



SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS
Reading Process & Literary Analysis
Benchmark LA.1112.1.7.5 Analyze a variety of text structures....

Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.5 Analyze and discuss characteristics of subgenres (e.g., satire)....

NOTABLE QUOTE

"I hate and detest that animal called man."

FYI

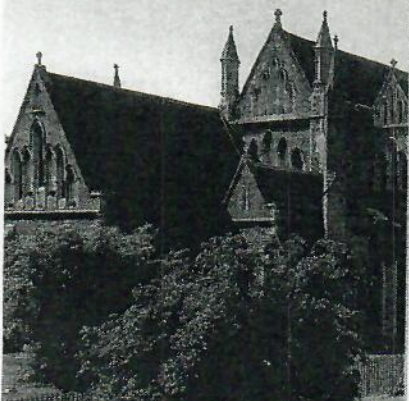
Did you know that Jonathan Swift ...

- had learned to read by the time he was three?
- coined the term *yahoo* to refer to a boorish and ignorant person?
- left much of his fortune to go toward the building of a mental hospital?

Author Online

For more on Jonathan Swift, visit the **Literature Center** at **ClassZone.com**.

St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin



A Modest Proposal

Essay by Jonathan Swift



Jonathan Swift

1667–1745

Jonathan Swift has been called the greatest satirist in the English language. His genuine outrage at man's inhumanity to man and his commitment to championing liberty found voice in his biting satire and unflinching criticism of his times. Few writers of the 18th century were as politically and socially influential as Swift.

A Priest with a Pen Jonathan Swift was born of Anglo-Irish parents in Dublin, Ireland. Though his family was not wealthy, Swift attended the prestigious Trinity College. After graduating, he moved to Surrey in England to accept a position as secretary to a retired diplomat. In 1695, Swift was ordained as an Anglican priest and became a full-fledged satirist, with two completed works ready for publication.

Swift was a clergyman and a political writer for the Whig party. His first two satires, *The Battle of the Books* and *A Tale of a Tub*, quickly established his acerbic style. Whether lampooning modern

thinkers and scientists (John Locke and Sir Isaac Newton among them), religious abuses, or humanity at large, Swift raged at the arrogance, phoniness, and shallowness he saw infecting contemporary intellectual and moral life. Though his early publications were anonymous, people began to recognize his vicious and witty political writing through his contributions to London periodicals such as Richard Steele's and Joseph Addison's *The Spectator*.

When the Whigs lost power to the Tories in 1710, the Tories courted the conservative Swift to join their side. As a man of principle and a strict moralist, however, he ultimately became disenchanted with the compromises and manipulations of politics.

Irish Patriot In 1713, Swift was appointed dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. Though Swift at first felt exiled in Ireland, in time he regained his interest in politics. Angered by the way England tyrannized Ireland, Swift fought back in a series of publications called *The Drapier's Letters*, in which he wrote, "Am I a freeman in England, and do I become a slave in six hours by crossing the channel?" For Irish Catholics and Protestants alike, Swift became a hero. His last major work about Ireland, "A Modest Proposal," is one of the most famous satires ever written.

Gulliver's Success In 1726, Swift anonymously published the masterly satire *Gulliver's Travels*, in which he vents his fury at political corruption and his annoyance with the general worthlessness of human beings. Though Swift aroused controversy, *Gulliver's Travels* turned out to be surprisingly popular, and it remains a classic for readers of all ages.

● LITERARY ANALYSIS: SATIRE

While Alexander Pope is generally sympathetic to his satirical targets, Swift's work is darker and more biting. **Satire** is a literary technique in which people's behaviors or society's institutions are ridiculed for the purpose of bringing about social reform. Swift used satire to comment on specific political and cultural concerns that angered and offended him.

One of the satirist's most reliable tools is **verbal irony**, in which what is said is the opposite of what is meant. As you read "A Modest Proposal," notice how Swift uses verbal irony to present his seemingly rational proposal.

● READING SKILL: IDENTIFY PROPOSITION AND SUPPORT

Although "A Modest Proposal" is a satire, it is written like a serious problem-solution essay. Specifically, it

- clearly identifies a **problem** and its causes
- proposes a **solution** to the problem—Swift's **proposition**—and explains how to implement it
- provides **support** for the proposed solution in the form of reasons and evidence
- notes **other possible solutions** and argues against them

As you read the essay, use a chart like the one shown to record Swift's proposition and the reasons and evidence he gives to support it.

Proposition:

Support:

- "These children can help feed and clothe thousands."
-

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

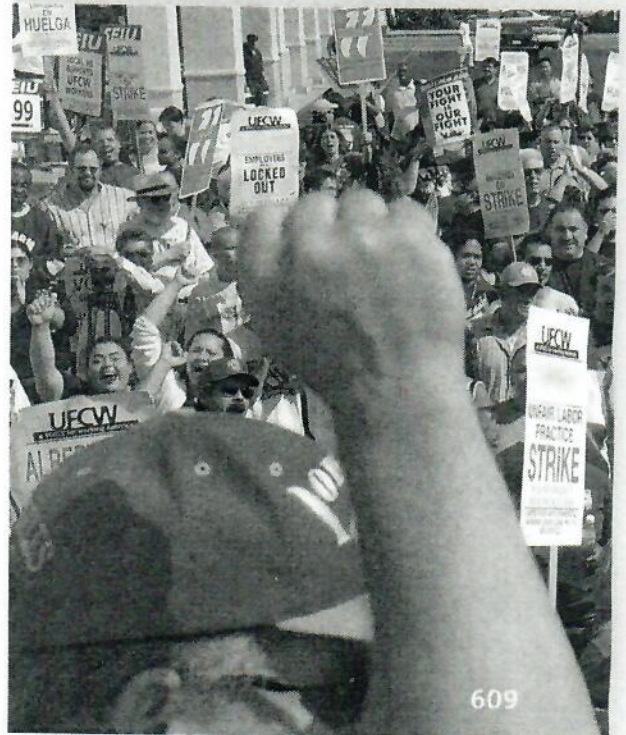
Determine the meaning of each boldfaced word in context.

1. food needed for **sustenance**
2. a beginner just learning the **rudiments**
3. a **collateral** benefit in addition to the main one
4. politely show **deference** to others' views
5. an **expedient** that will make life easier
6. an **encumbrance** that will make life harder
7. **famine** caused by massive crop failures
8. **propagation** of the human race to increase population

How can we fight
INJUSTICE?

KEY IDEA There's an old proverb that states, "The pen is mightier than the sword." Jonathan Swift wielded his pen like a rapier, using it to slash away at **injustice**. Though some may claim the power of the pen is greatly diminished these days, people still fight injustice with words—in speeches, in newspapers and magazines, and on the Internet.

DISCUSS With a small group, brainstorm a list of methods people use to fight injustice. Then think of a contemporary example of injustice. It may be a local, a national, or a global issue. With your a group, discuss which method or methods would be most effective in publicizing, and possibly leading to a solution to, the problem.



Reading-Writing Connection

WRITING PROMPT

WRITE A SATIRICAL PROPOSAL In the spirit of Swift's essay, write a **three-to-five-paragraph satirical proposal** on an issue you've heard or read about recently. The issue could relate to something at school, a problem in your town, or an issue that challenges the nation.

SELF-CHECK

A strong proposal will . . .

- clearly identify the issue that your proposal will solve
- address possible opposing views to your proposal
- use verbal irony and/or understatement

GRAMMAR AND STYLE

CHOOSE EFFECTIVE WORDS Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 617. Swift underscores the shocking nature of his proposal by using disparaging **nouns** to describe the poor of Ireland, as shown in the passages below.

I am assured by our merchants that a boy or girl before twelve years old is no salable commodity; (lines 54–55)

. . . these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages . . . (lines 68–69)

Notice how Swift's carefully chosen nouns satirize the dismissive attitude that the wealthy Protestants had toward the Catholic poor, heightening the essay's effectiveness.

PRACTICE Copy the sentences below. Then rewrite them using nouns that will give the sentences a more satirical edge. An example sentence is provided.

EXAMPLE

Nine out of ten landlords overeat, and some weigh as much as 300 pounds.
Nine out of ten landlords are gluttons, and some weigh as much as a full-grown sow.

1. Cars that use an excessive amount of gas make our oil dependence problem worse.
2. Those who want to preserve the rain forests can be alarmists at times.
3. Companies that dump waste in our waterways are irresponsible corporate citizens.



SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD Writing Process

Benchmark LA.1112.3.4.4 Grammar and usage, including but not limited to parts of speech, verb tense, noun/pronoun agreement, subject/verb agreement, pronoun/antecedent agreement, parallel structure, modifier placement, comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs, and unintended shift in person or tense.



For prewriting, revision, and editing tools, visit the **Writing Center** at ClassZone.com.