are the solutions to the problem of street violence that Tupac identifies?



Figure 2.8. From *Mad Hot Ballroom*.

might be more appropriate for introducing them to the Levels of Questioning. The clip opens with a montage of kids playing on the playgrounds at various schools. The music is a gentle, light tune. All kids, the film suggests, play and have fun, regardless of race and class. Then the film cuts between several of the kids all talking about what it means to be age ten or eleven. Some are confused by changes in their bodies and the difficulties of the schoolwork, and some are excited about getting older. The sequence ends with images of the children at home or at play with one of their parents: rollerblading, studying, riding on the back of a motorcycle. If these are single-parent homes, they're great ones for the kids. This sequence includes only positive images.

Level 1

1. How old are most of the kids at this time?
2. According to one of the girls, at what age are kids most likely to be targeted by kidnapers?
3. What are some of the things the kids like and don't like about being ten or eleven?

Level 2

1. Why are the children happy or unhappy about their ages?

2. Why are some of the children scared or confused at this age?
3. Why does the film include so many images of the kids playing?
4. What is the filmmaker's attitude toward being ten? How is this revealed through editing and music?

Level 3

1. Are kids allowed to just be kids these days?
2. What makes children happy?
3. What are the differences between being ten and [fill in blank with your students' age]?

Cornell Notes

The final strategy I like to use with students as they engage with non-fiction texts is the Cornell Notes process of note taking developed by Walter Pauk and presented in his *How to Study in College*; it is often given to students as a tool for taking notes during a class lecture or discussion, but it is also applicable to the reading of challenging nonfiction texts. Students, before taking notes on a difficult nonfiction text, divide their paper into three areas, each of which has a separate purpose. A full piece of paper should be divided to look like Figure 2.9.

Section 1 is the large space in which students write down the information they feel is important in the text. These might be facts, dates, names, chapter headings, etc. This material should not be in complete sentences, and students should have an opportunity to compare their notes in this section with those of their classmates, especially when you have just introduced this format to them. This is also a place for them to write down any significant visual, sound, and text elements (if you introduced them from the previous chapter). It is important to remember that documentaries are made up of more than just factual information; we want students to be able to pay attention to all of the elements that go into documentaries.

Section 2 is the place where students write a brief summary of all the information found in section 1. This summary should try to connect the information by describing how the various facts, names, dates, and so forth relate to one another. This section needs to be completed as soon as possible after students have taken the notes and must be in their own words. It can also include a brief analysis of the author's purpose and tone.

Section 3 is where students write questions or "cues" about the information that can be found in section 1. If, for instance, a student

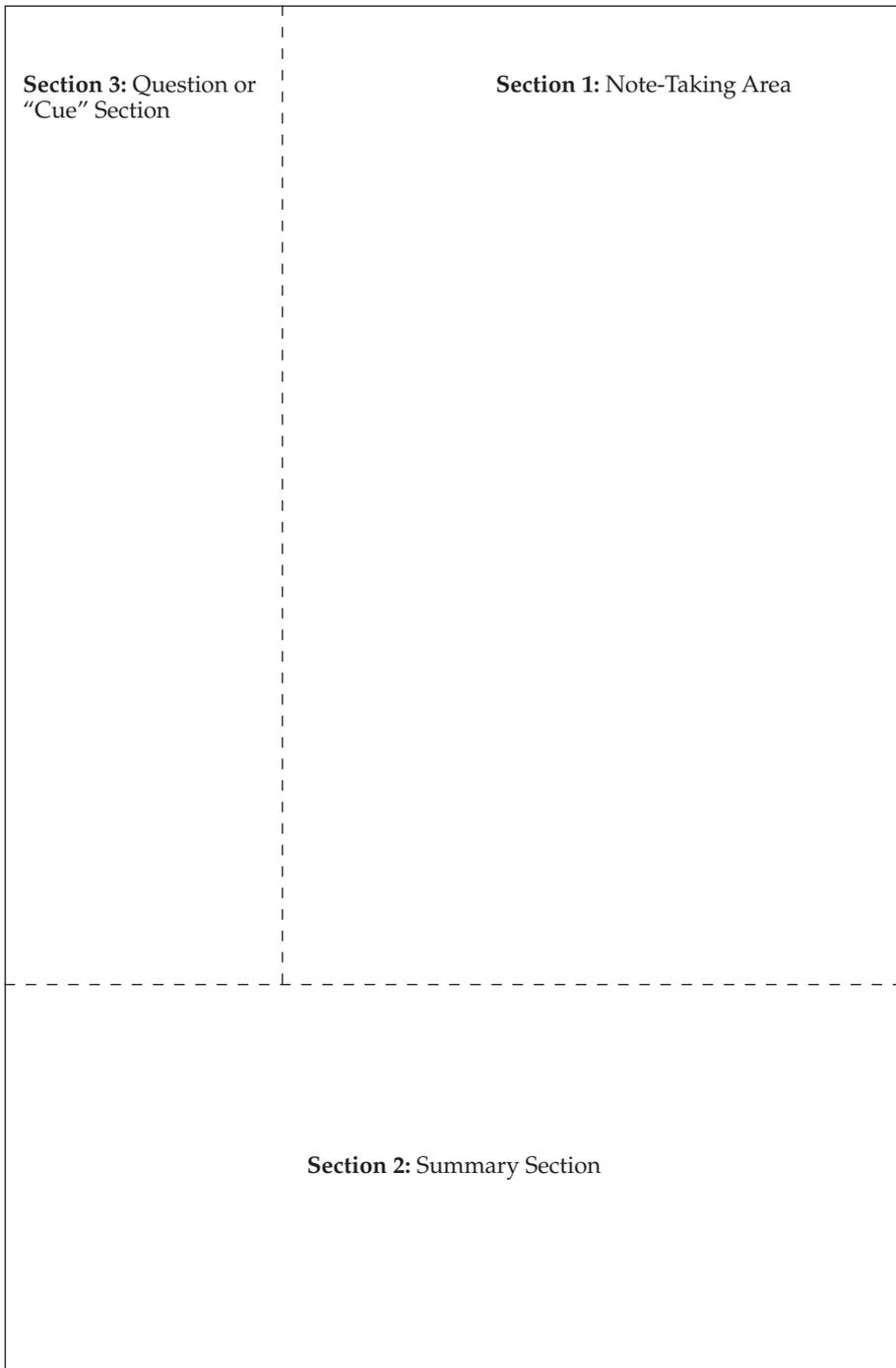


Figure 2.9. Cornell Notes divisions.

wrote down that “cars cause more pollution than anything else” in section 1, then a question in section 3 might be: “What is the greatest cause of pollution?” Rephrasing the material in this way (like writing a question for the game *Jeopardy!*) is an essential step in comprehension. While a typical Cornell system asks for only this recall type of question, I also like to add the Levels of Questioning strategy to this by asking students not only to write level 1 questions about the information found in section 1, but also to write level 2 and 3 questions that the material generates. For instance, students reading the article on pollution might write questions like: why are Americans addicted to their cars? Other questions might try to get at the author’s (or director’s) purpose or tone as well. By adding these questions, we can increase discussion and encourage even deeper thought about the subjects.

Following are descriptions of documentary clips that work well for practicing the Cornell Notes system.

4 *Little Girls* (Spike Lee, 1997)

0:07:16–0:12:19

In this short sequence from a film that explores the tragedy of the church bombing in 1963 in which four little girls were killed, Spike Lee gives us a brief history of Birmingham, Alabama. Interview subjects tell us that Birmingham was a steel town that grew up quickly and had to bring in a large unskilled labor force to keep up its growth, which caused it to be a violent town. Even though no one mentions lynching, Lee cuts—with a bold and threatening drumroll on the sound track—to a series of graphic pictures of black men being lynched by smiling mobs. The images are rural looking and are not identified as being committed in or around Birmingham. While most people recall how violent Birmingham was at the time, Lee juxtaposes these with a white circuit court judge saying that Birmingham in the 1950s was a quiet, wonderful place to raise a family, from which Lee cuts to archive footage of a KKK group (complete with young kids in white robes) marching through the streets. The real power of this sequence comes from Lee’s ability to make the concept of segregation felt in such a personal way. One family recounts a time when their child wanted to eat at a whites-only lunch counter and they had to tell her, a six-year-old girl, about racism (see Figure 2.10 for a sample Cornell Notes on this clip with multiple levels of questioning in the cue section).

<p>Title: <i>4 Little Girls</i></p>	<p>Author/Director: Spike Lee</p>	<p>Topic: Birmingham, AL</p>
<p>Section 3: Question or "Cue" Section</p> <p>What made Birmingham so violent at that time?</p> <p>What does segregation mean?</p> <p>What was segregated at the time?</p> <p>Have conditions improved since the 1950s?</p> <p>Why does racism exist?</p> <p>What does Spike Lee think about Birmingham at the time?</p>	<p>Section 1: Note-Taking Area</p> <p>1950s Birmingham Difficult to get work; a steel town then Built in late 1800s by Northerners History of labor violence, US Steel Rural people moving in to city Foreboding music Lynchings KKK Great place to raise a family Segregated, separate bathrooms, water fountains Awful time for young people Man tells story about his daughter, wants to eat a sandwich at store Still pictures of daughter Father tells her that she can't b/c she's black CU on father at the end</p>	<p>Section 2: Summary Section</p> <p>This section is about how difficult it was to be black in Birmingham in the 1950s. Things were violent and everything was segregated. Only one person thought it was a great place to raise a family, and he was white. The most powerful part is when a father has to tell his little girl that she can't eat at the lunch counter because she's black.</p>

Figure 2.10. Using Cornell Notes.

The Fog of War (Errol Morris, 2003)

0:06:45–0:12:30

This clip comes from an extended interview with Robert McNamara, the secretary of defense in the 1960s, in which he proposes a series of lessons of war. In this sequence, which focuses on the Cuban missile crisis, McNamara identifies lesson 1 as “Empathize with your enemy,” and suggests that nuclear war was averted because Kennedy and some of his advisors were able to put themselves into Soviet leader Khrushchev’s shoes. Students familiar with the elements discussed in Chapter 1 will find a tremendous amount of material to note on the director’s editing and text track choices. The clip works well for practicing Cornell note taking because most information will be new to students and many of the issues raised will prompt good questions.

March of the Penguins (Luc Jacquet, 2005)

0:00:00–0:06:30

If you are planning to use this strategy with younger students, this clip about the mating rituals of the emperor penguins in Antarctica would be perfect (Figure 2.11). In this opening sequence, we learn a lot of facts about the location, the distance covered, the temperature, and the methods of travel as the penguins try to get to their mating ground.

The Cornell Notes system empowers students by giving them an easy tool for organization, summary, and reflection. Once students practice with it a few times, you’ll see how quickly they catch on. Maybe they’ll even start using it in other classes and subjects.

All of the skills and strategies presented in this chapter are designed to isolate a few areas on which students should concentrate as they encounter nonfiction texts. As with all of these activities, the goal is for students to practice the strategy with the film and then to transfer the skills to a nonfiction print text immediately afterward. Throughout the year, I collect newspaper editorials, short scientific articles, and even essays from educational journals, and I pull out copies whenever I want to practice a particular skill or strategy. Please don’t think that the print text you select always needs to match the topic of the film clip you have just shown; it’s great when that happens, but we are most interested in the transfer of skills. The following section consists of short nonfiction pieces written by some of my students that you might want to copy and use to practice this transfer of skills.



Figure 2.11. The opening of *March of the Penguins* presents a lot of information, so it's a great sequence for having students practice their Cornell Notes. My page of notes, however, would have a single word: COLD!

After students have practiced with the film and print texts, it is a good habit to ask students to reflect on which strategies seem to help them the most and to be able to explain why. The goal cannot be simply to help them do better on standardized tests, though they certainly will; we need to give students a way to make sense of the texts they will encounter once they leave our classrooms.

Practice Nonfiction Print Texts

As I noted earlier, this chapter has been about the skills and strategies that students need in order to read and understand nonfiction texts, and the clips I have recommended can serve as practice for students before they transfer these skills to challenging nonfiction print texts. What follows are a few pieces written by my students that you might want to copy and use to help this transfer process.

They Give You a Dollar, We Keep Your Jobs

By Becca Carlson

Our country is built upon the ideals of life, liberty, and prosperity. One of the many liberties that this country provides is great work opportunities. Yet, with our ever growing population the demand for living has increased. More jobs are needed, but there are not always enough opportunities for work. The liberal parties of this nation feel that the solution to ridding low-wage poverty in this country is to raise the Federal minimum wage. The reality is that raising minimum wage would cause a vast loss of jobs across the country. Companies cannot afford the hourly increase in workers' pay, and small privately owned businesses are not equipped for the salary increase. The result of this high demand on the United States' businesses would lead to nothing less than the destruction of our economy.

Susan Miller, life long resident of Spokane, Washington, has spent the past 7 years of her life raising three children in her one bedroom apartment. Up until last month she worked two jobs, barely bringing in enough money to put food on the table. Today she is left jobless. Her workplaces could not afford to pay the state's high minimum wage.

While in office, the Clinton Administration made many attempts to raise the Federal minimum wage to \$7.00 an hour. The American national unemployment rate in 2002 was 5.1%. As of right now the current federal minimum wage is \$5.15 an hour. As national salary increases, it is predicted that the unemployment rates will rise accordingly. In their feeble attempt to help the low-wage people of this nation, the Democratic party failed to realize that having a job is better than having no job at all.

The states in this country which have the highest minimum wages also have the highest unemployment rates. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Washington and Oregon are in the top three in both categories. Both have a minimum wage of over \$7.00, and have unemployment rates of 7.3 and 7.5%. On the other hand, South Dakota, which has the lowest unemployment rate in the nation of 3.1%, uses the federal minimum wage.

It is obvious that there is a correlation between how much workers are paid, and the number of jobs available. It is appalling to

think that people are willing to make thousands of helpless families suffer in poverty, just to raise their pay to \$7.00.

President Bush is willing to support raising the federal minimum wage by a dollar, as long as certain states are allowed to opt out of it. This would prevent any potential job loss in states with smaller budgets. While some may argue that that defeats the purpose of raising the wage in the first place, it is obvious that this allows states to focus on economical issues at hand, as well as to help out families.

During the Depression our national unemployment rate sky rocketed from 3.1% to 24.75% over the period of a few years. In this day and age we are steadily working to keep up the economy. Raising the minimum wage could have catastrophic effects on our country. In the time of our grandparents there were hungry unemployed people lining the streets. Here we are eighty-one years later doing everything in our power to keep that from happening again.

Reading in the Reel World: Teaching Documentaries and Other Nonfiction Texts by John Golden © 2006 NCTE.

It's Time to Feel the Heat

By Emma Dobbins

The United States alone accounts for over 25% of the world's emissions of greenhouse gases. And even as the largest producing country of greenhouse gases, our government is *still* refusing to take appropriate action. In February of 2002, the White House Council of Economic Advisors said, "We need to recognize that it makes sense to discuss slowing emissions growth before trying to stop and eventually reverse it." The fact is, it's made sense to talk about this issue for the past fifteen years and now it's time for serious action. The Bush administration needs to get out of their comfortable chair of ignorance and show some ecological responsibility.

As this problem has continued to go untreated, our planet has literally begun to suffocate. Harmful greenhouse gases are trapping excess heat in our atmosphere. Normally, this heat would radiate out of the atmosphere but now much of it is being radiated back towards the Earth's surface resulting in the unnatural warming of our planet.

In the past century, the average surface temperature of the Earth has increased a total of 1.1°F (0.6° Celsius). Although this may not sound like much, its ecological impact is huge. Ecosystems all throughout the world are extremely delicate and can be altered or destroyed with a temperature fluctuation as small as 2°F. The U.S. climate action report from May of 2002 stated that since the industrial revolution, there has been a 30% increase of carbon dioxide, a 15% increase in nitrous oxide concentration and methane concentrations have nearly doubled.

Global warming isn't just a casual change in temperature but a raging invitation for ecological disaster. Ocean levels will rise dramatically not only endangering the surrounding lands, but the ecosystems within. Droughts and heat waves will deepen the problem over water resources. Weather extremes will initiate floods causing heightened levels of property damage and destruction. Most importantly, the potential for heat related illnesses and deaths would soar as well as the level of infectious diseases. The Union of Concerned Scientists also reported that mountain glaciers all over the world are receding and the global sea level has risen 300% faster in the past century than in the past 3,000 years.

Despite all of these facts, the Bush administration has still been hesitant to take action. In 2001, Bush pulled the United States out of the world wide treaty called the Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol was the first legally binding treaty aimed towards the reduction of the emissions of greenhouse gases all throughout the world. In the same year, Bush also rejected a campaign pledge to limit carbon dioxide in burning fossil fuels.

Awareness is not only lacking within our government, but within our country itself. Too many people are not fully aware or do not believe in the harsh realities of global warming. The impacts are beyond serious and we need to stand up and recognize this. Nationwide recognition is the first step towards prying open the eyes of our oblivious government.

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Government Sells Out to Vioxx

By Jon Coon

In recent months the story of the prescription drug Vioxx has sparked keen debate over the issue of FDA licensing. After all, how is it possible that a drug with so much potential for health damage was ever approved for the general public? With an estimated number of 27,785 heart attacks and sudden cardiac death between 1999 and 2003, Vioxx must be seen as a menace to society.

Marketed as a painkiller to relieve arthritis, Vioxx exemplifies the very problem with today's prescription drug market. A large company, in this case Merck & Co., produces a number of studies in a limited time to allow the drug to be approved faster. While there have been multiple drugs that help to ease the pain of those in need, the lasting effect is never truly known until years after the drug's release. In Vioxx's situation it is evident that during the four years of its sales many millions of people were exposed to a harmful treatment.

The problem here is that in an effort to make big profits, the drug companies campaign and push the FDA to approve of their drugs before enough information is known. Vioxx was one of Merck's biggest moneymakers with estimated sales of over \$2.5 billion dollars worldwide.

Solemnly, all the blame cannot simply be given to the FDA. It is after all not the FDA who sets their own budget. Where do American Congressmen or even President Bush stand on the issue? Obviously neither thought that providing additional funding to the FDA was a necessity before the latest news of mismanagement was divulged. When compared to the amount of money drug companies spend purely on marketing, one can see the discrepancy in the process of approving drugs. Based on an article by Stephen Pomper the FDA has shot itself in the foot so to speak. With regulations passed during the late 90's that folded to corporate demand for advertising and cut the approval process from 30 months to 12 it is not surprising that a Vioxx would turn up sooner or later.

To fix this substantial dilemma of American healthcare the government would be thoughtful to give more funds to support the FDA, restrict the ability to advertise (a key component of sales) and

finally enact a larger time frame for approval to ensure better safety. Without action the citizens of America will undoubtedly be the ill-advised guinea pigs to drug companies of the World.

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Students today are asked to read and interpret an increasingly diverse variety of nonfiction texts. From science textbooks and standardized tests to the daily newspaper, students are constantly required to determine what is “real” and are asked to make judgments about validity, objectivity, and bias. Because nonfiction texts are read differently than fiction, students need to learn different skills for decoding and interpreting nonfiction works.

In this follow-up to his successful *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom*, John Golden offers strategies for teaching nonfiction by demonstrating that teaching students to “read” documentary films can help them identify and practice the skills that good readers need when they encounter other nonfiction texts.

By tapping into students’ natural attraction to film, teachers can help students understand key concepts such as theme, tone, and point of view as well as practice and improve their persuasive, narrative, and expository writing abilities. Studying documentaries helps students learn how nonfiction texts are constructed and how these texts may shape the viewer’s/reader’s opinion.



Photo by Laura Lull

With classroom-tested activities, ready-to-copy handouts, and extensive lists of resources, including a glossary of film terminology, an index of documentaries by category, and an annotated list of additional resources, John Golden discusses more than thirty films and gives teachers the tools they need to effectively teach nonfiction texts using popular documentaries such as *Hoop Dreams*, *Spellbound*, and *Super Size Me*, as well as lesser known but accessible films such as *Girlhood*, *The Gleaners and I*, and *The True Meaning of Pictures*.

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