

THE SATIRICAL PROPOSAL

Lesson Introduction:

The purpose of satire is to criticize something of which the writer disapproves, usually in hopes of bringing about a change. Satire criticizes by saying what it doesn't mean or by saying much more than it means. It blends a critical attitude with humor and wit. Usually, modern satire attacks a group, an abstraction, an injustice, or a prejudice. What is the advantage of using satire instead of criticizing a situation or problem head-on and straightforwardly? The main advantage to using the satirical approach is that it grabs attention and provokes thought. And it is fun. Everyone hates to be preached at; everyone enjoys a nice "mind game."

How does satire work? By reducing to the ridiculous whatever it chooses to attack in one or more of these ways:

1. It may grossly exaggerate (as Orwell does in 1984 by taking totalitarian control beyond its 1949 level).
2. It may playfully reverse the facts (as Swift does in the fourth book of Gulliver's Travels, when men (the Yahoos) are beasts and horses (the Houyhnhnms) are intelligent, rational, and virtuous creatures).
3. It may transfer the situation to a different area where its ridiculousness will be more apparent (as a writer annoyed by excesses of time and motion studies in a government bureau once did when he applied the same principles of the efficiency experts to the equipment and conduct of a symphony orchestra).

Lesson Assignment:

Read with care and attention Jonathan Swift's classical satirical essay, "A Modest Proposal."

Then you are to write a satirical essay titled "A Not-So-Modest Proposal." Topic possibilities are endless – virtually any complaint you have about the ways things and people are could work as a basic topic. A good way to get started on this paper might be to brainstorm a list of your top ten gripes and pet peeves of the moment. Then consider which ones are worth a major attack through a satirical proposal. Do not, however, personally attack another person. Be tasteful!

What you'll be doing is proposing an outrageous remedy in a reasonable voice. Be sure in your paper to put verbal irony to good use. Notice in reading Swift's essay how many times he is saying one thing but really meaning the other. You'll be using this strategy throughout your essay. The resulting tension between what you say and what you really mean is a large part of the fun of satire. Remember, good satire never lets on that it is not serious.

Proposal Writing Guidelines:

Even though you're being satirical, you'll need to fulfill all the conventions of any proposal:

- establish that a problem exists;
- detail exactly how your proposal will work;
- provide arguments and evidence that it can work;
- and respond to such potential objections as self-interest and lack of feasibility.

What should be kept in mind in writing and revising the satirical essay?

1. Choose as your topic something you'd like to see change or be reconsidered.
2. Choose a subject about which you feel strongly.

3. Decide which satirical method best suits your purpose.
4. Give the appearance of writing seriously. The appearance of the truth is called “verisimilitude.” Verisimilitude is necessary in order to engage your reader’s thoughtful attention and lead him through the intellectual game of satire. The ideal is to be taken initially as serious so that the gradual revelation of satirical purpose is enhanced.
5. Be sure your satirical proposal becomes apparent. Satire backfires if it does injury to the cause in which it is written. There’s no preventing the truly stupid from misreading by reading satire literally, but you should be sure to scatter the “keys” to your satire along the way so that most readers will be able to unlock your purpose.

Minimum length: Three to four full typed, MLA formatted, double-spaced pages (or more if needed to complete your proposal).

Below is a fine example of Swiftonian irony and satire. Since I’ve provided this example, **you may not use this topic.**

A Not-So-Modest Proposal

I do not know about you, but I am fed up with old people! The elderly have become the new blight of America. The downfall of our country is upon us because of swarms of aging Americans sucking up our resources, our wealth, and our time. It is time that something be done to remedy the situation.

Like most Americans, I love my country. This is the greatest place in the world to live, but this great country is plagued with a growing epidemic that will soon destroy all for which America stands. This epidemic is the ever-growing expansion of the elderly population in our country. Think about it: What do the elderly do for us?

In studying this phenomenon, one can easily realize that the elderly, particularly those way past their prime, are like parasites feeding off the great sustenance this country has to offer. I have thought long and hard and still cannot think of one advantage of having the elderly remain a part of our great society. They cannot attend to themselves, they are constantly ill, they are dangerous, and they do not benefit our country in one way. I can think of numerous examples such as the recent nationwide news story of the elderly driver who killed several innocent people by driving his Buick through a farmer’s market in California.

As a result, I have come up with a not-so-modest proposal. In my proposal I envision a retirement center like no other – a final retirement center. A center where one can gracefully and ceremonially retire his loved ones. I am speaking of a center for the euthanasia of the elderly, a place where loved ones can say goodbye to their aged family members.

Like any good car, favorite piece of clothing, or household appliance, it soon comes time when we need to say goodbye to our aged loved ones. Despite achievements in medical technology, the human body still begins to fail as old age creeps in. Instead of following the pattern of nature, which allows the elderly to slowly and painfully creep onto death, I believe Americans should have the opportunity to rid themselves of the nuisance of caring for an elderly family member. After all, Americans have been using euthanasia on their family pets for centuries. When old Spot is too decrepit to be an asset to the family, he is put out of his misery by the family veterinarian. Why can’t Americans also have the same privilege with Granny or Pops?

Think about it seriously. What really shows more love and concern, allowing one’s loved one to leave this world in a breath of peace before the pitfalls of old age catch up with them, or allowing them to slowly lose all capacities of a normal human being as they wither away in the nearest nursing home? Personally, when I am too old to care for myself without being a burden

on my family, I would love for my family to have the opportunity to “put me to sleep” just as they have done with family pet after pet.

When Americans have reached past their prime and are simply a liability to their family, they serve no purpose. Social security and Medi-Care are two of the most expensive programs that our government supports. The tax liability alone for these programs is enormous. Without the excessive expense of caring for those elderly Americans who can no longer care for themselves, Americans would be much better off. Our tax liabilities would decrease and so would our group insurance expenses. When insurance companies are no longer forced to provide insurance for elderly patients who consume enormous amounts of resources just to prolong their life, then we all benefit from lower premiums. What about automobile insurance? Have you ever been on the road with an elderly citizen who should not be driving? Personally, twice drivers too old to be handling a four thousand pound piece of machinery have smashed into me. Life, you see, would be so much more enjoyable for us all.

How about the cost and inconveniences of caring for the elderly? Nursing homes are expensive, and if one is to allow their elderly family members to reside at home with them, then that person is also forced to become the primary care giver. I've been in this situation; it's no fun waking at two o'clock in the morning to wash out a bedpan for someone too old to make it to the commode. And this just scratches the surface of the many, many inconveniences caused by caring for an elderly family member. Besides the expense of medication, Depends, specialized medical equipment like wheelchairs and breathing machines, one is also forced to put their lives on hold in order to care for someone whose health will not improve. As a result, Americans are wasting away the prime years of their life caring for someone past their prime. By the time your loved one finally makes the transition into the next life, you are too old to enjoy life. Now you need the same care you have given them for the last twenty years.

The cycle is never-ending, unless of course we begin a nationwide program of euthanasia for the elderly. An idyllic center for retiring one's elderly loved one is just what we need, a center where we can say goodbye gracefully. I envision a place where Grandma can be strolled in, the family can gather around her bedside for a kiss goodbye, and then peacefully watch as the technician puts her to sleep. Following the brief procedure, the family can then walk over to the chapel for the funeral services. Convenient, peaceful, economical, and appropriate, what more can a person ask for their favorite, elderly loved one?