

Because if you're really teaching students how to think about history, the content *must* be deeply upsetting at times. A serious study of history requires a confrontation with the failures of courage and conscience that have often marked our times. Acknowledging this history doesn't diminish the gains our society has made; it makes them all the more extraordinary. Glossing over actual history for ahistorical, largely blameless fictions like *The Help* doesn't give young people nearly enough credit. Some educators assign these books under the misguided assumption that white kids will relate to a book about the struggle for equality only if it features a white protagonist and a "happy" resolution. But in my experience, teenagers are far more fluid in their conception of identity than older people and far more cognizant of unhappy endings and ambiguities than infantilizing adults think they are. As long as there's a point of connection—and injustice is one to which all teenagers relate—students devour stories of people different from themselves.

To my mind, if you're going to assign *The Help* to teach about civil rights, you might as well assign *Life Is Beautiful* to teach about the Holocaust. Both rely on a simplification that makes a hard subject seem palatable and resolved, while giving viewers that lovely self-righteous feeling that keeps us from recognizing the discrimination around us now. People didn't make concentration camps happy places through clowning, and the legalized system of oppression that ruled the South for more than 100 years was not undone by white girls and their mummies.

Of course, we teach the Holocaust with Anne Frank's diary or Elie Wiesel's *Night*, books that don't shield young readers from the realities of history nor from the way history echoes into the present. Racism is not a problem that Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks and Skeeter fixed, as demonstrated by the gutting of the Voting Rights Act, the murder of Trayvon Martin, and the everyday lives of high schoolers of color. But that's the kind of stagnant historical understanding I see in students who only read neat narratives of struggle and redemption. I've heard dozens of white students talk about how "crazy" things were before the civil rights movement changed everything, with no sense of present connection ("Now we have a black president") or the struggles that persist today. I have also seen the opposite—young people righteously incensed over racial injustice in *Black Boy*, glued to a documentary about the Scottsboro Boys, able to make modern connections about discrimination through *The New Jim Crow*, poring over pictures of life in the segregated South.

When I asked a student about *The Help* essay her school had assigned about black life under Jim Crow, she told me that the saddest part of the book was when Aibileen had to leave Mae Mobley, the little white girl she cared for. "It was so sad," she said, "because she loved Mae Mobley, and Mae Mobley loved her, but Aibileen got fired even though she didn't do anything wrong." Her takeaway was not unjustified—the book and the film set this scene up as a wrenching, tear-jerking moment, so it was simply hitting its intended mark—but it points to the awful, intractable problem with using *The Help* for historical purposes. This student will be fortunate enough to read other texts and explore better history, and I'm sure her understanding will grow deeper. But until that time, she will believe that taking away a black woman's ability to care for an adoring white girl best captures the racial injustice of 1963 Mississippi.

Correction, Dec. 2, 2013: This article misspelled the first name of author Anne Moody. (Return.)

Analysis of Argument (SAT Writing)

Paragraph 2: Body The "HOW & WHY" of the text 1. What is the significant element of argument the author uses first? 2. Make an assertion (topic sentence): "One significant strategy (the author) uses is..." 3. How does the author use it? 4. Textual evidence: Quote the text or, even better, summarize the evidence. 5. Why does the author use it? 6. What is the impact on the text and the readers?	Paragraph 1: Intro (2-3 sentences) The "WHAT" of the text • Identify SOAPs/relevant information • Which components are important to your analysis? • Identify the author's purpose and message. Restate in YOUR OWN words. This is your claim. • "In this piece, (the author) uses a number of (rhetorical/persuasive) strategies to (author's purpose and message)." Paragraph 3: Body The "HOW & WHY" of the text 1. What is the significant element of argument the author uses second? 2. Make an assertion (topic sentence): "Another important strategy (the author) uses is..." 3. How does the author use it? 4. Textual evidence: Quote the text or, even better, summarize the evidence. 5. Why does the author use it? 6. What is the impact on the text and the readers?
Paragraph 4: Conclusion Wrap it up neatly 1. Reinforce YOUR claim (now you should name the 2-3 strategies you identified in your body paragraphs) using DIFFERENT words. 2. "Through the use of (rhetorical strategies), (the author) is able to (purpose and message)." 3. What are the implications of the author's argument? 4. What is the impact on society? 5. Why does the author's claim matter? 6. NO new evidence here. Tie your analysis of the argument together.	Paragraph 3: Body The "HOW & WHY" of the text 1. What is the significant element of argument the author uses second? 2. Make an assertion (topic sentence): "Another important strategy (the author) uses is..." 3. How does the author use it? 4. Textual evidence: Quote the text or, even better, summarize the evidence. 5. Why does the author use it? 6. What is the impact on the text and the readers?