



## REVIEW TEST 4

Can failing a course be good for students? Here is a chance to apply your understanding of argument to an essay that addresses that question.

To help you continue to strengthen your skills, the reading is followed by questions not only on what you've learned in this chapter but also on what you've learned in previous chapters.

### Words to Watch

Below are some words in the reading that do not have strong context support. Each word is followed by the number of the paragraph in which it appears and its meaning there. These words are indicated in the article by a small circle (°).

*validity* (1): soundness or worth

*trump card* (4): a tactic that gives one an advantage (like a trump suit in card games)

*flustered* (6): nervously confused

*composure* (6): calmness and self-control

*radical* (6): extreme

*conspiracy* (11): plot

## IN PRAISE OF THE F WORD

Mary Sherry

1 Tens of thousands of eighteen-year-olds will graduate this year and be handed meaningless diplomas. These diplomas won't look any different from those awarded their luckier classmates. Their

validity° will be questioned only when their employers discover that these graduates are semiliterate.

Eventually a fortunate few will 2 find their way into educational-repair



shops—adult-literacy programs, such as the one where I teach basic grammar and writing. There, high-school graduates and high-school dropouts pursuing graduate-equivalency certificates will learn the skills they should have learned in school. They will also discover they have been cheated by our educational system.

3 As I teach, I learn a lot about our schools. Early in each session I ask my students to write about an unpleasant experience they had in school. No writers' block here! "I wish someone had made me stop doing drugs and made me study." "I liked to party and no one seemed to care." "I was a good kid and didn't cause any trouble, so they just passed me along even though I didn't read well and couldn't write." And so on.

4 I am your basic do-gooder, and prior to teaching this class I blamed the poor academic skills our kids have today on drugs, divorce, and other impediments to concentration necessary for doing well in school. But, as I rediscover each time I walk into the classroom, before a teacher can expect students to concentrate, he has to get their attention, no matter what distractions may be at hand. There are many ways to do this, and they have much to do with teaching style. However, if style alone won't do it, there is another way to show who holds the winning hand in the classroom. That is to reveal the trump card<sup>o</sup> of failure.

5 I will never forget a teacher who played that card to get the attention of one of my children. Our youngest, a world-class charmer, did little to develop

his intellectual talents but always got by. Until Mrs. Stifter.

Our son was a high-school senior 6 when he had her for English. "He sits in the back of the room talking to his friends," she told me. "Why don't you move him to the front row?" I urged, believing the embarrassment would get him to settle down. Mrs. Stifter looked at me steely-eyed over her glasses. "I don't move seniors," she said. "I flunk them." I was flustered<sup>o</sup>. Our son's academic life flashed before my eyes. No teacher had ever threatened him with that before. I regained my composure<sup>o</sup> and managed to say that I thought she was right. By the time I got home I was feeling pretty good about this. It was a radical<sup>o</sup> approach for these times, but, well, why not? "She's going to flunk you," I told my son. I did not discuss it any further. Suddenly English became a priority in his life. He finished out the semester with an A.

I know one example doesn't make 7 a case, but at night I see a parade of students who are angry and resentful for having been passed along until they could no longer even pretend to keep up. Of average intelligence or better, they eventually quit school, concluding they were too dumb to finish. "I should have been held back," is a comment I hear frequently. Even sadder are those students who are high-school graduates who say to me after a few weeks of class, "I don't know how I ever got a high-school diploma."

Passing students who have not 8 mastered the work cheats them and the employers who expect graduates to have

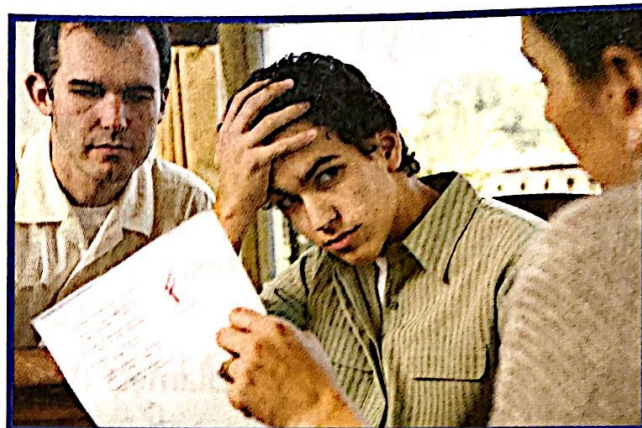


basic skills. We excuse this dishonest behavior by saying kids can't learn if they come from terrible environments. No one seems to stop to think that—no matter what environments they come from—most kids don't put school first on their list unless they perceive something is at stake. They'd rather be sailing.

9 Many students I see at night could give expert testimony on unemployment, chemical dependency, abusive relationships. In spite of these difficulties, they have decided to make education a priority. They are motivated by the desire for a better job or the need to hang on to the one they've got. They have a healthy fear of failure.

10 People of all ages can rise above their problems, but they need to have a reason to do so. Young people generally don't have the maturity to value education in the same way my adult students value it. But fear of failure, whether economic or academic, can motivate both.

11 Flunking as a regular policy has just as much merit today as it did two generations ago. We must review the threat of flunking and see it as it really is—a positive teaching tool. It is an expression of confidence by both teachers and parents that the students



have the ability to learn the material presented to them. However, making it work again would take a dedicated, caring conspiracy<sup>o</sup> between teachers and parents. It would mean facing the tough reality that passing kids who haven't learned the material—while it might save them grief for the short term—dooms them to long-term illiteracy. It would mean that teachers would have to follow through on their threats, and parents would have to stand behind them, knowing their children's best interests are indeed at stake. This means no more doing Scott's assignments for him because he might fail. No more passing Jodi because she's such a nice kid.

12 This is a policy that worked in the past and can work today. A wise teacher, with my husband's and my support, gave our son the opportunity to succeed—or fail. It's time we return this choice to all students.



## Reading Comprehension Questions

### Vocabulary in Context

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. In the excerpt below, the word *impediments* (im-pěd'ə-mənts) means
- A. questions.
  - B. skills.
  - C. obstacles.
  - D. paths.
- " . . . I blamed the poor academic skills our kids have today on drugs, divorce, and other impediments to concentration . . . " (Paragraph 4)

### Central Point and Main Ideas

- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Which sentence best expresses the central point of the selection?
- A. Before students will concentrate, the teacher must get their attention.
  - B. Many adults cannot read or write well.
  - C. English skills can be learned through adult literacy programs.
  - D. The threat of failure should be returned to our classrooms.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Which sentence best expresses the main idea of paragraph 6?
- A. According to his teacher, Sherry's son sat at the back of the room, talking to his friends.
  - B. Mrs. Stifter said that she didn't move seniors; she flunked them.
  - C. The fear of failure motivated Sherry's son to do well in English.
  - D. Sherry was at first nervous and confused to learn that her son might fail English.

### Supporting Details

- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. According to the author, many students who get "passed along"
- A. are lucky.
  - B. don't get into trouble.
  - C. eventually feel angry and resentful.
  - D. will never learn basic grammar and writing skills.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. According to the author, a fear of failure
- A. is healthy.
  - B. does not motivate people.
  - C. hurts more than it helps.
  - D. affects young students, but not her adult students.

## Transitions

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Read the two sentences below and then answer the question that follows.
- "Many students I see at night could give expert testimony on unemployment, chemical dependency, abusive relationships. In spite of these difficulties, they have decided to make education a priority." (Paragraph 9)

What does the second sentence do?

- A. It defines a problem and presents a solution.
- B. It shows a time order relationship.
- C. It compares the attitudes of day students to the attitudes of night students.
- D. It contrasts the students' difficulties with their willingness to make education a priority.

## Patterns of Organization

- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The main pattern of organization of paragraph 6 is
- A. time order.
  - B. list of items.
  - C. definition and example.
  - D. comparison.

## Inferences

- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The author implies that our present educational system is
- A. doing the best that it can.
  - B. the best in the world.
  - C. not demanding enough of students.
  - D. very short of teachers.

## Purpose

- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The author's primary purpose in this article is
- A. to inform readers about the advantages and disadvantages of giving failing grades to students.
  - B. to persuade readers that failure (or the threat of failure) can be good for students.
  - C. to entertain readers with the true story of one teacher's experiences.



## Argument

10. Label the point of the following argument from the reading with a **P**; label the two statements of support for the point with an **S**. Label with an **X** the one statement that is neither the point nor the support of the argument.
- \_\_\_ A. Fear of failure motivated the author's son to do well in English.
  - \_\_\_ B. Fear of failure is a good motivator.
  - \_\_\_ C. Some people learn skills after high school in adult literacy programs.
  - \_\_\_ D. Some kids won't put school first unless they know they might fail.

## Discussion Questions

1. Do you know anyone who has failed or almost failed a course? What effect did the experience have on that person?
2. Most people think of failing a course as a negative experience. Why, then, does Sherry consider the threat of failure to be a positive teaching tool? Do you agree?
3. People often look back on their education and realize that some of the teachers they learned the most from were their strictest teachers. Who do you think you learned more from, strict teachers or lenient ones? Give examples to support your point.
4. Besides the threat of failure, what are some other ways that teachers can motivate students? What have teachers done to make you want to work harder for a class?