

AoW #2

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading on the page.
3. Write a one-page reflection in your WN

Article #1: Losing the Race for Intelligence

Source: Leonard Pitts, *Miami Herald*, February 6, 2011

ITEM: Only 28 percent of high school science teachers consistently follow National Research Council guidelines encouraging them to present students with evidence of evolution. Thirteen percent ``explicitly advocate creationism or intelligent design."

These are among the findings of Penn State political scientists Michael Berkman and Eric Plutzer after examining data from a representative survey of 926 high school biology teachers. Writing in the Jan. 28 issue of *Science* magazine, they report that most science teachers -- 60 percent -- cheat controversy by such stratagems as telling students it does not matter if they ``believe" in evolution, so long as they understand enough to pass a test. Or they teach evolution on a par with creationism and encourage students to make up their own minds.

Once upon a time, there lived a stupid giant.

The giant had not always been stupid. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say the giant had once revered intelligence, reason and the byproducts thereof. Indeed, the giant was renowned for an ingenuity and standard of living that made it the envy of the world.

But much of the world did more than envy the giant. Much of the world admired and respected it. Its basic decency, along with its strength and intelligence, set it apart.

There came a time, however, when, though the giant retained its strength and arguably even its decency, it lost its intelligence.

No one can say exactly how and when the loss occurred. There was no great blast of thunder and lightning to herald it, no sudden instant when the giant's intelligence plummeted dramatically from the instant before.

No, stupidity crept over the giant with the stealth of twilight, a product less of one abrupt moment than of a thousand moments of complacency, of resting on laurels, of allowing curiosity to be teased and bullied out of bright children, of dumbing down textbooks so kids could get better grades with less work, of using ``elite" like a curse word. And, of behaving as if knowing things, and being able to extrapolate from and otherwise make critical use of, the things one knows, was a betrayal of some fundamental human authenticity -- some need to keep it real.

Stupidity stole over the giant until it could no longer tell science from faith, or conventional wisdom from actual wisdom and in any event, valued ideological purity above them all. Stupidity snaked over the giant until science teachers shrank from teaching science, history books contained history that wasn't history, late-night comics got easy laughs from people on the street who could not say when the War of 1812 was fought, political leaders told outright lies with blithe smiles and no fear of being caught and you would not have been surprised to hear that someone had fixed mathematics, so that 2+2 could now equal 17, thus preserving the all-important self esteem of second-grade kids.

Some regarded the giant's stupidity as a danger. They reasoned that when one is so big that one's merest movement or slightest utterance affects the entire world, it's a good idea if those movements and utterances are animated by something more than autonomic function.

Others saw the giant's stupidity as an opportunity. They learned eagerly until they surpassed the giant's intellect. They grew until they rivaled the giant's size and strength. They did not attempt to match the giant's decency. They considered decency a hindrance.

And the giant? It sat on its haunches in the mud as the world changed about it and new giants rose and shook their fists. The giant did not notice. It was watching *The Jersey Shore* on MTV.

And it lived obliviously ever after.

Article #2: What happens when mom unplugs teens for 6 months? (excerpt)

Source: Beth J. Harpaz,, *Associated Press* – Tue Jan 18, 2011

Susan Maushart lived out every parent's fantasy: She unplugged her teenagers. For six months, she took away the Internet, TV, iPods, cell phones and video games. The eerie glow of screens stopped lighting up the family room. Electronic devices no longer chirped through the night like "evil crickets." And she stopped carrying her iPhone into the bathroom.

The result of what she grandly calls "The Experiment" was more OMG than LOL — and nothing less than an immersion in RL (real life).

As Maushart explains in a book released in the U.S. this week called "The Winter of Our Disconnect" (Penguin, \$16.95), she and her kids rediscovered small pleasures — like board games, books, lazy Sundays, old photos, family meals and listening to music together instead of everyone plugging into their own iPods.

Her son Bill, a videogame and TV addict, filled his newfound spare time playing saxophone. "He swapped Grand Theft Auto for the Charlie Parker songbook," Maushart wrote. Bill says The Experiment was merely a "trigger" and he would have found his way back to music eventually. Either way, he got so serious playing sax that when the gadget ban ended, he sold his game console and is now studying music in college.

Maushart's eldest, Anni, was less wired and more bookish than the others, so her transition in and out of The Experiment was the least dramatic. Her friends thought the ban was "cool." If she needed computers for schoolwork, she went to the library. Even now, she swears off Facebook from time to time, just for the heck of it.

Maushart's youngest daughter, Sussy, had the hardest time going off the grid. Maushart had decided to allow use of the Internet, TV and other electronics outside the home, and Sussy immediately took that option, taking her laptop and moving in with her dad — Maushart's ex-husband — for six weeks. Even after she returned to Maushart's home, she spent hours on a landline phone as a substitute for texts and Facebook. But the electronic deprivation had an impact anyway: Sussy's grades improved substantially. Maushart wrote that her kids "awoke slowly from the state of *cognitus interruptus* that had characterized many of their waking hours to become more focused logical thinkers."

Maushart decided to unplug the family because the kids — ages 14, 15 and 18 when she started The Experiment — didn't just "use media," as she put it. They "inhabited" media. "They don't remember a time before e-mail, or instant messaging, or Google," she wrote.

Like so many teens, they couldn't do their homework without simultaneously listening to music, updating Facebook and trading instant messages. If they were amused, instead of laughing, they actually said "LOL" aloud. Her girls had become mere "accessories of their own social-networking profile, as if real life were simply a dress rehearsal (or more accurately, a photo op) for the next status update."

Possible WN topics:

Do you agree with Pitts? Why? Why not?

What can be done to solve the problem that Pitts describes?

Do you think being plugged in makes us dumber?