

Saywhat?!

Language, History and the Common Core

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The material that follows is excerpted from a book being written
by Bill Chapman, ***Building History Labs: U.S. History Lessons
That Teach Critical Thinking & Other Citizenship Skills***

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If I shouted the following

\ ' rī t \

What would you hear?

If I shouted the following

\ 'rīt\

What would you hear?

It could be any of 4 words:

right

If I shouted the following

\ 'rīt\

What would you hear?

It could be any of 4 words:

right

write

If I shouted the following

\ 'rīt\

What would you hear?

It could be any of 4 words:

right

write

rite

If I shouted the following

\ 'rīt\

What would you hear?

It could be any of 4 words:

right

write

rite

wright

If I shouted the following

\ 'rīt \

What would I mean?

If I shouted the following

\ 'rīt\

What would I mean by it?

The online M-W dictionary
shows 47 possible meanings

right (17 meanings)

write (25 meanings)

rite (4 meanings)

wright (1 meaning)

The online M-W dictionary shows 47 possible meanings

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How do you know which I intended?

How do you know which I intended?

Context

How do you know which I intended?

Context

If I was proctoring
an exam, I'd have
shouted, "Write!"

How do you know which I intended?

Context

If I was asked which direction to turn, I'd have said, "Right"

How do you know which I intended?

Context

If I was asked to fill in
the blank, “_____ of
passage”, I’d have
said, “Rite”

How do you know which I intended?

Context

If I was asked the occupational category of a wood worker, I'd have said, "Wright"

Exploring Context

is the key to determining
the meaning of the
primary source documents
we'll examine in the next
few minutes.

The common core skill standard with which we will be working today is RH..4

“Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text,....”

The Common Core social studies standards are available on the web, and in a free iOS app.

On the web at

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH>

In the free iOS app, Common Core Standards

Document #1

Published in 1590 as part of *A Briefe and True Report of the Newfound Land of Virginia*

http://www.virtualjamestown.org/images/white_debry_html/debry40.html

How would we write the headline today if we wanted to convey the author's thought?

Their sitting at meate. XVI.



Document #1

How would we write the headline today if we wanted to convey the author's thought?

What questions could we ask and answer that would help us create that sentence?

Their sitting at meate. XVI.



What questions could we ask and answer that would help us create that sentence?

Perhaps the first should be:

Is **MEATE** an
English language
word?

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- I've been able to find it in only one contemporary dictionary, the OED.

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- I've been able to find it in only one contemporary dictionary, the OED
- Its entry there shows that the 1590 **meate** has lost its final **e** to become **meat**

What questions could we ask and answer that would help us create that sentence?

Is **MEATE** an English language word?

- I've been able to find it in only one contemporary dictionary, the OED
- Its entry there shows that the 1590 meate has lost its final e to become meat
- However, the phrase "at meate" or "at meat" has no meaning today

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- In 1590, however, the phrase had a meaning that has since been lost

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- However, the phrase "at meate" or "at meat" has no meaning today
- In 1590, however, the phrase had a meaning that has since been lost
- That meaning was, "3. A meal, a feast. Sometimes: spec. the principal meal of a day, dinner. Also in various prepositional phrases (mostly somewhat arch.). at (†the) meat , †at meat and meal: at table, at or during a meal or meals. Similarly after meat, before meat, †to go to meat , etc. Now arch. and regional."

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- So today, we would most likely write "at meate" as "dinner" or "meal"

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How would we write the headline today if we wanted to convey the author's thought?
Are there other questions we need to ask and answer before we can create that sentence?

Their sitting at meate. XVI.



What questions could we ask and answer that would help us create that sentence?

How about, what is the second word in the sentence?

Their fitting at meate.

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Their fitting at meate.

- To modern eyes, it looks like fitting.

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How about, what is the second word in the sentence?

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- To modern eyes, it looks like fitting.
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- In 1590, there was an additional letter in the English alphabet, the elongated s.

What questions could we ask and answer that would help us create that sentence?

How about, what is the second word in the sentence?

Their fitting at meate.

- To modern eyes, it looks like fitting.
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- In 1590, there was an additional letter in the English alphabet, the elongated s.
- Our lower case s was used as the last letter of a word.

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- The elongated s was used at the beginning or in the middle of words.

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- To modern eyes, it looks like fitting.
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- In 1590, there was an additional letter in the English alphabet, the elongated s.
- Our lower case s was used as the last letter of a word.
- The elongated s was used at the beginning or in the middle of words.
- It differs from a lower case f in that the cross piece only appears on the left side.

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How about, what is the second word in the sentence?

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- To modern eyes, it looks like fitting.
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- The elongated s was used at the beginning or in the middle of words.
- It differs from a lower case f in that the cross piece only appears on the left side.
- Therefore, the second word in our sentence is sitting.

So, how might we write this sentence today?

Their fitting at meate.

So, how might we write this sentence today?

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Is there a single, correct answer?

So, how might we write this sentence today?

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Is there a single, correct answer?

No.

Are there potentially wrong ones?

So, how might we write this sentence today?

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Yes

For example: “Stylish clothing”

So, how might we write this sentence today?

Their fitting at meate.

Is there a single, correct answer?

No.

Are there potentially wrong ones?

Yes

For example: “Stylish clothing”

Correct answers must be rooted in the evidence & subject to rational explanation.

Their fitting at meate.

Here are four valid modernizations.

In 2003, the University of North Carolina published a transcription of the headline ([online](#)) using the modern English alphabet (no elongated s) and a modern typeface.

Their sitting at meate.

In 1975, Michael Alexander chose to modernize its spelling and punctuation.
(from **Discovering the New World: based on the works of THEODORE DE BRY**,
edited by Michael Alexander. Harper and Row, 1975, page 79)

Their sitting at meat

In 1946, Stefan Lorant published a version in which he completely modernized the text.
(from **The New World: The First Pictures of America**, edited by Stefan Lorant.
Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946 and 1965, page 257)

How They Eat

In 1999, I translated it as

Sitting Down to a Meal

White's original watercolor (1585) & engraving from it (1590).



http://www.virtualjamestown.org/images/white_debry_html/plate40.html

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- When groups have reached consensus answers, have each present its page and result to the entire class for a group discussion.

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For additional resources related to this document, see my web page located at

<http://www.classroomtools.com/briefe.htm>

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“Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text,....”

Document #2

2nd amendment to the US Constitution, adopted by the First Congress in 1789, ratified 1791.

The meaning of this amendment seems not to have been questioned in the nineteenth century, but violent disagreements began in the mid-twentieth; what do you think changed?

Amendment II

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

The amendment as recorded in the National Archives after ratification.

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• The meaning of militia changed dramatically.

According to the OED, 18th century militias were defined as, “ II. A military force.

3a. Originally: †the body of soldiers in the service of a sovereign or a state (*obs.*). Subsequently: a military force raised from the civilian population of a country or region, esp. to supplement a regular army in an emergency, freq. as distinguished from mercenaries or professional soldiers. Occas. with *pl.* concord.

1777 W. HEATH in J. Sparks *Corr. Amer. Revol.* (1853) I. 329 Our troops are all militia, and, although perhaps as good as any militia, yet they are not disciplined.”

By the early 20th century, it had taken on a new meaning: “ **3d.** A paramilitary force motivated by religious or political ideology, *esp.* one that engages in rebel or terrorist activities in opposition to a regular army.

1928 *Daily Tel.* 10 Jan. 10/6 The members of the Fascist Militia..might understandably display any aggressive consciousness of their position and power.

Since the early 1990s in the U.S., the term has been applied to a number of right-wing groups opposed to gun control and distrustful of the federal government.”

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- In the 19th century, “the people” in this context was understood to mean the group acting through an elected state government, not individuals.
- Beginning after the Civil War and again in the latter half of the 20th century, a vocal growing percentage of citizens began to understand “the people” here to mean individuals. By 2008, a Gallup Poll showed 73% of the US public held this belief.

Document #2

2nd amendment to the US Constitution, adopted by the First Congress in 1789, ratified 1791.

Do the two commas inserted in the recorded copy of the amendment change the meaning of the amendment as adopted?

Amendment II

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The amendment as recorded in the National Archives after ratification.

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ART. IV. A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. Adopted.

The amendment as adopted by Congress and submitted to the states for ratification.

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=001/llsl001.db&recNum=220>

Document #2

2nd amendment to the US Constitution, adopted by the First Congress in 1789, ratified 1791.

For additional resources related to this document, see my web page located at

<http://www.classroomtools.com/gunright.htm>

and the links on this flow chart:

<http://www.classroomtools.com/edcampsfbay2012.htm>

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Document #3

A sticker mandated for display in school Biology texts by the Cobb County, Georgia school board (2002). The county was sued in federal court, and the court ordered the stickers removed from the texts.

What is wrong with the stickers?

This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered.

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Perhaps an answer will emerge if we change just a couple of words.

This textbook contains material on gravity. Gravity is a theory, not a fact, regarding a physical phenomenon. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered.

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the·o·ry, n., pl. -ries.

1. a coherent group of general propositions used as principles of explanation for a class of phenomena: Einstein's theory of relativity.
2. a proposed explanation whose status is still conjectural, in contrast to well-established propositions that are regarded as reporting matters of actual fact.
3. Math. a body of principles, theorems, or the like, belonging to one subject: number theory.
4. the branch of a science or art that deals with its principles or methods, as distinguished from its practice: music theory.
5. a particular conception or view of something to be done or of the method of doing it; a system of rules or principles.
6. contemplation or speculation.
7. guess or conjecture.

[1590–1600]

—Syn. 1. THEORY, HYPOTHESIS are used in non-technical contexts to mean an untested idea or opinion. A THEORY in technical use is a more or less verified or established explanation accounting for known facts or phenomena: the theory of relativity. A HYPOTHESIS is a conjecture put forth as a possible explanation of phenomena or relations, which serves as a basis of argument or experimentation to reach the truth: This idea is only a hypothesis.

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The sticker authors use "theory" in a non-technical sense to imply guess, conjecture, contemplation or speculation (definition #6 or #7); however since the context is technical, definition #1 clearly applies. This play with the word **theory** makes their sticker argument *fallacious*.

One could reasonably argue that definition #2 might have applied to **Evolutionary Theory** when Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859. However, the more than 150 years of research and discovery that have developed, expanded and strengthened it since then places it clearly within definition #1 today.

What does it tell you about the state of scientific literacy in our nation that only one third of us (according to the Gallup Poll) recognize the difference between a guess and a scientific theory?

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This slide presentation is available in
PDF format on my web site at

<http://www.classroomtools.com/saywhat-ccss2015.pdf>

I am also working on a book showing how materials and lessons like those in this presentation can be used to teach critical thinking and other citizenship skills in U.S.

History classes. If you would like to know when it becomes available, e-mail me at

billchapman@classroomtools.com and ask me to send you notification when my book is available for purchase.