

## Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

**Title:** “A Modest Proposal” & California Farm Workers: The Consumption Continues

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**School Affiliation:** Acton-Boxborough Regional High School

**Location:** Acton, Massachusetts

**Grade Level/Subject Areas:** High School English (grade depends on curriculum)

**Duration of Lesson:** 3-5 class periods (depending on the depth you want to go)

### Relevant State/National Standards:

#### *Massachusetts Reading Standards for Literature 6–12*

- \* 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
  
- \* 6. Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

#### *Massachusetts Reading Standards for Informational Text 6–12*

- \* 6. Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

### Lesson Abstract

The lesson begins with helping students gain a solid foundational understanding of both satire and Swift’s “A Modest Proposal,” which then allows them to explore modern day connections. Students will look at the California farm worker plight, noting connections between the systematic dehumanization of Irish farm workers in the 1700s and Mexican-American farm workers in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Students will also discuss methods of nonviolent resistance as a source for change (writing and boycotting/striking).

### Guiding Questions

1. How do you identify satire? How can you tell if the author means something different from what he/she says?
  
2. What are the similarities between the Irish farm worker exploitation in 17<sup>th</sup> century England and exploitation of farm workers in modern day America?
  
3. What are different nonviolent methods of resistance, and why are they effective?

## **Content Essay:**

### ***Introduction***

When Cesar Chavez was young, his mother was fired from her job as a farmworker after calling out a contractor who was trying to cheat a customer. Many would wonder why she would bother – she needs that job. However, from a young age, Juana Estrada Chavez taught her son that “There is a difference between being of service and being a servant” (Chavez “Juana Estrada Chavez” 222). While this lesson may have been instilled in the Chavez family from childhood, Cesar Chavez’ life work proves that not everyone shares these same values. And Cesar Chavez learned this through experience.

### ***Cesar Chavez’ Personal Background – the Younger Years***

We all know the importance of childhood with respect to development. Childhood is the time to learn morals, make friendships, focus on schoolwork, and live in innocence. Chavez and many other Mexican-American and immigrant families, however recall a significantly different childhood experience: “Cesar’s most vivid memories of his youth are not of school days but of crawling under twisted, scratchy vines for hard-to-reach bunch of grapes, choking on the chemical sprays used on the fruit, breathing the hot dust of the fields as sweat poured into his eyes, and spending much of his day in a back-breaking stooped position” (Ingram 98). When a family does not have enough to eat, children are forced to join in the effort to provide – everyone works. Chavez himself did not move past eighth grade, as he had to leave school in order for his family to earn enough money. It was here that Chavez learned about the miserable conditions the poor farmworkers lived under.

Likely recalling his mother’s lesson regarding servitude, in 1940, when he was thirteen, Chavez participated in his first field strike near El Centro, California. The demands to the farm manager were as follows: “they wanted a minimum wage of fifty cents per hour, overtime pay after eight hours of work, no child labor, and separate toilets for men and women. They also wanted free drinking water while picking in the fields, instead of being charged a nickel per ladle” (Ingram 97). As you read this, recall that these were *demands*: this means that the farm workers made less than fifty cents an hour, had steep quotas but no opportunity for overtime pay, child labor was encouraged, and men and women had to relieve themselves in the open, in the fields – no privacy or rest time given. Additionally, they had to *pay* to drink water. These were conditions the workers had to *fight* for. These workers, however, found that the only power they had was over themselves, and so striking became a powerful tool.

### ***Working Conditions in Chavez’ Adulthood***

Years later, Chavez began his own movement to establish a union for farm workers in order to stop exploitation of the poor. Though it was sixteen years later, Chavez found himself fighting many of the same battles: “Workers endured long hours without rest breaks, had little access to water or restrooms, had toxic pesticides sprayed on them, and endured hard labor for very little pay and no health benefits. These injustices communicated to the workers that they were subhuman and not deserving of even the most common dignities offered to others” (Teaching Tolerance 11). For whatever reason, agribusiness did not see the farm workers as human – they were merely expendable labor. Due to a large influx of immigrants, the state of California had a surplus labor market, which gave the growers no motivation to offer a fair, but more expensive,

work environment. If one poor family decided not to work, there was always other poor families to take up that work. In order to keep their jobs, families employed children, which agribusiness readily accepted. This competition for labor created “poverty-level wages. Child labor, though illegal, was standard practice and expected by labor contractors, middlemen who hired field hands and took a cut of their pay” (Ingram 98). If a business sees that their bottom line can be higher with minimum benefits, they have little reason (other than ethical) to improve conditions for the workers. In a speech given in 1990 (which speaks to the little improvement made in this system), Chavez spoke of the continued subhuman working conditions:

The farm labor system in place today is a system of economic slavery. Our workers labor for many hours every day under the hot sun, often without safe drinking water or toilet facilities. Our workers are constantly subjected to incredible pressures and intimidation to meet excessive quotas. These women who work in the fields are routinely subjected to sexual harassment and sexual assaults by the grower’s thugs. When our workers complain, or try to organize, they are fired, assaulted, and even murdered. (Chavez “Martin Luther King Jr. II 165)

The life of a farmworker was similar to that of a slave. There was no opportunity to build your sense of dignity, self-worth, and pride, and so too was there no opportunity for the upward mobility so many came to American to pursue. Aside from the economic exploitation and awful physical conditions in the field, the farm workers were also subjected to poison on a daily basis: “According to the farm workers, eight million pounds of pesticides are used annually on crops. The poisons cling to the leaves and are absorbed through the skin. Some of these sprays are so toxic that they affect workers weeks after the spraying has occurred. Farm workers in California have the highest incidence of job-related-illnesses” (Ingram 102). Aside from the obvious dangers of using pesticides on foods, these poisonous gases were sprayed, daily, on unsuspecting farmworkers. Their sickness fell on blind eyes, who, again, had more labor forces if they needed it. In an interview, Cesar offered the following information about the pesticides:

These poisons are “organophosphates, nerve gas poisons. That’s how they kill insects; they affect their nervous systems. And so, too, they affect our nervous systems. Pesticides have killed a great number of workers and incapacitated many others; they have wrecked the health of the workers, their families, their children ...

The more weight you have the more you can buffer; the less your weight, the more you are at risk. So it is children who are suffering the cancers and the birth defects. The number of miscarriages of women working with grapes is very high. We now see lots of cancer and lots of birth defects – terrible, terrible examples of birth defects – children born without arms or legs. Oh, it’s just horrible” (Ingram 105-6).

The farmers were expected to work in outdoor gas chambers; mothers needlessly experienced the tragedy of child loss, and expectant parents dealt with the tragedy of sick – very sick – children. What is an infrequent terrible tragedy in our world was an increasing occurrence in theirs – but no one cared. While one can assume no one knew, it is important to remember that some people *did* know – the growers who employed those workers and pesticide sprayers, and the farm workers themselves, who advocated for a safer workplace long before they received it. Chavez recalls: “When most of the people were worried about how thick the eggshells were on the birds, we [the farm workers] were talking about human beings – about workers and then about consumers” (Ingram 105). How incredibly sad that people *knew* about the pesticides, and yet were only concerned about the effects on the food they were going to consume... and not the workers who

provided that food for them, and were directly in contact with the toxic fumes. Even the government showed little care -- "In 1985, Governor Deukmejian vetoed a bill that required posting warning signs when a field has been sprayed" (Ingram 102). This is the experience of a California farm worker.

### ***Challenges to Helping the Helpless***

Cesar Chavez knew that what was happening was wrong, and he believed that despite the odds against him, he had justice and truth on his side – and he believed in Martin Luther King Jr.'s faith that "the universe is on the side of justice" (King 379). Though he had this faith, he was not naïve, and understood the odds against which he fought. He knew that money and power were dangerous things. In his own life, and despite the clear both temptation and need for it, Chavez rejected offers of financial assistance. This because he knew that gifts often come with strings attached. Chavez "carefully refused to accept money as a gift, saying, 'Sooner or later, whoever offers money will want something in return – a vote, a promise of support, maybe a change in our thinking" (Ingram 101). Though he was surrounded by poverty and certainly could have benefited *in the short term* from financial assistance, Chavez did not want to fall into the same system of corruption that he saw around him. Reflecting on this, he once said that "land has a powerful, powerful influence on people. You're dealing with landowners who literally own where you live, where you walk, and where you breathe. That power is awesome. And power tends to corrupt, and the system gets corrupted" (Ingram 111). And while Chavez was able to resist this temptation of this power, he was surrounded by many weaker people.

When you consider the people the farm workers could appeal to in their plight, it was a challenge to find someone without competing interests. The growers had their pockets in mind, and those pockets were ones that heavily donated to political campaigns. These donations led to the very corruption that Chavez refused to be a part of:

Everything is interwoven with agribusiness, so when you take on the growers you're also taking on the large insurance companies who also happen to be owners of the land, and you're taking on the large banks, and the railroads, and the pesticide and fertilizer companies. Talk about a power base against you. That's why legislatively and politically there's no way we can do anything. They've got it clamped. (Ingram 112)

From growers to insurance to transportation services to companies meant to protect the health of the workers... the farm workers were helpless. And this massive system of tainted loyalties and systematic corruption was no chance misfortune – it had been carefully planned: "To maintain cheap labor the growers have worked out a horrible system of surplus labor – a surplus labor pool that they are experts at maintaining. Experts! See, agribusiness controls immigration policy, and it has for years. So much so that not long ago the Immigration and Naturalization Service was part of the Department of Agriculture. They control it" (111). How the government allowed immigration service to be a *part* of the Department of Agriculture speaks to the deep-seated helplessness bestowed upon the poor. In fact, this interrelated use of immigration policy by growers only allowed them greater ability to exploit workers -- because it allowed them to import undocumented workers:

What agribusiness does is often outside the law. They would recruit in [China, Japan, India, the Philippines, Mexico, Asia, Africa, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala]. This is all recruitment for agribusiness, and that's how they do it [...] CI [interviewer]: So they bring in all of these foreigners and it's to their advantage that the people remain illegal. CC

[Chavez]: Oh yes, because they exploit them and the illegals can do nothing about it. They cannot make a move. They have to accept whatever they are given. (Ingram 113)

The agribusiness had the farm workers isolated. They had no one to help them... and so Chavez used the most powerful resource available to him – his own people. To start, Chavez and fellow organizer Fred Ross decided to utilize the system that is so exalted in the United States: Democracy. If the Mexican-Americans want their rights, they need to exercise them! There was a good number of Mexican-Americans, and so Ross and Chavez had faith that with their numbers, they could start to make improvements. However, “local officials, also aware of the political power of a Chicano voting bloc, made it as difficult as possible for Mexican-Americans to register” (Ingram 99). *La Causa*, the adopted name of the farm worker civil rights movement, encountered further corruption after they finally did establish a union: “... the farm workers made solid gains, particularly with the establishment of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, designed to oversee violations of agreements between workers and growers. Since that time, however, Governor George Deukmejian, who [...] was heavily financed by the California agribusiness, has appointed only pro-grower members to the board, and it has consistently hurt *la causa*” (Ingram 102). Obstacles placed by the powerful were not the only ones Chavez had to face. Linked with the influx of immigrants during strikes are the *braceros* – during one strike, “more than a hundred *braceros*, Mexican peasants, arrived to work the fields. They and the families they had left behind in Mexico were desperately poor and hungry. The *braceros* were willing to do the lowliest jobs for long hours with little pay. Librado Chavez [Cesar’s brother] pleaded with them in Spanish not to cross the picket lines, but although the *braceros* understood the plight of the grape-pickers, their own needs came first and they sadly crossed the lines” (Ingram 97). Though all the odds were against them, from all sides, Chavez and the supporters of *La Causa* continued their fight – despite the strength of the opposition, they knew morality was on their side. And while morality may seem like a weak offense, the progress made for the farm worker cause proves otherwise.

### ***“The Universe is on the Side of Justice”: Chavez’ Faith in the Strength of Morality***

*La Causa* was characterized by peaceful nonviolent protest, and this nonviolence was both in thought and action. Despite the fact that “just as Bull Connor turned the dogs loose on non-violent marchers in Alabama, the growers turn armed foremen on innocent farm workers in California” (Chavez “Martin Luther King Jr. II” 165), Chavez and his followers remained steadfast and peaceful. In fact, in a letter to EL Barr, a powerful California grower who accused Chavez and his followers of violence, Chavez wrote the following compassionate words: “We do not hate you or rejoice to see your industry destroyed; we hate the agribusiness system that seeks to keep us enslaved and we shall overcome and change it not by retaliation or bloodshed but by a determined nonviolent struggle carried on by those masses of farm workers who intend to be free and human” (Chavez “Good Friday Letter”). It was this call for humanity that touched millions of Americans, and allowed for progress to be made.

In an interview, Chavez said that “because we don’t have the economic or political force, we have to appeal to the moral force [...] it’s the moral force that compels, and then it translates into economic pressure. It starts from a moral stance, but it takes time” (Ingram 106). It was “moral force” that allowed this group of silenced people to finally be heard. While violence would have led to further resentment and hatred, the trained nonviolent strikes and boycotts that *La Causa* initiated roused American empathy, and perhaps, guilt:

Beginning in July 1988, Chavez undertook his longest fast ever – thirty-six days – to raise public awareness of pesticide use. The fast was [...] act of penance, according to Chavez, ‘for those in position of moral authority and for all men and women activists who know what is right and just, who know that they could or should do more, who have become bystanders and thus collaborators with an industry that does not care about its workers. (Ingram 102-3)

America is populated with millions of caring, empathetic, moral individuals. These individuals, however, are often ignorant of injustices around them, and Chavez and his people made it their mission to expose the wrongs they faced. They encouraged unity and action, rather than division and passivity. Aside from the moral imperative, Chavez saw that the farm worker plight appealed to many different audiences: “Our power is with the people. That’s where our power is. People – all shapes, all colors, all sizes, all religions. We have people who are very conservative who support what we do, people who are even anti-union. See, everybody interprets our work in a different way. Some people interpret us as a union, some people interpret our work as an ethnic issue, some people interpret our work as peace, some people see it as a religious movement. So we can appeal to broad sectors because of these different interpretations” (Ingram 110). It was this broad appeal that allowed Chavez to make a real impact – people were listening, finally, and when consumers listen, so too must the businessmen.

If the agribusiness cheated the workers of their humanity because of financial reasons, then Chavez just had to make it financially practical to treat human beings like human beings. And his strikes and boycotts did just that -- “Consumers understood the plight of the farm workers, and 17 million of them stopped buying grapes. The growers conceded the battle to the workers and negotiated contracts that insured better wages, improved working conditions, and recognition of the union” (Ingram 102). Amazing. Seventeen million Americans came out and sounded a resounding “No!” to systematic dehumanization. Even though it may have inconvenienced them, even though it had no direct impact on them, and even though the people they were helping were complete strangers, 17 million people saw the righteousness in the Mexican-American cause. Due to Chavez’ work on behalf of not only farm workers, but oppressed people everywhere, “our nation gained a measure of dignity by treating the workers with the respect they deserved” (Teaching Tolerance 11).

However, the work is nowhere near over. But Chavez showed that David can defeat Goliath -- when morality is on his side.

*“Our work is like two steps forward, and one and nine-tenths back” ~ Cesar Chavez (Ingram 108).*

## **Bibliography**

- \* Chavez, Cesar. "Good Friday Letter." An Organizer's Tale. Ilan Stavans: New York, Penguin. 2008. Print.
- \* Chavez, Cesar. "Juana Estrada Chavez." An Organizer's Tale. Ilan Stavans: New York, Penguin. 2008. Print.
- \* Ingram, Catherine. In the Footsteps of Gandhi. Berkeley: Parallax, 2003. Print.
- \* "Teaching Tolerance." Viva La Causa Teacher's Guide. 11. Print.

## LESSON PLAN

### *Day 1: Introduction to the text*

1. Distribute handouts
  - a. background info
  - b. the text itself
  - c. guided reading questions
2. Read and discuss background information
3. Begin reading the text in class
4. Stop periodically to check for comprehension
5. For the first paragraph or two, make sure to check in regarding what the kids think about the narrator.
  - a. At this point, he seems compassionate!
6. Continue reading in class
7. Students can finish the reading and guided reading questions for homework

### *Day 2: Understanding the Original Text*

1. Go over guided reading questions, and discuss as needed
2. Synthesize:
  - a. The narrator doesn't think his plan is cruel. Okay, well "humor me" – why is this plan cruel?
    - \* Allow students to offer answers (write them on the board – you'll need them!)
      - The wealthy are benefiting from the suffering of the poor
      - The wealthy are literally nourished by the poor, who don't have enough?
      - The poor are being treated like animals
      - The poor are defenseless
      - No one cares about their well-being
      - They are dehumanized
      - The poor are killed/indirectly murdered
      - Inhumane
    - b. Okay, now let's look at the way the British treat the Irish. In the case of British exploitation of the poor...
      - Do the English benefit from the suffering of the Irish? Yes!
      - Are the English nourished by the Irish, who don't have enough? Yes!
      - Are the Irish treated like animals? Yes!
      - Are the Irish defenseless? Yes!
      - Does anyone seem to care about the Irish well-being? Yes!
      - Are the Irish dehumanized? Yes!
      - Are the Irish killed/murdered? Yes!
      - Is the British treatment of the Irish inhumane? Yes!
    - \* The answer to all of these questions is yes... so what? What was Swift's point?
      - The British are treating the Irish poor like animals... and they aren't animals. And it needs to be stopped.
    - \* Why did he choose "devour" as the verb to describe what the landlords do to the Irish?
      - They did devour them – they took away their ability to live
        - Denotation vs Connotation
  3. Define satire. Explain how Swift created a narrator in order to get his point across – he did not mean what his "narrator" said, and yet we were able to determine what Swift meant. How?
    - a. Give out handout – how to identify satire

### *Days 3-4: Making connections*

1. Transition to film – tell them we’re going to look at MP from a different perspective...
2. Show digital film
3. Ask for reactions – what was the point of that film?
4. Ask the class if they think the type of exploitation that the British showed towards the Irish still exists today
5. Ask if they know who Cesar Chavez was, and introduce students to La Causa, the national farm worker’s movement.
  - a. Watch Teaching Tolerance’s *Viva La Causa*
6. Give students information from Chavez era regarding life on a farm and working conditions and corporate greed
  - b. Read the content essay
  - c. As students read, ask them to note actions, behaviors, etc. that remind them of “A Modest Proposal.”
7. Discuss similarities (and differences)
8. Discuss each author’s nonviolent method for creating change – how did they do it? Why did each work?
  - d. Contrast to rioting/fighting or writing a nasty essay... why were these effective movements in comparison?
  - e. Talk about coercion, persuasion, conversion
  - f. Perhaps read a speech about the power of nonviolence? Chavez’ speech about Martin Luther King Jr. (1978) would be a good choice for this.
9. Give information regarding how to know you are buying from people who respect farm workers
10. Homework – read and respond to articles from Teaching Tolerance about modern day farm worker exploitation.
  - g. Or read this story: <http://www.grist.org/industrial-agriculture/2011-04-01-bon-appetit-report-shines-light-on-farm-labor-conditions>

### **Materials**

1. Class copies of:
  - a. “A Modest Proposal”
  - b. Background info handout
  - c. Guided reading questions
  - d. How to identify satire handout
  - e. Copies of content essay on farm workers
2. Access to digital story
3. Teaching Tolerance video *Viva La Causa*
4. Optional – copies of modern farm worker struggle stories

## REQUIRED BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE FOR A MODEST PROPOSAL

### **Brief Irish History to 1729**

390-461	St. Patrick brings Christianity to Ireland	1695-1728	Penal Laws: Acts against Catholics. These: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Prevent Catholics from bearing arms and owning horses worth over five pounds.</li><li>o Restrict their rights to education.</li><li>o Stop them buying land</li><li>o Ban Catholics from serving in the army, holding public office, entering the legal profession, or voting.</li></ul>
795-1014	Vikings begin series of invasions		
1170	Long-term British involvement in Ireland begins		
1541	Henry VIII of England, a Protestant, declares himself King of Ireland		
1649	Oliver Cromwell crushes Irish opposition.		
By 1703,	Protestants own 90% of the country's land.		

### **Jonathan Swift, 1667-1745**

- Parents were English Protestants, but he was born in Ireland
- Considered the great prose satirist of the English language.
- His tombstone reads, "He has gone where savage indignation can tear his heart no more."

A hero's welcome (parades, church bells ringing, bonfires, the whole deal) awaited Jonathan Swift when he arrived in Dublin during the late summer of 1726. This because—in addition to his success with *Gulliver's Travels*—he had rallied public opinion for the cause of Irish economic and political independence in his role as M.B. Drapier of St. Francis Street (an alias). In his Fourth Drapier Letter, addressed to the "Whole People of Ireland," he declared that "by the Laws of God, of Nature, of Nations, and of your own Country, you are and ought to be as Free a People as your brethren in England."

Strangely enough, this was the same man who referred to Ireland as "the most miserable country upon earth" and wrote "I do suppose nobody hates and despises this kingdom more than myself" and described the trip from England to Ireland as "a passage to the land I hate." He returned to Ireland for good in 1713 as Dean of St. Patrick's, to make this "wretched Dublin in Ireland" his permanent home, "a poisoned rate in a hole," as he describes his situation to a friend in a letter. However, he was constantly role-playing and he just as often praised Ireland and the quality of his own life there.

### **The Modest Proposal**

A *Modest Proposal* was written by Jonathan Swift in 1729 as a pamphlet (a kind of essay). At this time, and for many years afterward, Ireland was far poorer than England, who was currently ruling over Ireland. Laws were imposed by English landlords, enforced by English soldiers, and suspects were tried in the English courts. The Irish government was highly limited by the English. Most Irishmen were Roman Catholics and employed as agricultural laborers or tenant farmers. The landlords (English) were paid their rent from the produce of the land, at rates that the workers could rarely afford. These ruling classes were usually Protestants. Many of them were not born in Ireland, nor did they live there permanently. They usually resided primarily in England, and were referred to as "absentee landlords," because they claimed they did not live in Ireland as to avoid paying taxes, but because they owned the land, they could still collect fees from the poor men working on it (a pretty scandalous system). If the laborers lost their work, there would always be other poor people to take it up. Thousands of homeless Irish farmers flocked to the cities, trying to survive. Once the small farmers had been cleared off of the land, the farms were converted to wheat farms or cattle farms. The wheat and cattle were exported to England, leaving nothing to eat for many Irish families. Finally, there was no work available in the cities. All manufactured goods had to come from England. All of Ireland's exports had to go to England. There was no social security system and starvation was as common as in the Third World today. Things in Ireland were not looking up (litote!).

## **PRE-READING VOCABULARY**

**Chair:** (Here) a Sedan Chair - a covered chair supported by poles, carried by two bearers.

**Episcopal:** refers to church administration

**Gibbet:** Place where criminals are hanged.

**Papists:** Supporters of the Pope, an insulting name for Catholics.

**Pretender:** James Stuart, a Catholic who pretended to (claimed) the English and Scottish thrones.

**Shambles:** Place (usually in a town) where animals are slaughtered and butchered.

**Solar year:** A year in the ordinary sense (as measured by the earth's going once round the sun).

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

“A Modest Proposal” Guided Reading Questions

1. What country is Swift discussing throughout his proposal? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What sight becomes a “melancholy object” for Swift and others who walk through the towns and cities?
3. What will give the people reason to put up a statue for the “preserver of the nation?” What problem would he solve to attain such an honor? **Quote** the reason – this is key!
4. What will he do with the children once they turn one year old? (Bottom of first column, page one)
5. At the top of the second column on the first page, what does the writer say that his proposal will prevent?
6. How many children are born into poor households annually (not including those who die within the first year)? Read carefully.
7. Why does the author say that a boy or girl before age 12 is not a “saleable commodity”? What does “saleable commodity” mean, and what does this tell you about the narrator?
8. SUMMARIZE the problem the narrator is describing.
9. Describe Swift’s plan. You may read it and ask yourself if he is serious – that’s the point! 😊 Just write what he proposes.
10. Who, does Swift say, this food will be “especially dear to”? Why? What have they already done? (Use the same verb he does in your answer!)
11. What does the following line mean, in context? “One male will be sufficient to serve four females.” What quality is this helping to reveal in our narrator?

12. "The number of popish infants is at least three to one in this kingdom: and therefore it will have one other collateral advantage, by lessening the number of papists among us." What does this mean? What does this tell you about the narrator?
  
13. What can the "thrifty" people do with the children?
  
14. The narrator says that it is "not improbable that some scrupulous people might be apt to censure such a practice (although indeed very unjustly), as a little bordering upon cruelty; which, I confess, hath always been with me the strongest objection against any project, however so well intended." What does he mean here? What does this tell you about him?
  
15. Why does the narrator say he is not overly concerned with "that vast number of poor people, who are aged, diseased, or maimed"?
  
16. What makes the entire paragraph containing the quote in question #15 especially cruel? What can you tell about the narrator?
  
17. List the main solutions (there are **SIX** that he lists) that Swift's proposal would solve:
  
18. So, "logically," this plan makes sense, right? Eating babies *would* help the economy.... So why is it still wrong?
  
19. On the last page, in the first column, Swift says, "let no man talk to me of other expedients." What are expedients? (Look it up if you do not know). What are some of the expedients he mentions?
  
20. How are these "expedients" different from the proposer's idea?

21. Why does the proposer say that he will “let no man talk to [him]” about these expedients? Why doesn’t he think there will be a “hearty and sincere attempt to put them into practice”?
  
22. At the end of the second to last paragraph, the proposer makes a challenge to “those politicians who dislike my overture.” What does he tell them to do, and why?
  
23. Describe the proposer. What is he like? What kind of job would you imagine him having, and why?
  
24. This essay is called “A Modest Proposal.” What does the word “modest” mean? Is this, in fact, a modest proposal?

**SATIRE: The literary art of diminishing a subject and making it appear ridiculous. The purpose is to expose folly or wickedness by using irony, derision, or wit, and to call attention to and inspire CHANGE in flawed cultural and societal norms.**

The ability to recognize literary satire may make the difference between whether a person recognizes flaws in society (and perhaps themselves) from a book like *Huckleberry Finn* or bans it from his/her library. That is why learning how to recognize literary satire is something that even non-English majors should learn how to do! ☺

Spotting satire is often difficult because it requires rejection of the surface meaning in favor of a new, opposite meaning hidden underneath. While there is no foolproof method for determining if a text is satirical, consider the following qualities below to help you figure it out:

**Credibility:** Satirical texts often use a narrative voice, character, or source of information that is clearly not trustworthy. Remember, the author is not always the narrator – most often in satirical works, the author creates a narrator to make his point!

What makes Swift's narrator unreliable? How do we know he is not trustworthy?

*Example: The narrator cites an unnamed but knowing "American friend" who provides information about cooking children – if this person were actually reliable, they would be named (and what kind of trustworthy person is an expert on eating children?).*

**Context:** What do we know about the author outside this work? Do the views presented here match their usual beliefs? Would the medium which published the piece accept the author's statements literally?

What do we know about Jonathon Swift? From what we know of him, does this match his usual beliefs?

**Contradictions:** Some satirical texts contain such obvious and glaring contradictions in logic or fact that an author cannot have seriously made the error.

What obvious contradictions exist within Swift's work?

**Consent:** This is the most difficult category to judge, but also the ultimate basis for determining satire. In the end, satire becomes apparent when readers decide that it is impossible for themselves, rational members of society, and even the author to agree with the claims in the text. Because we take issue with literal arguments all the time, this process goes beyond normal disagreement – it must analyze author intent. By measuring the text against societal norms and our values, we must decide whether the author can literally mean what he wrote.

Is it possible for rational readers to agree with what the narrator says? Why may he have chosen this particular "analogy"?

**Composure:** One huge clue to irony is the tone in which the argument is presented, especially if the author appears to be using hyperbole or litotes. Extreme statements do get made, but when they are made by sane individuals, they acknowledge and address the audience's initial shock. Satire comes off as either too extreme or too calm and fails to seriously consider rational audience reaction.

What was your initial reaction to Swift's suggestion that the best way to solve the poverty crisis is to eat the babies?

1. For a satire to be effective, exaggeration is necessary. Why do you think that is?
  
2. Satire “passes over a single foe to charge the whole army.” What does this mean? Who does satire attack? Are the Irish presented solely as victims, or do you think Swift blames them, as well? Why?
  
3. What is the difference between being satirical and just being funny? Just being critical?
  
4. Why do you think Swift wrote this proposal? Is this just a joke or a story about eating babies?
  
5. Why satire? Why not just write an angry article about how the British exploit poor, defenseless Irishmen?
  
6. Do you think Swift’s use of irony is effective, or does it risk not being taken seriously by readers and arousing nothing more than disgust and outrage at the author? Explain your opinion.