Student

English 1010

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Evolved vs. Designed

**Evolution and Intelligent Design in the Classroom Overview and Context**

Human life. Where did it come from? Why are we here? What caused life on earth to form into what it is today? These are questions that have been asked for centuries and argued in many different ways. Today, the debate has expanded from the scientific community into the classroom. Should ideas of Intelligent Design (ID), or the idea that a god created man, be taught alongside evolution? In this essay we will view three of the many different ways that people argue this topic, and examine their strengths and weaknesses.

**Open Letter to Kansas School Board Summary and Review**

*Article Summary and Review*

Back in 2005, the debate whether or not to teach Intelligent Design in Kansas public schools was coming to a head, and many people were sending their thoughts through letters to the school board members. Bobby Henderson was one such person. Henderson’s letter, titled “Open Letter to the Kansas School Board,” opens with Henderson explaining that he has heard of the recent debates and is concerned that students will not be able to hear *all* viewpoints. It is at this juncture that Henderson introduces us to the church he believes should be fairly considered alongside Christianity; The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM).

Henderson, of course, is not serious in this belief, but instead has found an effective and sarcastic way to show and convince others of his viewpoints. Rather than rejecting his opponent’s theories and stating why he disagrees with them, Henderson takes their standpoint to the most extreme belief possible. He continues in this for several paragraphs, explaining some of his “church’s” beliefs.

Told in an extremely mocking tone, the entirety of Henderson’s paper is a jab at organized religion, and states that “If the Intelligent Design theory is not based on faith, but instead another scientific theory, as is claimed, then you must also allow our theory to be taught, as it is also based on science, not on faith.” (Henderson). Concluding with a vague “threat” to sue the school board if they do not take him seriously and an obvious throw that evolution is superior to the other two viewpoints, Henderson also includes an “artistic drawing” of the FSM. Although his *method* of explaining his views is quite good, his viewpoints have very few facts to back them up and are extremely biased. Henderson explains quite often throughout his website that he is not trying to attack any churches but is instead trying to get people to listen to reason. While these may be noble intentions, anyone reading his paper who is remotely religious will surely find offense throughout the letter. This may not be a problem for Henderson, whose audience is clearly those whose beliefs align with his own, but in trying to convince others, his paper is extremely ineffective. Ultimately, Henderson’s letter is clearly an extremely biased opinion piece that expresses very little of the opposing side of the issue.

*Genre and Medium Strengths*

Personal letters are opinion pieces that can express the authors views exactly as they see them. This allows them to use personal experiences in their arguments, something that not many other genres can use effectively. Letters also allow authors to address single persons, hence allowing them to attach their arguments to a political figure, person of prominence, or personal friends. This single person attachment allows the author to talk about specific quotes, arguments, or views that the receiver of the letter may have expressed in the past, thus allowing a much more streamlined, to the point argument.

*Genre and Medium Limitations*

Personal letters are not something that someone would read to gain more info on the topic at hand, but instead are pieces that they would read to justify what they *already* believe. Letters very rarely show both sides of an issue, and are almost always show facts that have been swayed towards the author’s opinion. Letters do not have to be peer-reviewed since they are not intended to be published anywhere, resulting in pieces that may be inaccurate or flat out wrong.

**Intelligent Design in the Public School Science Classroom Summary and Review**

*Article Summary and Review*

As stated earlier, ID is the proposal that we, as humans, were not created by evolution, but instead by a “creator” who formed us in their image. Many schools across the country embraced this idea, and even taught it in their biology classrooms. Eventually, the Supreme Court declared this practice unconstitutional, as they saw teaching ID as endorsing a religion in public schools. Many teachers and schools ignore this ruling however, and continue to teach ID alongside evolution. With all of these teachers acting unconstitutionally, many have questioned whether to change the ruling, and allow teachers to teach what they wish. One such questioner is Wesley D. Hickey in his peer reviewed piece *Intelligent Design in the Public School Science Classroom.*

 Hickey’s writing begins with an introductory paragraph introducing the readers to the issue at hand, ID being taught in classrooms, and uses language that only those familiar with the topic will understand. The article goes on for several paragraphs introducing new ideas and thoughts into the discussion, while trying to accurately showing both sides. While Hickey’s attempt at staying neutral is quite valiant, he comes off instead as someone trying not to offend anyone. For instance, he may say something extremely swayed towards one side and then immediately say something swayed extremely far towards the opposite. This effectively undermines his arguments as the audience doesn’t know what he is trying to say until his conclusion, where his bias and main ideas finally manifest themselves.

 Heading into his conclusion, we are finally told that Hickey does want ID taught in the classroom, but not for any reasons he has previously mentioned, religious or otherwise. Instead, Hickey wants ID taught in order to show students how to learn from other research, analyze faulty data, and reach their own conclusions. Hickey seems to believe this is a solution that can appeal both sides of the opposing issue. However, it is worth noting this is clearly an idea slanted much more towards ID critics, not advocates.

*Genre and Medium Strengths*

 Peer Reviewed Articles are fantastic sources of information, mostly due to their frequent attempts to remain unbiased and their reviews by multiple sources. Should someone only get their information from these sources, they would become quite knowledgeable on the topic, but find that most of their information was slightly slanted towards one side or another. Their information *would* be much more correct than most other sources info however. Ultimately, Peer-Reviewed Articles are excellent sources of info as long as readers make their own judgments based on the available facts and read many articles from many viewpoints on their topic.

*Genre and Medium Limitation*

Many articles, including Hickey’s, fail to remain unbiased throughout their contents and instead end up quite one-sided. Also, anyone reading an article hoping to learn about their topic for the first time will find reading one very difficult, as authors quite often use language far above that of a casual reader and instead focus on jargon and abbreviations that are only known to those well versed in the topic

**Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed Summary and Review**

*Article Summary and Review*

 When it comes to ID, many people have questions and concerns about its authenticity. In his 97-minute-long, *very* scientific documentary *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed,* Ben Stein clearly “answers” all of them. Opening up with an extremely moving interview with a well-dressed scientist who was kicked out of the Smithsonian, we are given the sense that this man almost lost it all just because he wanted to express religious beliefs. That is, until it is revealed that he didn’t release his religious beliefs to a small number of people. Rather, he released an article relating closer to a conspiracy theory than a scientific paper, and branded it as official Smithsonian Institute research. This is a theme seen throughout Stein’s “documentary.” As his own title even says, there is “No Intelligence Allowed” in any of the wild accusations Stein throws out. Many times, his examples/stories are told solely from the perspective of the victims, with no chance given to the other parties to explain themselves. When Stein *does* decide to secure interviews with the villains of the scientific community, he provokes them. He asks them questions designed to contradict themselves, plays music making them sound like fools, and even cuts them off in the middle of their statements with jump cuts to outdoor shots. Stein’s piece begins seemingly unbiased and quite intellectual, but as time goes on and his motives become clear, Stein’s movie, as well as his arguments, becomes biased, unintelligent, and accusatory. Eventually culminating in his final argument, since the Nazi’s believed so heavily in evolution and not in god, if you believe in evolution, you are a Nazi.

*Genre and Medium Strengths*

 Documentaries are very informative and provide lots of interviews, facts, statistics, and other info in order to express their views. They are extremely entertaining to watch and can be viewed by casual moviegoers for hours on end. This allows them to reach an audience that other genres cannot. Filmmakers can also use music to change emotion, shots to change perspective, and many other filming tricks to make their audience believe as they do.

*Genre and Medium Limitations*

Should someone only get their information from a documentary such as this, their viewpoints would be extremely biased and very skewed from the truth. Documentaries are created by people who are passionate about a topic to the point where they will spend anywhere from months to years making a movie about it. This usually means they have their own opinion about the topic beforehand, which, consciously or unconsciously, almost always creates a movie biased towards what the director believes. Creating something not informative, as documentaries so often brand themselves, but instead something closer to propaganda.

This is not to say that all documentaries are this way, many do manage to achieve the neutrality that is needed to successfully tell both sides of a story. However, more documentaries fall short of this goal and instead end up taking the much easier path of creating victims and heroes. After the filmmaker does this, they very quickly fall down a slippery slope and change from being unbiased to throwing wild accusations with very little evidence towards the perceived villains. Things such as playing ridiculous music over their interviews, taking their words out of context, or making fun of their points after the interview is over, make the “villains” look truly evil.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

 The debate whether Intelligent Design should be taught alongside Evolution is very complicated and involves people from many different backgrounds and lifestyles. For these reasons, it is of the upmost importance that debaters get their info from the most accurate and reliable sources. Looking back at our first source, it becomes clear that letters are neither accurate nor reliable, as they are extremely biased and do not have to contain true facts. Should someone only get their info from a source similar to a letter, they would have strong feelings about their topic, yet very few facts or evidence to back up their claims.

 Looking at another of our sources, we realize that documentaries are somewhat accurate, but horribly unreliable. Since we rarely realize our director’s viewpoint until very late in the movie, we cannot know what facts are accurate and what facts are completely false. Should someone only get their info from a source resembling a documentary, they would have a lot of info about their topic, as well as strong feelings, but would say and believe things that simply weren’t true. They would have no reliability in their facts and wouldn’t know what was true and what wasn’t. Ultimately, they would have ideas, but no proof.

 This brings us to our last and most reliable source, peer-reviewed articles. These are perhaps the most accurate and reliable sources available. Due to their requirement of being reviewed by other experts, the facts must be accurate and the opinions must reflect the views of most people in that particular field. Should someone only get their info from sources such as this, they would become quite knowledgeable about their topic, but perhaps lack some of the passion that drives other, more “exciting”, genres.

Works Cited

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