

**UIL READY WRITING**  
**CONTEST TOPICS AND STATE ACADEMIC MEET 1ST PLACE ESSAYS**  
**SPRING 2012**

***INVITATIONAL A***

**Topic I**

“When we try to pick at anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything in the Universe.”

— John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 1911

**Topic II**

“They that start by burning books will end by burning men.”

— Heinrich Heine, from *Almansor*, 1821

***INVITATIONAL B***

**Topic I**

“How to begin to educate a child. First rule: leave him alone. Second rule: leave him alone. Third rule: leave him alone. That is the whole beginning.”

— D.H. Lawrence, English novelist, 1918

**Topic II**

“A censor is a man who knows more than he thinks you ought to.”

— Granville Hicks (1901-1983), American Marxist

***DISTRICT 1***

**Topic I**

“The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.”

— Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961)

American novelist/journalist, *A Farewell to Arms*, 1929

**Topic II**

“Many people would rather die than think; in fact, most do.”

— Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), British philosopher/social critic

***DISTRICT 2***

**Topic I**

“How is the world ruled and led to war? Diplomats lie to journalists and believe these lies when they see them in print.”

— Karl Kraus (1874-1936), Austrian writer/journalist

**Topic II**

“Revolution means turning the wheel.”

— Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), French/American composer

**REGIONAL****Topic I**

“We live in a society today I believe that is motivated by anonymous people that write faceless texts and twitters and it gets things stirred up. There's no accountability to that type of society. There's an immediacy that they request. And I think it's very important that when people make decisions that they make them based on facts and analysis and insight. What's real, not what's false. And sometimes I think that gets skewed up a little bit.”

— Mike Sherman, former Texas A&M Football Coach,  
*Austin American Statesman*, December 2, 2011

**Topic II**

“It is possible that some aspects of recent disappointments that Americans have endured can be attributed to a tendency among those at the highest level of American society to permit sports rhetoric, metaphors of winning and losing and game dramaturgy\* to supply patterns for dealing with issues that are deadly earnest, that have a logic rooted in the real world, and are not games at all.”

— Peter Francis Murphy, Sports Writer and Author,  
*Studs, Tools, and the Family Jewels*, February 2001

\*The art of the theater, especially with regard to the techniques involved with writing a play.

**STATE****Topic I**

Readers nearing retirement age probably recall a childhood media environment consisting of magazines and newspapers, radio, possibly a phonograph, and an occasional Saturday matinee at a neighborhood movie theater. In contrast, most of today's high school students cannot recall a time when the universe of television channels was fewer than three dozen, and their younger siblings have never known a world without interactive video games, personal computers, the World Wide Web, and instant messaging. Today's teenagers, who spent in excess of \$155 billion in 2000, have never known a time when they were not viewed as consumers, thus when substantial portions of media and media content were not tailored expressly for them.

Along with rapid growth in media channels, digital technology is dramatically altering media experiences, providing sights and sounds that equal or – some would argue – surpass reality. Today's audiences hear orchestras in their own homes with the fidelity of the concert hall; they experience space travel in movie theaters so real that it can engender motion sickness; almost any screen they turn to can portray violence and mayhem so vividly that it leaves viewers ducking to avoid being spattered. And finally, the new interactive media have transformed listening and viewing audiences into active participants. Children no longer simply watch actors shoot at each other; they now take part in the action, blasting anything on screen that moves.

There is also good reason to believe that the proliferation and miniaturization of communication devices themselves is changing the social context of media use, turning what was once a family experience into an activity that, for many youngsters, is more and more private. Often youngsters sit at the computer terminal alone, many in the privacy of their bedrooms. In other words, although it has always been possible for youth, especially adolescents, to engage in various kinds of media use with some degree of privacy, the new media appear to have given today's kids a great deal more autonomy in their media selection, and a great deal more freedom from adult supervision. Moreover, continuing advances in miniaturization and portability (e.g., cell phones with Internet access) suggest that media experiences are likely to become even more private. Perhaps most important, technological changes and contemporary social trends may be

combining to create a media environment in which youth use these media largely independent of adult supervision or comment – indeed, often in the absence of adult awareness.

— Donald F. Roberts and Ulla G. Foehr,  
*Kids and Media in America*, 2003

## Topic II

“The paradox may be put this way. We have entered the Information Age, traveled the Information Superhighway, spawned a Knowledge Economy, undergone the Digital Revolution, converted manual workers into knowledge workers, and promoted a Creative Class, and we anticipate a Conceptual Age to be. However overhyped those grand social metaphors, they signify a rising premium on knowledge and communications, and everyone from *Wired* magazine to Al Gore to Thomas Friedman to the Task Force on the Future of American Innovation echoes the change. When he announced the American Competitiveness Initiative in 2006, President Bush directly linked the fate of the U.S. economy “to generating knowledge and tools upon which new technologies are developed.” In a *Washington Post* op-ed, Bill Gates asserted, “but if we are to remain, we need a workforce that consists of the world’s greatest minds . . . . First we must demand strong schools so that young Americans enter the workforce with the math, science and problem-solving skills they need to succeed in the knowledge economy.”

And yet while teens and young adults have absorbed digital tools into their daily lives like no other age group, while they have grown up with more knowledge and information readily at hand, taken more classes, built their own Websites, enjoyed more libraries, bookstores, and museums in their towns and cities . . . in sum, while the world has provided them extraordinary chances to gain knowledge and improve their reading/writing skills, not to mention offering financial incentives to do so, young Americans today are no more learned or skillful than their predecessors, no more knowledgeable, fluent, up-to-date, inquisitive, except in the materials of youth culture. They don’t know any more history or civics, economics or science, or literature or current events. They read less on their own, both books or newspapers, and you would have to canvass a lot of college English instructors and employers before you found one who said that they compose better paragraphs. In fact, their technology skills fall short of the common claim, too, especially when they must apply them to research and workplace tasks.

The world delivers facts and events and arts and ideas as never before, but the young American mind hasn’t opened. They have all the advantages of modernity and democracy, but when the gifts of life lead to social joys, not intellectual labor, the minds of the young plateau at age 18. This is happening all around us. The fonts of knowledge are everywhere, but the rising generation is camped on the desert, passing stories, pictures, tunes, and texts back and forth living off the thrill of peer attention. Meanwhile, their intellects refuse the cultural and civic inheritance that has made us what we are up to now.”

— Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*, 2008

**1ST PLACE ESSAYS • ACADEMIC STATE MEET • SPRING 2012**

**HONEY, I'VE SHRUNK OUR BRAINS**  
***Kenzie Taff, Cross Plains HS***

**Conference 1A**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

As time progresses streets, businesses, and homes within American cities continue to grow at society's will and illuminate with today's increasing technology. Consumers are now drawn towards the lime light that new technology possesses. Whether it is the newest television, cell phone, game console, or hand held device, they are all considered absolute necessities for most Americans. Twenty years ago people would not expect to see LCD and HD screens for fast food restaurant menus or even as personal television screens at home. Today televisions are capable of connecting to the internet and to other people's televisions around the world with little to no effort. As 2012 continues to develop and evolve into 2013, we are far past the beginning of change and at any cost, the time in which we live in now should be viewed as a whirlwind of technological growth and should not be taken advantage of.

Younger generations of today are fully capable of using technological devices with much more ease than some older generations. For many children and teenagers, technology is all they have ever known. Not only has technology been an acquired source of youth's recreation but also one of the main stepping stones towards their educational development. Even teenagers today can recall the heavy and blocky personal computers that sat in classrooms and homes, captivating their attention. Now toddlers and young children are eager to play both educational and recreational games and listen to "eBooks" that are all available for their access through the androids or iPhones. There are less and less crayon scribbles and food stains on children books as technology persists and at times, the only way parents can keep their young child from throwing a tantrum is to give the child their cell phone or iPad so long as they will stay quiet.

It is an absolute necessity that technology should not be overlooked because as technology grows and ages society is expected to do so as well. In some situations both young and old adults of this time period struggle to keep the same pace as technology. Although the educational opportunities are now endless, humanity continues to be drawn to the consumer side of technology. Instead of being persuaded to push forth new research and increase their educational boundaries, people are persuaded to push forth new tweets, texts, and Facebook statuses. People live in a society today where eleven year olds like Willow Smith, the daughter of actor Will Smith, have twitter accounts and post pictures of themselves almost every day which are available to the entire world. There is no privacy, and this is why adults should not overlook or ignore technology because their lives and their children's lives are entirely public if precautions are not taken.

In some cases the growing of technology is great if not magnificent for children of today. But if technology is taken advantage of, the benefits for education dwindle quickly and in result of, children are not learning anything educational at all. Technology today should be evenly balanced with the learning methods of the past in order for future generations to learn. Learning should consist of more hands on experiences as an alternative to some of the technological devices that children use today. Instead of allowing children to drag shapes across the screen into the correct spot, children should be able to hold and feel real shapes to decide where they should go. The developmental stages of children are very important and should not only be monitored closely but also balanced between hands on experiences and technology.

Even adults and teenagers are allowing technology to control many important aspects of their life. Instead of actual face to face and honest conversations, meaningless texts are sent in place of. Instead of making visits to a distance friend, video chat and face time are now considered one of the main options. Although technology seems like it has benefited society greatly and do not

misinterpret that in some places it has, but do become aware that humanity is very capable of falling victim to the negative attributes that technology possesses.

There are many benefits of today's technology, but if society continues to let the growing of technology be in command of their personal and educational lives, there won't be much left of their life that they themselves will be able to control. Technology is something that society needs to become acutely aware of. It is something that needs to be understood, balanced, and controlled all to the most personal extent possible. "The world delivers facts and events and arts and ideas as never before, but the young American mind hasn't opened. They have all the advantages of modernity and democracy, but when the gifts of life lead to social joys, not intellectual labor, the minds of the young plateau at age 18." Even in 2008, Mark Bauerlein identified some of the negative attributes that technology possessed. He explained that even though people have and continue to have available access to knowledge of the world around us, today's generation's knowledge and education have not grown much more than the past generations. It is society's responsibility to take control of what they have created and take hold of the educational opportunities that lay before their generation and generations to come. Otherwise, technology is and will be continued to be used for everything except education.

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**MONSTERS OF SOCIETY**  
*Najla Brown, Denver City HS*

**Conference 2A**  
**1st Place**

As thunder crashes and lightning flashes across a forebodingly dark sky, a stone castle is illuminated in the darkness, inside, a scientist works. Creating vaccines to alleviate the separation society feels amongst itself, the cure is rumored to have transformed into the ailment. Addiction is said to be born upon consumption as the younger members of civilization slowly become dependent on the drug known as technology. Comparable to the Native Americans when the Spanish arrived in the New World, humanity has no immunity. Taking the force of the disease entirely, the scientist as well as the various men occupying that stone castle revel in their good fortune. Producing more of the medication to further feed people's corrupted desire, the general public has become worse than junkies; by society's definition, they have become abominations. Using NASA's history as an example of the benefits of moving towards a more technological age along with the teachings of Darwin, my own experiences with technology, as well as work of literature to support this revolution, the true monster will be revealed as the chemistry of the vaccine as well as its effects are explored.

NASA is notorious for laying the foundation for new technologies. Because this organization goes beyond the atmosphere to accomplish its goals, it is imperative for them to develop the technology to hand the prospective mission or to die trying. For example, in the first moon landing, the technology NASA used gave birth to the modern day microchips society find today in Ipods, iPhones, and Ipads. In addition, NASA managed to make breakthrough discoveries in the general field of computers, specifically in robotics. However, aside from the technological advancements, one of the advantages NASA reaped from exploring the moon, building the Hubble Telescope, and launching a Mars rover was it raised public spirit. America wanted scientific and technological advancement; therefore, to believe it is taboo for American children to accept these innovations eagerly is ridiculous. To refer back to the United State's history in space, it is important to remember the space race America entered against Russia. Fueled by fear and a competitive spirit, Americans felt it was important to beat the Russians to the moon. Consequently, the United State's government began to heavily fund NASA. The entire country wanted to plant our flag on that lunar rock, and once it was accomplished, Americans experienced a type of high. Patriotism was found from coast to coast. As pride swelled in each and every citizen's heart, American society eagerly accepted the victory as well as the

technological spin-offs created from the moon mission. In fact, enterprise encouraged the mass production of such products and evolution demanded these products be made smaller, faster, and more efficient. Symbolic of the castle mentioned in the introduction, industry hired the scientist with tax-payer dollars, and they administered the medicine to raise American's standard of living, which is the ultimate goal in everything our government does. Therefore, by accepting these medications, the youth of America is changing by melding with the innovations they are introduced to.

Hinted at in the last paragraph, when technological dependency is called into question, it is important to place significance on the scientific theory developed by Charles Darwin. Upholding the beliefs of "survival of the fittest" and "adapt to survive," Darwin looked towards the future by examining the past and present. He studied how species evolved over time as they became introduced to new things. From climates to change in habitat, Darwin investigated factors that could have some affect on future development; technology has become one of those factors. Young adults and children are the most adaptable. Because in youth the brain is still developing, younger beings are more accepting to new ideas, languages, and technologies. Therefore, teenagers and children will continue to become more involved with technology as it continues to be produced through scientific innovation. It is an inevitable process within the gates of the castle. However, it is a necessary process. With the introduction of new technologies, comes the beginning of a new way of life, and to prohibit the advancement of life is to cripple children for eternity in the United States today. This lifestyle may promote a level of reclusiveness, but as supported by Charles Darwin, it is the coming age. It is a new way of life. Talking face to face to one individual has become obsolete when compared to video chatting with a multitude of people. The youth of America has adapted; lost in a deviant society, they are the norm.

To speak about my own experiences with social media, technology, and the internet in general, I completely adhere to society's stereotype. I spend hours a day on my computer. I game; I Skype; I Facebook. I do not socialize with my family regularly, but the fact of the matter is, I do not need to. As long as a person socializes with someone in some form, they meet that humanely requirement. Therefore, I can have a three hour conversation with someone on Skype or message a friend on Facebook throughout the day. I can spend hours on World of Warcraft raiding with my guild while chatting with them on the voice communication server known as Ventrillo. These are all perfectly acceptable outlets of communication in today's society. However, although time spent on the internet is a concern, the primary worry of the country is not whether or not we are socializing, but specifically, what we are talking about, who we are talking with, and what we are looking at. Society believes adult supervision is a necessity; however, society is blatantly wrong. Adult supervision is not a necessity; morals are a necessity. In this technological age, everything must change, including rules. Adults are responsible for teaching their children internet safety as well as the timeless lessons of right and wrong. Technology is not an evil. It is a medicine, an alleviant for the hardships experienced by humanity. Hindering technological advances will not solve the issue of paranoia, nor will crippling an evolutionary advancement; it simply comes down to one thing: we are the children of technology. We are the addicts of the web. We are the society perceived abominations locked in a castle with the bricks of obsolete ideas.

In the novel I am Legend, you are introduced to the main character that is described as an average man. He is approximately six feet tall, and he has blonde hair and blue eyes. He is married with one child, and he has worked at the same factory since returning from being stationed in a South American country. He is a symbol of archaic; he is the castle in human form. During the novel, a disease begins to spread to the townspeople. Everyone dies, except him. However, they come back to life as vampires. Disgusted by the state of his town and depressed by the loss of his wife and child, he begins killing these vampires. Learning about his enemy by reading and re-reading Dracula, he begins to test out the various theories for killing vampires. He learns through trial and error what he needs to do to survive this new environment; he adapts. Nevertheless, the vampires adjust as well. Forming a new society, the vampires organize a

government, a police force, and a plan to take the main character hostage and bring him in for trial for murdering so many of their kind. AS the man discovers the plan from a vampire informant he mistook as a normal person, he decides to face his fate armed with two pistols. When the time came for the vampire police force to take him, he was hurt in the struggle. Dying from the wounds he received during the battle, the main character was placed in a tall cell overlooking the vampire congregation. Walking to the new window for a final view of the monsters that killed him, he was awe-stricken by the way their faces contorted in fear at the sight of him. They, the monsters, were scared of him, the human. At this point, he realized that in this new society, he was not a man. He was not the norm. He was the monster; he was legend. Today's youth are the vampires of our time. They have a new society, and the adults simply do not fit in nor do they understand. They are legends.

Within the castle, the scientist works at developing more of the vaccine, As he administers it to individuals, he notices the young accept it more willingly than the elderly. However, upon completely accepting it into their system, they become isolated and pale. They stare off into the distance for hours at a time, and they refuse to socialize with their elders. Nevertheless, the vaccine was designed to make their lives easier, and it has successfully done exactly what it was intended to do. In fact, it was a product supported by society; however, now that society has received it and has not quite bonded with it as well as the younger individuals, they uphold it as evil and the people using it as monsters. Nevertheless, the youth utilizing the full effects of the vaccine are not monsters. They are simply new creatures that have adapted to the latest innovations. As monster myself, technology has changed my life. It has made communication easier, and it has educated me beyond belief. It is the future, and to fail to utilize it to the fullest would be becoming human in a society of vampires. It would be transforming yourself into a legend.

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**T.M.I.**  
***Austin Keeton, Borger HS***

**Conference 3A**  
**1st Place**

It is a brand new world. The mountains are still the same ones that stood a million years ago; the oceans and rivers and seas still participate in the ancient water cycle; the earth still spins on the same axis that is has since its beginning. But people and the way we communicate and discover have changed fundamentally. No longer is it necessary to initiate face-to-face contact in order to get the message across. The days of finding and discovering in the day-to-day world, of gathering real experience are gone. The advance of digital media and the availability of easy information have created a society in which instant gratification and effortless discovery are the norm. The thirst for knowledge among the common people is absent, and if this trend continues, we may come upon a future in which truly new information and the search for it are stagnant, left to the top tier of the pyramid to be controlled by any who might wish to manipulate it.

The internet is a place of spontaneity. At any moment, one might discover a brand new site which can keep him busy for hours on end. The possibilities are endless, and the availability of access to social networking sites and online forums has definitely shortened the process of communicating and perhaps the attention span required for that process. Whereas fifty years ago the majority of communication took place between people standing at least in the same room, today it seems that more texts and emails are sent, more Facebook pokes are received, and more picture messages are exchanged than words are spoken aloud. This is a fundamental shift in the way the human species has articulated its thoughts, a shift in the way we are human. Mark Bauerlein said, "Young adults have absorbed digital tools into their daily lives like no other age group.." His observation is astute, as it is virtually impossible to make it an hour of the day without encountering some sort of digital media and communication device in one form or

another. This has potentially hindered the way in which we think. There is no longer the necessity of seeing someone in person to get a message to them, and this has perhaps rendered the search for that human connection and the desire to gain real life experience dormant. This has extended to almost every part of our daily lives. Online shopping is an advancement that has strode right alongside proliferation of the digital age and the internet. Do we want a new television? [www.BestBuy.com](http://www.BestBuy.com) is your new best friend. Need frog livers or pig warts or any other sort of obscure object or ingredient? Amazon is sure to have what you desire. Though the information and the access to these things are free and readily available, the quest for them and the effort required to obtain them has been all but demolished. The acquirement of these things is no longer understood and their possession is perhaps not so appreciated as it would be were we obligated to actually walk outside to get them. This inclination to place leisure and pleasure above the search for knowledge and contact with other has made us similarly unappreciative of the information so easily achieved. One can definitely adore the ease of use that these new digital systems offer, but can one justify the loss of understanding what it means to search for something to get it? Can we look past the gap that this is creating in our culture, a gap filled with ones and zeroes instead of words and emotions? Perhaps it would be wise to reevaluate our stance on these things; else we might just end up relinquishing too much control to those who hunt for those things they desire.

Cell phones and computers are absolutely lovely. They provide us with the weather, the news, and ideas on just what exactly we are going to make for dinner. They automate and expedite processes that otherwise would possibly take years. They can show us where Thomas Jefferson was born with nothing more than a few swipes of the fingers. This access to information is quite an astounding thing. But maybe the ease with which we acquire that information has led us to take it for granted. Five-hundred years ago, if one wanted to know how to build a paper airplane or build a proper mound of leaves of jumping, he had to find someone who had that knowledge he sought or figure it out himself. This is no longer the way of things. Any number of how-to's on any subject can be found on the world wide web. There is no more reality. There is no more quest for meaning. There is only information; facts and advice show up everywhere we look. As this abundance steadily increases, the value of knowledge is lost. The true cost of what it took to get those facts the first time they were discovered does not even enter the mind of the second-hand receiver. All data are now second-hand aside from those found in new research trials conducted only by elite teams and labs across the nation. We have effectively handed over our power to become better than the lowest class citizens in terms of power and discovery. We have lost our hunger for new ideas and ways of living. This is not the Renaissance, and we are not in the age of mass revolution. The passion for advancement has been one of the driving forces behind the human race; what a race is has been. But without that desire and appetite for new things and thoughts, and with the tendency to give ourselves over to the technological advances and lack of human contact predominant in our society, perhaps we may just be setting ourselves up for a world of Orwellian proportions.

In 1984 by George Orwell, the author presents us with a society completely lacking in individual thought or any sort of real communication. The people are one cohesive whole, bound and controlled by the government and its almighty leader, Big Brother. There are three classes of citizens and three classes only—The Proles, the Party Members, and the Inner Party Members. None of which has any control over their own lives. Technology abounds. Telescreens monitor every movement, every facial expression. The memory hole and its powers have the ability to wipe out any fact from history, erase it from the collective consciousness. There is no advancement; there is no knowledge. Though one might envy the Proles in this novel, they are in the worst position possible. They are the ones with the only possibility of revolt. They are the ones with the inkling of hope for the world and its inhabitants. Though they are free to do as they wish, free to walk, talk, eat, drink, and be merry as they like, they are in the dark. They have no thoughts other than those given to them by the electronic things all around them. We are just like them—lost in our texts and emails, distracted by the overabundance of free information, trying to



find our way out of the maze to the important facts and ideas. We are consumed by the ability to have the understanding but dazzled by the trivial nature of most of what we acquire. We are the Proletariat. We are the ones who have forfeited our thirst for knowledge for the leisure and distractions of today. We are the ones who will face the possible future consequences of a society without the drive to succeed, the drive to understand the nature of the world.

A long, long time ago, in a land where the hunt for truth was arduous and filled with obstacles, the world was a place of sincerity and advancement in which any man could make for himself a new way of living, a hope and knowledge about the workings of the universe. In our fight to make knowledge freely available, we may have ironically destroyed the want of it, the conscious need for revolution that is the routine of humanity. The digital age is upon us, and though we should most certainly take advantage of its uses in efficiency, we should also understand the consequences of becoming consumed by the lure of ease. Most do not care what the atomic number of carbon is, but we can tell you in ten seconds flat with our handy-dandy computers. The dog days are over. The pursuit for truth is lost to the majority. We are in for a smooth and potentially deadly ride. But was that too much information?

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**THE STRENGTH OF THE ANTS**  
**Lindsay Bonnen, Friendswood HS**

**Conference 4A**  
**1st Place**

Ants are the most powerful creatures in the world – according to ecological experts at Columbia University, anyway. They have colonized every continent except Antarctica, are almost impossible to eradicate from even one household, and outnumber humans worldwide by about ten to one. What makes these tiny creatures so powerful? Columbia’s scientists believe it is their “eusocialization,” their absolute dedication to the good of the group. These scientists believe our strength as humans comes from our focus on society as well – or at least it used to. But as technology grows at an unprecedented rate, many believe we are becoming increasingly isolated and individualistic rather than connected and community-oriented. And this technologically driven isolation could threaten not only our mental and physical health, but the very strength of our society.

The growth of individual technological devices may be rapid, but their development is relatively new, and as a society we still seem to be in the “honeymoon stage” with technology. Headlines ecstatically spout the names of new devices, while politicians and teachers alike sing their praises and everyone from businessmen to parents stand in line for hours to get the iPad 3. The birth of these devices is heralded as the dawning of a new age, a time of knowledge and success for all. But some are beginning to wonder if our unquestioning infatuation with technology is such a good thing. The Parents’ Television Council or PTC, a watchdog organization for media and technology, published an article last year suggesting that the proliferation of cell phones, personal computers, and televisions may be doing us more harm than good, at least in terms of mental health. The Council and its guest commentator Dr. Meyers warned that as technology becomes more and more personalized – cell phones, personal computers, televisions in every bedroom – our isolation from one another is growing. We no longer sit down as a family to listen to “The Lone Ranger” on the radio or watch “Hogan’s Heroes” on the family t.v. Instead, we each head off to our own bedrooms to look up separate shows on Netflix or stick in our headphones and tune out our siblings. In fact, the PTC reported that only twenty-two percent of the parents surveyed the month before could name three of their children’s favorite bands or television shows. Not only is the way we access our technology becoming more individual, Dr. Meyers believes the technology itself is increasingly designed for isolation. We no longer need to find a friend when we want to play MarioKart; there’s sure to be someone online to compete against. We no longer need to sit down with someone to play

checkers; the computer can simulate an opponent for us. Technology is making entertainment an increasingly isolated activity – and the PTC warns us that there are consequences. It recalls a study in which five hundred university professors were instructed to ask their students what they thought was the biggest problem they faced. Almost two-thirds of classes reported loneliness as their greatest obstacle throughout their childhood and present lives. These students have grown up more in touch with technology than any generation before them – and apparently, less in touch with one another. The rate of suicides in the United States has increased by about thirteen percent in the last five years, with the largest increase of almost twenty-four percent among people under the age of twenty-five. These are the early warning signs of a society that is becoming increasingly isolated, plugged into our devices instead of one another.

An Oklahoma research center believes there is another problem with isolated technological experiences. Neuroscientists there conducted a study in which they observed the effects of extended, isolated use of technology on participants' brains. They found that after only two hours of working on the computer or watching television alone, participants' prefrontal lobes showed increased activity of fifteen to twenty percent, while their cortexes showed significantly decreased activity. What does this mean in less scientific terms? The prefrontal lobe is used for cognitive and logical decisions, while the cortex is where we get compassion and empathy. Using technology in isolation caused participants to use much less empathy in their decision-making process, considering what was useful for themselves instead of what was good for others. Even without the brain scans, the lead researcher points out, this makes sense: you might let your little sister win every once in a while, but who cares about how the computer feels if you beat it six times in a row? This destimulation of the cortex lasted for up to five hours after the isolated technological experience ended, suggesting that even when we aren't using technology, it still affects the way we think. Fascinatingly, the scientists also found that the effects of the technology were cut almost in half when participants played a video game with a friend or family member. The technology still had an impact, but apparently it was much less significant when several people used it together. Unfortunately, today that is rarely the case.

So how important is this really? It's easy for us to write off these results as just a bunch of doom and gloom, or old-fashioned resistance to progress. We're a little less empathetic and a little more lonely. So what? We still have friends, still interact with others. How big of a problem could this be? This is where that idea of eusocialization comes in. We don't just need to function as individuals, or even as family circles and small communities. We need to function as a society, as a nation, and, as globalization continues, as a world-wide community. Increasing isolation and egocentricity prevents us from fitting into our places in that society. Dr. Wilkinson, was one of the scientists who studied this concept at Columbia, took advantage of an interview with the Smithsonian magazine to explain the theory of eusocialization in terms his favorite animal, ants. Ants, he explains, are remarkable for their complete and unhesitating willingness to give up work, strength, and life for the good of the colony. This is why they are so prevalent in every corner of the world; each one serves the others and puts the colony first, so even if many die, the colony remains, and in fact continues to be strong. Dr. Wilkinson points out that this is exactly how every major human society has become successful as well. Rome was built on the concept that every man would fight for his nation for at least four years, pay taxes to the nation, and worship the emperor as a god. The early Japanese empire quickly became strong because of a feudal system in which everyone gave a portion of their work to serve the governing part of society. America itself first survived at Jamestown based on the famous principle "work or don't eat," and went on to write a constitution in which each citizen is responsible for insuring a fair government and justice system by voting and serving as jurors. We gain our strength from being eusocial, which literally means being a "true society, more than a society." If individual technological devices make us more isolated and less empathetic, they impair our ability to function as a whole and strike at the very basis of our civilization. We cannot be a successful, functional society if we cannot understand one another and work together.

Technology isn't in itself evil or dangerous; it's the isolation it can cause that hurts us. Even the studies that reveal the problem also offer solutions. The PTC tells us the suicide rate is fifty percent lower among teens who attend a weekly social meeting, regardless of their technology use, so let's get out and spend time with other people. The neuroscience research tells us we remain compassionate if we share our technology time with others, so we can watch our favorite t.v. show with friends or play a video game with a sibling. The key truth we need to take away from these findings is that despite our love affair with technology, it can have harmful effects that impact not only individuals, but the strength of human society itself. We have to monitor our technology use and be intentional about focusing on what's best for our society. Simply put, we have to imitate the ants.

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**ONE CLICK AWAY**

***Sarah Bernardo, Clements HS***

**Conference 5A**

**1st**

**Place**

Think different. Or so goes the slogan of Apple, arguably one of the greatest technological giants of our time. In 1964, Apple unveiled a dramatic commercial at the Superbowl which announced the release of a new personal computer. Orwellian-themed, commercial challenged American society to fight the Big Brother of conformism by simply thinking differently- and buying an Apple computer. Almost fifty years later, digital technology has indeed revolutionized American thinking, but not in the ways one might expect. The "me" generation increasingly seems to take technology for granted. The advent and exponential growth of digital technology has transformed American society, but the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge has consequently declined.

The plethora of digital tools available to American youth is unbelievable, but as technology progresses, knowledge dwindles. Take Google for instance. This quintessential search engine has reduced the time to find information from hours perusing library shelves to only seconds with a click of the mouse. Undoubtedly, the thousands, or even millions, of search results Google produces as an affirmation that the Internet has radically increased the availability of information. However, more information does not invariably lead to smarter people. Youths in particular seem to take no notice of the thousands of results and instead usually visit the first website that pops up. Filtering out useless information seems to be a lost art in a time when convenience and speed is more desirable than complete accuracy. This is especially true when Wikipedia appears as the first result on almost every online search. As the most popular online encyclopedia, Wikipedia prides itself in being an information-sharing "community", get too many American adolescents deem information found on the site as immutably accurate. This couldn't be farther from the truth. Any individual with Internet access could alter pages on Wikipedia instantaneously, thus rendering the website tentative at best. English teachers everywhere warn students against the evils of Wikipedia, but numerous students still rely on its convenient supply of material simply because they can. This ubiquitous practice proves that greater abundance of information facilitated by the Internet does not lead to better, or even more accurate, learning. In fact, one can even argue that the rise of digital tools has only heralded the end of cultivated intellectualism. One of the most popular websites amongst American youth is UrbanDictionary.com. The website's sole purpose is to create a compilation of slang terminology used by young adults and teens. Informal, even derogatory, jargon such as "noob" fill the pages of the site. If the existence of such a source doesn't indicate a decline in worthy knowledge, then certainly nothing does. The utilization of technology to stay in touch with cultural trends emphasizes the great contrast between the capabilities of modern digital tools and their actual uses by the current generation.

A look back in history reveals a vastly different process to find information. Before computers, smart phones, or the Internet, students relied completely on libraries for material. The recently released movie *J. Edgar* contains a scene in which J. Edgar Hoover in his early days scampers around the Library of Congress in order to show his date the card system he devised. Upon witnessing his enthusiasm for a primitive catalogue system that allowed visitors to find books more easily, I almost scoffed. Online catalogues today take only seconds. Yet although society has come far from the card system, the affinity for knowledge has not kept up. A library with physical books lends an atmosphere of culture, refinement, and wisdom that a glowing screen in a bedroom can never accomplish. In the times of my parents, one went to the library to study or research. Nowadays, many youths hardly step inside a library after early childhood. As the utilization of “old-fashioned” research methods are replaced by isolated Internet browsing, young people find little reason to use digital tools for learning. A laptop or smartphone quite simply does not create the atmosphere of focused study. Distractions like e-mail or social networking sites that are seldom found in a library are only once click away through digital technology. As technology has expanded, attention spans have diminished. The lack of concentration prevalent in American teens counteracts any quantity of information the Internet may provide. If students can not stay focused long enough to filter and analyze information, then more material is useless. Maru Bauerlein dubbed modern youths “the dumbest generation,” but perhaps for good reason. Today’s generation is not any less capable or naturally intelligent as our predecessors, yet our inability to fully utilize the vast opportunities we are given implies absurdity. Instead of using digital tools to expand their horizons, many teens employ technology for personal relationships creating whole social lives on the Internet.

“You don’t know what you’ve got, until it’s gone,” an old adage goes. This is true for technology. One hurricane a few summers ago left me staring uselessly at my parents as I struggled to combat boredom without electricity. The modern nightmare for American youth is a world without Internet, cell phones, TV, or social networking sites, and my own experience only perpetuated that fear. Without a doubt, the unfortunate truth is that teens do not use digital tools for learning often enough. The painstaking advancements of science are commonplace to teens. Consequently, any value they hold for older generations in terms of knowledge is lost upon them. Adults may see countless ways to learn, discover new ideas, and be inspired in digital technology, but young people see only their social lives immortalized electronically. It is this discrepancy between technological capability and actual use that defines the knowledge decline. Digital resources are just not being used in the right ways. Instead, leaps and bounds have been made in the area of digital social lives through Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter, and more. Contemporary youth culture encourages technological relevancy, and as a result, the “me” generation exploits the tools available to expand their social lives. Knowledge and learning take the backseat to the endless social opportunities technology provides. Despite a myriad of learning prospects, modern youth chooses to focus on the personal side of digital media. Deference once afforded to prominent artists or philosophers is showered upon pseudo-celebrities who inhabit Youtube or MTV. The focus of technology on popular culture overshadows any educational benefits it possesses, at least in the eyes of teenagers.

Clearly, the growth of digital technology has dramatically changed society. It is only unfortunate that the pursuit of knowledge appears to be a victim of technological advancement. Yet, the potential remains. Opportunities to learn from digital tools still exist, if only the current generation would realize it. In 1964, Apple challenged Americans to “think differently,” and they did. Invariably, the youth will continue to champion originality and independence of thought. If Americans could think differently once, who says they can’t do it again? All it takes is one click of the mouse.