

Activities for "A Modest Proposal" (Swift)



**Activity 1**

**Rhetorical Analysis of paragraphs 1 -6.**

In paragraphs 1 – 6, Swift develops an ironic tone, but it is milder than the irony he develops as the essay progresses. Your analysis should track how Swift develops his tone and what specific arguments he introduces implicitly through this irony.

**Task:**

Trace Swift's diction.

Label each example you find as a *type of diction*, not merely as "diction" (word choice), but, for example, scientific, technical, didactic, pedantic, slang, etc.

Keep track of examples with direct quotations but do not feel a need to copy down entire sentences.

Use a dictionary to look up the exact meaning of words so that you can get the full significance of a word's denotation. Take notes when you look up a definition. As you find word patterns, draw conclusions about their significance and pose questions that could get you to a better conclusion.

**Your end result should be:**

Notes on word patterns and specific types of diction, and at least 1 -2 well-formed arguments from your notes on **why** Swift uses those words (that you develop from your work in the "abstract" column).

*Questions you may ask:*

- o What is the speaker's background – where is he from? What is his social class? Is he Irish or English? Is he rich or poor? What perspective does he have?
- o What kind of personality does the speaker seem to have from the language he uses in paragraphs 1 -6? This is not the same person as Swift.
  - o What is Swift doing by creating this other persona?
  - o What does Swift want the reader to think about this speaker?
  - o What would you think about someone who spoke about this topic (discussed in these paragraphs only) in this way?

**Activity 2:**

**Answer the below question with one sentence.** (You may include text support, but this must fit within the one sentence requirement.)

Between paragraphs 7 – 9, Swift's essay turns from mildly ironic to darkly satirical. What key word or phrase is, your opinion, most indicative of this turn?

**Activity 3:**

Between paragraphs 19 – 26, Swift delineates various arguments to support his proposal.

**Identify three of the arguments and explain the underlying premises that they rely on.** \*You may want to look up the definition of "premise" to help accomplish this task.

*Here is an example:*

In paragraph 7, on page 562, Swift states that he is "assured by [their] merchants that a boy or a girl before twelve years old is no saleable commodity."

The first premise underlying this observation is that the idea that it is acceptable for a human being to be "saleable," but we should only refrain for some age restriction, not morality; i.e. the reason a boy or girl before twelve isn't "saleable" isn't because slavery is terrible, but because he or she hasn't reached some more appropriate age in which slavery would be acceptable.

The other premise underlying this statement is that after twelve a boy or girl becomes "saleable" for some reason the reader might be able to infer, such as prostitution or "wage slavery" (making only enough money to survive so that the worker can work the next day; in essence a slave), which the speaker also accepts as viable options.

**Activity 4:** In order to understand a significant portion of this essay, you must understand the meaning of Swift's discussion of "expedients" in paragraphs 27 – 28.

In your analysis notes, you should answer these questions and draw significant conclusions from your answers:

*What is an expedient?*

*What does Swift suggest as "other expedients"?*

*Is Swift's argument to not attempt these satirical? Why or why not?*

**Activity 5:**

**Transform paragraph 30 into the literal, serious argument that Swift is making in this essay.**

I believe it is possible to do this only by deleting certain words, but you may want to add certain words if the deletion task proves too challenging.

**Activity 6:**

**Brainstorm between 4 -5 contemporary visual examples of satire used to expose a social ill, serious problem, political complaint, or other such object of criticism. Be specific as possible in your description.**

This would include cartoons, posters, t-shirts, tote-bags, toys, commercials, shows, movies, etc. Then, as best as you can, collect some of these examples. You may sketch, print out, photograph, bring in objects, etc. The example is due the next class meeting (Monday or Tuesday).

