

Short Texts Used in Weeks 1-3

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Snape, “We Can Find Sensible, Middle-Ground Solutions to Mass Shootings.”

Dr. S Snape. *Hogwarts Daily Prophet*, May 20, 2018.

[1] In recent years we have witnessed a series of horrifying mass-shootings in the nation’s schools. We have watched as teenagers use their phones to record terrifying scenes of slaughter, and as parents desperately try to make contact with their children, unsure if they have survived the latest massacre. Despite the urgent need to do something, we seem unable to agree on solutions. My argument is that the best way forward is to combine several practical solutions recently offered by both gun safety advocates and gun rights groups. These solutions are sensible, feasible, and relatively uncontroversial. They are thus our best hope of implementing policies that have widespread support. They are not the only solutions we can consider, but they are the best place to start.

[2] First, and most importantly, we should require universal background checks on all gun sales. A 2018 study by the American College of Physicians found that 22 percent of guns are obtained without a background check. This makes it much easier for criminals and troubled individuals to purchase guns. Polls consistently find that over 90 percent of the public, including most NRA members, supports making these background checks universal.

[3] Second, we need to require safe storage of all guns, and pass “red flag laws” that allow a judge to order the temporary removal of a gun from a person who makes threats or seems particularly troubled. Friends, family and teachers who notice such behavior can make this request. Again, this measure is supported by gun safety advocates, but also by many gun rights groups. Some gun rights advocates support this measure as it allows due process, and the removal is temporary (it can be lifted after a set amount of time or after certain conditions are met). Recent school shootings revealed that in some

cases people had reported disturbing behavior by the shooter, but authorities had no legal means to remove the weapons, and thus few options to deal with the emerging danger.

[4] Lastly, we can provide increased safety at schools. State and federal funding can be made available to schools that request this. There are many practical measures that can be implemented to “harden” schools, but this must be decided by local communities, as schools vary enormously, and there is no one-size-fits-all way of doing this (indeed, some schools may elect not to increase security). This measure is supported by gun rights groups, and also by gun safety advocates.

[5] Some have argued that any attempt to change gun laws is pointless, as the real drivers of mass shootings lie elsewhere. They claim shootings are caused by violent media, mental illness, or the decline of religious belief. But almost all developed countries allow violent media, and some allow far more of it than we do. All countries have people with mental illness, and the United States has far higher rates of religious observance than any other Western country. Yet American teens are 82 times more likely to be murdered with guns than their peers in other advanced nations.

[6] This is not to suggest that guns should be banned, or that law abiding citizens should be unable to purchase firearms, or that the 2nd amendment should not be adhered to. It is merely to suggest that background checks, waiting periods, red flag laws, licensing and training should be more strictly regulated and enforced, and (where appropriate and requested) schools be allowed to take measures to increase armed security.

[7] On the day of the shooting at Santa Fe High School on May 18, 2018, a teen survivor was asked if she was surprised such a horrible event could happen at her school. In tears, she replied she was not surprised. A TV reporter asked her why, and the teen said, “It’s been happening everywhere. I’ve always felt it would eventually happen here too.” We cannot allow a generation of our children to go to school expecting to see their classmates murdered. We need to act now, and we need to begin with solutions that have a good chance of being implemented.

Kristof, “Do We Have the Courage to Stop This?”

Nicholas Kristof, op-ed, *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 2012.

[1] In the harrowing aftermath of the school shooting in Connecticut, one thought wells in my mind: Why can’t we regulate guns as seriously as we do cars?

[2] The fundamental reason kids are dying in massacres like this one is not that we have lunatics or criminals — all countries have them — but that we suffer from a political failure to regulate guns.

[3] Children ages 5 to 14 in America are 13 times as likely to be murdered with guns as children in other industrialized countries, according to [David Hemenway](#), a public health specialist at Harvard who has written an excellent book on gun violence.

[4] So let’s treat firearms rationally as the center of a public health crisis that claims one life every 20 minutes. The United States realistically isn’t going to ban guns, but we can take steps to reduce the carnage.

[5] American schoolchildren are protected by building codes that govern stairways and windows. School buses must meet safety standards, and the bus drivers have to pass tests. Cafeteria food is regulated for safety. The only things we seem lax about are the things most likely to kill.

[6] The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has five pages of regulations about [ladders](#), while federal authorities shrug at serious curbs on firearms. Ladders kill around 300 Americans a year, and [guns 30,000](#). We even regulate toy guns, by requiring orange tips — but lawmakers don't have the gumption to stand up to National Rifle Association extremists and regulate real guns as carefully as we do toys. What do we make of the contrast between heroic teachers who stand up to a gunman and craven, feckless politicians who won't stand up to the N.R.A.?

[7] As one of my Facebook followers wrote after I posted about the shooting, "It is more difficult to adopt a pet than it is to buy a gun."

[8] Look, I grew up on an Oregon farm where guns were a part of life; and my dad gave me a .22 rifle for my 12th birthday. I understand: shooting is fun! But so is driving, and we accept that we must wear seat belts, use headlights at night, and fill out forms to buy a car. Why can't we be equally adult about regulating guns?

[9] And don't say that it won't make a difference because crazies will always be able to get a gun. We're not going to eliminate gun deaths, any more than we have eliminated auto accidents. But if we could reduce gun deaths by one-third, that would be 10,000 lives saved annually.

[10] Likewise, don't bother with the argument that if more people carried guns, they would deter shooters or interrupt them. Mass shooters typically kill themselves or are promptly caught, so it's hard to see what deterrence would be added by having more people pack heat. There have been few if any cases in the United States in which an ordinary citizen with a gun stopped a mass shooting.

[11] The tragedy isn't one school shooting, it's the unceasing toll across our country. More Americans die in gun homicides and suicides in six months than have died in the last 25 years in every terrorist attack and the [wars in Afghanistan and Iraq combined](#).

[12] So what can we do? A starting point would be to limit gun purchases to one a month, to curb gun traffickers. Likewise, we should restrict the sale of high-capacity magazines so that a shooter can't kill as many people without reloading.

[13] We should impose a universal background check for gun buyers, even with private sales. Let's make serial numbers more difficult to erase, and [back California](#) in its effort to require that new handguns imprint a microstamp on each shell so that it can be traced back to a particular gun.

[14] "We've endured too many of these tragedies in the past few years," President Obama noted in a tearful statement on television. He's right, but the solution isn't just to mourn the victims — it's to change our policies. Let's see leadership on this issue, not just moving speeches.

[15] Other countries offer a road map. In Australia in 1996, a mass killing of 35 people galvanized the nation's [conservative prime minister](#) to ban certain rapid-fire long guns. The "national firearms

agreement,” as it was known, led to the buyback of 650,000 guns and to tighter rules for licensing and safe storage of those remaining in public hands.

[16] The law did not end gun ownership in Australia. It reduced the number of firearms in private hands by one-fifth, and they were the kinds most likely to be used in mass shootings. In the 18 years before the law, Australia suffered 13 mass shootings — but not one in the 14 years after the law took full effect. The murder rate with firearms has dropped by more than 40 percent, according to data compiled by the [Harvard Injury Control Research Center](#), and the suicide rate with firearms has dropped by more than half.

[17] Or we can look north to [Canada](#). It now requires a 28-day waiting period to buy a handgun, and it imposes a clever safeguard: gun buyers should have the support of two people vouching for them.

[18] For that matter, we can look for inspiration at our own history on auto safety. As with guns, some auto deaths are caused by people who break laws or behave irresponsibly. But we don’t shrug and say, “Cars don’t kill people, drunks do.”

[19] Instead, we have required seat belts, air bags, child seats and crash safety standards. We have introduced limited licenses for young drivers and tried to curb the use of mobile phones while driving. All this has [reduced America’s traffic fatality rate](#) per mile driven by nearly 90 percent since the 1950s.

[20] Some of you are alive today because of those auto safety regulations. And if we don’t treat guns in the same serious way, some of you and some of your children will die because of our failure.

Kristof, “Some Inconvenient Gun Facts for Liberals”

Nicholas Kristof, Op-ed, *New York Times*, January 17, 2016.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/opinion/sunday/some-inconvenient-gun-facts-for-liberals.html>

[1] FOR those of us who argue in favor of gun safety laws, there are a few inconvenient facts. We liberals are sometimes glib about equating guns and danger. In fact, it’s complicated: The number of guns in America has increased by more than 50 percent since 1993, and in that same period the gun homicide rate in the United States has dropped by half.

[2] Then there are the policies that liberals fought for, starting with the assault weapons ban. A [113-page study](#) found no clear indication that it reduced shooting deaths for the 10 years it was in effect. That’s because the ban was poorly drafted, and because even before the ban, assault weapons accounted for only 2 percent of guns used in crimes.

[3] Move on to open-carry and conceal-carry laws: With some [13 million Americans now licensed](#) to pack a concealed gun, many liberals expected gun battles to be erupting all around us. In fact, the most rigorous analysis suggests that all these gun permits caused neither a drop in crime (as conservatives had predicted) nor a spike in killings (as liberals had expected). Liberals were closer to the truth, for the increase in carrying loaded guns does appear to have led to more aggravated assaults with guns, but the fears were overblown.

[4] One of the puzzles of American politics is that most voters want gun regulation, but Congress resists. One poll found that 74 percent [even of N.R.A. members](#) favor universal background checks to acquire a gun. Likewise, the [latest New York Times poll](#) found that 62 percent of Americans approved of President Obama's executive actions on guns this month. So why does nothing get done? One reason is that liberals often inadvertently antagonize gun owners and empower the National Rifle Association by coming across as supercilious, condescending and spectacularly uninformed about the guns they propose to regulate. A classic of gun ignorance: New York passed a law three years ago banning gun magazines holding more than seven bullets — [without realizing](#) that for most guns there is no such thing as a magazine for seven bullets or less.

[5] And every time liberals speak blithely about banning guns, they boost the N.R.A. Let's also banish the term "gun control": the better expression is "gun safety." Yet this, too, must be said: Americans are absolutely right to be outraged at the toll of guns. Just since 1970, [more Americans have died](#) from guns than all the Americans who died in wars going back to the American Revolution (about 1.45 million vs. 1.4 million). That gun toll includes suicides, murders and accidents, and these days it amounts to 92 bodies a day.

[6] We spend billions of dollars tackling terrorism, which killed 229 Americans worldwide from 2005 through 2014, according to the State Department. In the same 10 years, including suicides, some 310,000 Americans [died from guns](#).

[7] So of course we should try to reduce this carnage. But we need a new strategy, a public health approach that treats guns as we do cars — taking evidence-based steps to make them safer. That seems to be what President Obama is trying to do.

[8] Research suggests that the most important practical step would be to keep guns away from high-risk individuals, such as criminals, those who abuse alcohol, or those who beat up their domestic partners. That means universal background checks before somebody acquires a gun. [New Harvard research](#) confirms a long-ago finding that 40 percent of firearms in the United States are acquired without a background check. That's crazy. Why empower criminals to arm themselves?

[9] Some evidence supports steps that seem common sense. [More than 10 percent](#) of murders in the United States, for example, are by intimate partners. The riskiest moment is often after a violent breakup when a woman has won a restraining order against her ex. Prohibiting the subjects of those restraining orders from possessing a gun reduces these murders by 10 percent, one study found. "If you can keep a gun from someone at that moment of threat, that is very important," notes Daniel W. Webster, a gun safety expert at Johns Hopkins University who has pioneered research on keeping guns from high-risk individuals.

[10] Some public health approaches to reducing gun violence have nothing to do with guns. Researchers find that a nonprofit called [Cure Violence](#), which works with gangs, [curbs gun deaths](#). An initiative called Fast Track supports high-risk children and [reduces delinquency](#) and adult crime.

[11] In short, let's get smarter. Let's make America's gun battles less ideological and more driven by evidence of what works. If the left can drop the sanctimony, and the right can drop the obstructionism, if instead of wrestling with each other we can grapple with the evidence, we can save thousands of lives a year.

May, The Stories We Tell Ourselves

Todd May, "The Stories We Tell Ourselves." *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 2017

<https://nytimes.com/2017/01/16/opinion/the-stories-we-tell-ourselves.html>



Here's a story: I was driving home from work and a car cut me off. The guy was driving really slowly, and I wound up following him for half a mile.

As it stands, it's not a very interesting story. But suppose we add another line:

So I laid on my horn the whole time.

Or perhaps a different line:

That's why I'm late.

Each of those two lines add a dimension to the story that wasn't there before. Now, instead of just a story about me, we have a story about how I like to see myself, or perhaps how I like myself to be seen. Either way, I am expressing what might loosely be called a "value." This value is not necessarily a moral value, but a way of being that I want to see myself as living, a way of being that I consider valuable for myself and seek to associate myself with. In the first case, I express something like, "I am not a person to be messed with." In the second it is something like, "I am not a tardy person."

Many of our stories about ourselves do this. We tell stories that make us seem adventurous, or funny, or strong. We tell stories that make our lives seem interesting. And we tell these stories not only to others, but also to ourselves. The audience for these stories, of course, affect the stories we tell. If we're trying to impress a date, we might tell a story that makes us seem interesting or witty or caring, whereas if we're trying to justify a dubious act to someone who is judging us (or perhaps ourselves), we might tell a story that makes us out to be without other recourse in the situation. In the latter case, what we are doing is dissociating ourselves from a value we might be associated with and thus implicitly associated ourselves with a different one.

Not all our stories about ourselves express values like these. However, many — perhaps most — of them do. This is so even where a story might seem to express a disvalue. Think, for instance, of people whose stories about themselves are often about things not working out for them. Whatever they try, they fail; the world conspires against them. These stories express values as well, values that often stem from

resentment or even despair. They buttress a view of the world that justifies their being who they are and not someone more accomplished or happy or social.

This is not to say that people who tell stories like this are necessarily wrong about their history. There are certainly people whose circumstances do conspire against them. We have seen this recently in the egregious incidents of hate toward traditionally marginalized groups. But when people come to identify themselves with stories about their difficulties, then they are not merely living through difficulties but, in some cases understandably, expressing values about their lives, ways of living that they identify with.

This last point leads to a further one. Some of the values we express are not values we would necessarily want to acknowledge. If someone calls attention to the fact that I am always making myself out to be a victim, I might well deny it. “No, it’s not me, it’s the circumstances. Everything happened just as I told you.” There are ways of being that we might value but not be willing to admit, even to ourselves, that we value. This may seem paradoxical. How could we value something and yet not admit to ourselves that we value it?

However, we know — at least in the abstract — that we do deceive ourselves about certain aspects of who we are and what we are doing. Such self-deception involves, among other things, the expression of values that we are unwilling to acknowledge. When I laid on my horn while following the slow driver — which I confess to you here I did — then I expressed a value that I would really not want to be associated with, and would likely not have admitted to at the time. (Now I try to do better, but as a person raised in New York, I have difficulty. And you will certainly have noticed that even that admission expresses a value associated with being someone from New York.)

If we reflect on the stories we tell about ourselves, both to others and to ourselves, we may well find out things about who we are that complicate the view we would prefer to be identified with.

Why might this matter? Here is one reason. The presidential election has displayed in stark terms a phenomenon that many have commented on in recent years. With the proliferation of various cable news channels, the internet, niche marketing, clustering in communities of like-minded people, most of us live in echo chambers that reflect the righteousness of our lives back to us. We are reinforced to think of ourselves as embodying the right values, as living in ways that are at least justified, if not superior. Reflecting on the stories we tell about ourselves might reveal to us other aspects of who we are and what we value, aspects that would complicate the simple picture provided by our echo chamber.

And that complication, in turn, could lead us to another revelation: that those who live outside our echo chamber might also be more complicated than we have imagined. While the values we take them to be expressing might be mistaken — or even abhorrent — to us, there are perhaps other aspects to their lives as well, other values those lives express, values that would become manifest to us if we listened to some of the stories they tell about themselves. If we are more complicated than we like to think, perhaps others are also more complicated than we would like to think. (And also more complicated than they would like to think.)

None of this is meant to argue for some sort of relativism of values or that everyone is equally justified in the choices they make. The displays of racism, sexism and xenophobia that this presidential election has brought us — often in the form of stories that express values associated with macho individualism — are to be rejected wholesale. However, in this age of polarization, where it is easy to dismiss others

with a righteous wave of our hand, we could perhaps do worse than to reflect on the complications that each of us lives, complications that are often on display in the stories we tell about ourselves.

Jeremy Rifkin, "A Change of Heart about Animals."

LA Times, September 1, 2003. The *Los Angeles Times* is an American daily newspaper based in Los Angeles, but also across much of California and some other parts of the United States. Jeremy Rifkin is an American economic and social theorist, writer, political advisor, and activist. He is the author of 20 books about the impact of technological changes on society.

[1] Though much of big science has centered on breakthroughs in biotechnology, nanotechnology and more esoteric questions like the age of our universe, a quieter story has been unfolding behind the scenes in laboratories around the world — one whose effect on human perception and our understanding of life is likely to be profound.

[2] What these researchers are finding is that many of our fellow creatures are more like us than we had ever imagined. They feel pain, suffer and experience stress, affection, excitement and even love — and these findings are changing how we view animals.

[3] Strangely enough, some of the research sponsors are fast food purveyors, such as McDonald's, Burger King and KFC. Pressured by animal rights activists and by growing public support for the humane treatment of animals, these companies have financed research into, among other things, the emotional, mental and behavioral states of our fellow creatures.

[4] Studies on pigs' social behavior funded by McDonald's at Purdue University, for example, have found that they crave affection and are easily depressed if isolated or denied playtime with each other. The lack of mental and physical stimuli can result in deterioration of health.

[5] The European Union has taken such studies to heart and outlawed the use of isolating pig stalls by 2012. In Germany, the government is encouraging pig farmers to give each pig 20 seconds of human contact each day and to provide them with toys to prevent them from fighting.

[6] Other funding sources have fueled the growing field of study into animal emotions and cognitive abilities.

[7] Researchers were stunned recently by findings (published in the journal *Science*) on the conceptual abilities of New Caledonian crows. In controlled experiments, scientists at Oxford University reported that two birds named Betty and Abel were given a choice between using two tools, one a straight wire, the other a hooked wire, to snag a piece of meat from inside a tube. Both chose the hooked wire. Abel, the more dominant male, then stole Betty's hook, leaving her with only a straight wire. Betty then used her beak to wedge the straight wire in a crack and bent it with her beak to produce a hook. She then snagged the food from inside the tube. Researchers repeated the experiment and she fashioned a hook out of the wire nine of out of 10 times.

[8] Equally impressive is Koko, the 300-pound gorilla at the Gorilla Foundation in Northern California, who was taught sign language and has mastered more than 1,000 signs and understands several thousand English words. On human IQ tests, she scores between 70 and 95.

[9] Tool-making and the development of sophisticated language skills are just two of the many attributes we thought were exclusive to our species. Self-awareness is another.

[10] Some philosophers and animal behaviorists have long argued that other animals are not capable of self-awareness because they lack a sense of individualism. Not so, according to new studies. At the Washington National Zoo, orangutans given mirrors explore parts of their bodies they can't otherwise see, showing a sense of self. An orangutan named Chantek who lives at the Atlanta Zoo used a mirror to groom his teeth and adjust his sunglasses.

[11] Of course, when it comes to the ultimate test of what distinguishes humans from the other creatures, scientists have long believed that mourning for the dead represents the real divide. It's commonly believed that other animals have no sense of their mortality and are unable to comprehend the concept of their own death. Not necessarily so. Animals, it appears, experience grief. Elephants will often stand next to their dead kin for days, occasionally touching their bodies with their trunks.

[12] We also know that animals play, especially when young. Recent studies in the brain chemistry of rats show that when they play, their brains release large amounts of dopamine, a neurochemical associated with pleasure and excitement in human beings.

[13] Noting the striking similarities in brain anatomy and chemistry of humans and other animals, Stephen M. Sivy, a behavioral scientist at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania, asks a question increasingly on the minds of other researchers. "If you believe in evolution by natural selection, how can you believe that feelings suddenly appeared, out of the blue, with human beings?"

[14] Until very recently, scientists were still advancing the idea that most creatures behaved by sheer instinct and that what appeared to be learned behavior was merely genetically wired activity. Now we know that geese have to teach their goslings their migration routes. In fact, we are finding that learning is passed on from parent to offspring far more often than not and that most animals engage in all kinds of learned experience brought on by continued experimentation.

[15] So what does all of this portend for the way we treat our fellow creatures? And for the thousands of animals subjected each year to painful laboratory experiments? Or the millions of domestic animals raised under the most inhumane conditions and destined for slaughter and human consumption? Should we discourage the sale and purchase of fur coats? What about fox hunting in the English countryside, bull fighting in Spain? Should wild lions be caged in zoos?

[16] Such questions are being raised. Harvard and 25 other U.S. law schools have introduced law courses on animal rights, and an increasing number of animal rights lawsuits are being filed. Germany recently became the first nation to guarantee animal rights in its constitution.

[17] The human journey is, at its core, about the extension of empathy to broader and more inclusive domains. At first, the empathy extended only to kin and tribe. Eventually it was extended to people of like-minded values. In the 19th century, the first animal humane societies were established. The current studies open up a new phase, allowing us to expand and deepen our empathy to include the broader community of creatures with whom we share the Earth.

Smith-Holt, “I Had to Bury My 26-Year-Old Son Because He Couldn’t Afford Insulin”

Nicole Smith-Holt, *Truthout*, February 1, 2018.

Note 1: – the original version of this article contains online links to sources. The footnotes below describe some of the links used, and explain some technical terms.

CLASS EXERCISE IDEA: Before you ask students to read the Smith-Holt text you could show them this 4 minute video op-ed, "[We either Buy Insulin or We Die.](#)" It makes a fascinating, engaging argument about inequities in access to insulin.

Students could analyze the strategies in this video, and compare them to strategies in the Smith-Holt text below.

On June 27, 2017, my son Alec was found dead, alone in his Minneapolis apartment. It shouldn’t have happened.

Alec had Type 1 diabetes, a serious condition that is manageable with access to insulin and proper supplies. But Alec turned 26 years old on May 20 of last year, which meant that his coverage under my health insurance policy ended a few days later. Alec had a full-time, steady job. But, like a lot of US workers, he did not have good health insurance offered through his employer.

For Alec and others with diabetes, this presents a deadly situation. Many people with type 2 diabetes need regular access to insulin to live; all persons with Type 1 do. Insulin is a 95-year-old drug whose discoverers sold their patents for \$1 each, but its price has increased over 1,000 percent¹ since the late 1990s. A vial of the same insulin that was once sold for around \$25 can now cost patients like Alec nearly \$300, and many people need multiple vials per month to survive.

The pharmaceutical companies that sell insulin won’t disclose any details, but it is likely that this same vial is manufactured for just a few dollars.² Which means that those companies are making huge profits and paying huge CEO salaries.³ The three insulin manufacturers have raised their prices in lockstep for many years now, prompting a class-action lawsuit⁴ and criminal investigations into collusion. Additionally, the insurance industry is also complicit in the drug pricing scheme.

For Alec, this meant that his insulin and supplies cost almost \$1,300 a month. He and I together researched for months in advance about his health insurance options. They weren’t good. The best plan we found would cost him \$450 a month for the premium with a whopping \$7,600 deductible. That deductible meant he would be paying out-of-pocket for his medicine for many months anyway, so he decided to go without the plan until he could find a different job with benefits.

With the cost so high, Alec tried to ration his insulin. I have since learned that this is not uncommon.

¹ Link Ben Popken, "Desperate Families Driven to Black Market Insulin." *NBC News*, April 25, 2017.

² Link to Fran Quigley, "Making Insulin Affordable." *Foreign Affairs*, March 13, 2017.

³ Link to Richard Anderson, "Pharmaceutical industry gets high on fat profits" *BBC News*, 6 November 2014.

⁴ Link to Katie Thomas, "Drug Makers Accused of Fixing Prices on Insulin." *New York Times*, Jan. 30, 2017

Globally, half of the people who need insulin⁵ can't reliably get access to it. With 6 million people⁶ in the US insulin-dependent, and nearly 40 percent⁷ of Americans uninsured or facing high deductibles that leave their medicine costs uncovered, the crisis is occurring right here, too.

Endocrinologists here in the US report that as many as one in five of their patients⁸ are not able to afford their insulin. For many persons with diabetes, that means they land in the emergency room with diabetic ketoacidosis⁹. For others, like Alec, they never get there. Just 27 days after his coverage under my insurance ended, I received the call no parent ever wants to get.

As you would imagine, my family and I are still grieving. But I've decided that sharing our story may help prevent someone else from going through what Alec did. There are a lot of proposals to increase access to affordable health coverage and to lower the price of medicines, including forcing drug companies to be transparent about their research costs and profits, and allowing Medicare to negotiate down the price it pays for prescription drugs. To me, they all boil down to one theme: Access to insulin, and other life-essential medicines, is a human right.

The inventor of insulin, Frederick Banting, believed that. When he was asked why he gave away his patent for \$1, he replied, "Because insulin does not belong to me. It belongs to the world." That spirit is being violated today, where there are thousands of GoFundMe pages devoted to people like Alec, desperately trying to cobble together the money they need for their monthly insulin.

There are a lot of good people working to change this, including US lawmakers. But it seems clear to me that significant movement toward universal access to essential medicines will only come when the affected patients and their loved ones help lead the way.

So I was happy to see that people with diabetes in Nevada were able to help push through a law that requires transparency in insulin pricing there.¹⁰ And that is why I support the patient group T1 International's demand that insulin manufacturers disclose the profits they are making off of each vial and reverse their unjustified price increases. That is why I shared Alec's story at a recent demonstration led by Type 1 diabetes patients outside the headquarters of insulin manufacturer Eli Lilly and Company, demanding increased transparency and lower prices.

As I told the patients and activists gathered there, my Alec was the best son anyone could ask for. He was loved by so many and I am so proud to have been his mom for the short 26 years I had with him. But he should still be here. I should not have buried my son at 26 because he couldn't afford the one thing in life that was created to keep him alive.

⁵ Link to "Inequities and Inefficiencies in the Global Insulin Market." 2015 Report by Health Action International, a non-profit organization that conducts research and policy analysis on healthcare.

⁶ Link to "Why treating diabetes keeps getting more expensive, Carolyn Johnson, *Washington Post*, Oct 31, 2016.

⁷ Link to 2016 report by Centers for Disease Control on levels of health insurance coverage.

⁸ Link to "Lilly insulin prices come under microscope," John Russell, *Indianapolis Business Journal*, Aug 25, 2017.

⁹ Diabetic ketoacidosis is a buildup of acids in the blood that can be life-threatening.

¹⁰ Link to "Nevada just passed one of the strictest drug pricing transparency laws in the country." By Lydia Ramsey *Business Insider*, Jun. 15, 2017.

How Doctors Can Help Skeptical Patients Understand Vaccines.

Amitha Kalaichandran, *Los Angeles Times*, June 05, 2019.

Amitha Kalaichandran is a pediatrics resident doctor, epidemiologist, and medical journalist who writes about public health, behavioral science, and integrative medicine.

The *Los Angeles Times* is an American daily newspaper based in Los Angeles, but also read across much of California and some other parts of the United States.

Context: In recent years there has been a decline in immunization rates. Some parents have decided not to get their children immunized for a variety of reasons, including fear that vaccines may not be safe, or may cause autism (scientists and medical experts have shown that vaccines are safe and do not cause autism). There has been a significant increase in outbreaks of infectious diseases such as measles, with some of the largest occurring in California. Doctors have struggled to persuade some parents that vaccines are safe and effective. In this article the author argues there are some simple ways doctors can help educate and persuade patients. While the text primarily addresses doctors and healthcare workers, it may also be aimed at educating parents reluctant to vaccinate their children, or parents who may be in a position to talk to others who are skeptical of vaccines.

In 1853, as public health awareness was growing in England, Parliament passed a law requiring all babies to be vaccinated for smallpox, a virulent and deadly disease. The vaccine, developed by physician and scientist Edward Jenner at the turn of the previous century, was an effective way of preventing smallpox. Yet, not everyone was happy about the new law.

Pockets of resistance arose quickly, and in 1867, the National Anti-Compulsory Vaccination League was founded, with concerns not dissimilar to those of today's vaccine skeptics. The group questioned whether the vaccine might harm its recipients; they believed doctors were somehow profiting from the vaccination law; and they railed against the absence of personal choice.

Today, with the measles epidemic¹¹, we are back, effectively, to where Brits found themselves in the 19th century. But there is one big difference. Then, there was incomplete knowledge of how diseases spread and how vaccinations prevent them. Now, the issue isn't so much a lack of information but the lack of a proper foundation on which to process information. Doctors need to help provide that foundation for their patients.

Not long ago, the father of one of my pediatric patients asked me a simple question about vaccinations: "How is giving a medication to my healthy child supposed to be a good thing?"

It was a eureka moment for me to hear that he considered vaccines to be medicines rather than what they actually are: prevention tools. A vaccine needs to be seen more like a helmet or a seat belt — preventing something from happening rather than treating something that's there. I tried to clarify how vaccines work by using an analogy. I asked him if he read aloud to his son. He did. I likened vaccines to

¹¹ The author is referring to a series of measles outbreaks that occurred in California in early 2019.

what happens when he repeatedly points to and identifies an object in a favorite book. Over time, his son learns what the object looks like, and when he sees it in real life, he will recognize it.

A vaccine needs to be seen more like a helmet or a seat belt — preventing something from happening rather than treating something that's there.

Similarly, a vaccine contains protein identifiers of the virus or bacteria it is aimed at preventing. It doesn't have the complete virus or bacteria itself — just as a book has only a picture of, say, a zebra, not the actual animal. The immune system learns to “recognize” the identifiers, and is thus able to mount a strong response if and when it encounters the actual virus or bacteria, much as a child could recognize a real zebra in the zoo because of exposure to pictures of one.

Two other concepts doctors need to help their patients understand are causality and risk. Causality is tricky. In part, it's a matter of timing. If your toe hurts immediately after you hit it against the door, it's reasonable to assume the door caused it. But timing alone isn't enough; there also must be plausibility — a rational reason to connect one thing with another. There is a rational reason, after years of study, to connect smoking to lung cancer, for example. But even though the symptoms of autism often first emerge in children at around the same age that they are being vaccinated, there's no biologically plausible basis for a connection — any more than, say, than if a child who prefers to wear yellow every day develops autism, we could establish that yellow clothing caused the condition.

Similarly, and related to this, most of us are poor judges of risk and its role in how we process uncertainty. We fear dying in a plane crash more than in a car accident, though the latter is far more likely. With vaccines, hearing about a rare side effect, especially if coupled with an emotional element (having a close friend who shares the same fear, for example), can make the risk of being vaccinated seem far greater than the risks posed by the disease it would prevent, even though quite the opposite is true.

That said, it's important for doctors to empathize with parents who express these fears. Whether or not a fear is fully rational, it's real. One thing that can help is explaining not only the research behind vaccine risk, but also the rigor with which research articles are appraised and reviewed. It was that rigor that exposed, in the end, the fraudulent “research” that suggested a vaccine-autism connection. It was also scientific rigor over decades of meticulous research that has established the safety and efficacy of vaccines. And the inquiry doesn't stop when a vaccine hits market. The Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System is a U.S. government-sponsored safety surveillance program aimed at quickly spotting problems with vaccines. In the past, it has been able to rapidly identify potential problems, as it did with a first-generation rotavirus vaccine, for instance.

A final thing doctors might want to share with reluctant patients is something that I myself was surprised to learn: Vaccines are only a tiny fraction of pharmaceutical profit. So the argument in vaccine-hesitant communities that vaccines are promoted largely because they provide huge profits for drug companies simply doesn't pan out.

Part of the reason there's such a disconnect between physicians and vaccine-skeptical patients is that they don't come into the discussion speaking the same language. The more we can learn about each others' perspectives, the better it will be for children and for public health.

Miller, "A Smoker's Plea."

Stephen Miller, Opinion Column | April 9, 2007, *The Chronicle* (Duke University Student Newspaper) <http://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2007/04/smokers-plea>

As you may have heard, the University, under pressure from the Medical Center, may stop selling cigarettes on campus next year. The University has already banned smoking in indoor locations, and I think it's likely it won't be too long before Duke joins the growing collegiate trend (and its own Medical Center) and bans smoking on campus altogether. This would be a grievous error.

With countless dollars and the awesome force of political correctness behind it, the anti-smoking crusade is nearly impervious to truth or reason. But I shall nonetheless make an effort to dismantle a few of the major lies that have brought our society to its knees before the unrelenting health fascists. So let's begin.

A study in the British Medical Journal reports that men who quit smoking before the age of 30 live just as long as those who never smoked. Indeed, it is safer for college kids to smoke than to drive.

But what of the people who don't quit? As the renowned Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, reports, even if one uses the government's own dubious figures, the majority of smoking deaths occur at age 70 or above. Moreover, almost half occur at age 75 or above and almost 20 percent occur at age 85 or above. A great many smokers who die of tobacco-related causes are still outliving non-smokers.

Again, the actual figures are probably even more optimistic for smokers because the anti-smoking studies are so biased. In these studies, smoking-related deaths are defined as anything that kills smokers at a higher rate than non-smokers, even if negligibly so. Thus, a smoker whose obesity kills him through heart disease still gets tallied as a smoking death. Even deaths by fire are counted as smoking-related. I kid you not.

In "Lies, Damned Lies, and 400,000 Smoking Related Deaths," the authors show that if one even lightly firms up the standards for smoking-related deaths, the number immediately drops by 65 percent. And get this-if one applies the same methodology the Centers for Disease Control uses to calculate smoking-related deaths to lack-of-exercise related deaths, failure to exercise kills over 100,000 more people than smoking. And bad dietary habits? Over 200,000 more people. Using the CDC's standards, smoking is healthier than getting too little exercise or eating poorly. So is the University going to shut down McDonald's?

In fact, if one compares smokers who live a healthy lifestyle to non-smokers who live a very unhealthy lifestyle, smokers will in fact turn out to be "healthier and die less often by a factor of three than the never-smokers." And what of second-hand smoking, you say? Even if the risk of smoking is grossly exaggerated, don't non-smokers have a right to avoid the grave hazards of second-hand smoking? They would, if only second-hand smoking were in fact a grave hazard.

As the Cato Institute Reports in "The Case Against Smoking Bans," a forgotten study from the New England Journal of Medicine in 1975 found that, "one would have to breathe smoke-filled air for 4,000 hours in order to inhale as much tobacco smoke as a smoker inhales in a single cigarette."

How does this translate to cancer risks? A 2003 study of 35,000 never-smoking Californians who were married to smokers, based on data collected for 39 years, found "no heightened lung cancer risk among study subjects." And that's people living with smokers-not those who happen to dine in a restaurant or walk on a boulevard where someone is lighting up.

What does this all mean? First and foremost, second-hand smoking cannot be used to justify efforts to restrict and ban smoking. Secondly, smoking, while risky and potentially lethal, is not nearly as dangerous as special interest groups and their cohorts in government have made it out to be. It is instead an issue with tremendous political capital that preys on people's fears.

The real risks are the fascistic tendencies that prohibit smoking in even private establishments, violating our liberties and setting the groundwork for a future where any personal habit can be regulated when it is politically expedient. So, to all smokers and people who value their freedom, I say it is time to draw a line in the ash and defend our right to light up. Washington Duke wouldn't have it any other way.

Shieh, Smoking ban diminishes on-campus diversity

By [Simon Shieh](#), *Daily Aztec*, January 29, 2014.

<http://www.thedailyaztec.com/47214/opinion/smoking-ban-diminishes-on-campus-diversity/>

I smoked my first cigarette when I was 18 years old living in a remote mountain village in southern China. I was offered one almost every day and finally tried it out of curiosity. It made me nauseous and I didn't smoke again. The people who lived in the village either didn't know, chose to ignore, or had simply forgot that smoking is bad for your health. However, it held no connotations and nearly everyone did it. [quote]Living there, I learned that my healthy lifestyle was neither right nor better, but completely arbitrary.[/quote] San Diego State's recent move toward a smoke-free campus limits diversity in our community, restricts what some consider a social event and a coping mechanism and projects a misrepresented image of our student body.

The issue of secondhand smoke was probably the forefront decision to restrict smoking on campus, and although I agree that it's a serious issue, I don't believe that secondhand smoke outdoors in an isolated area would have a significant effect on the non-smoking population at SDSU. In a study done by the California Environmental Protection Agency, nicotine concentration from secondhand smoke was measured various indoor and outdoor locations. The results showed that the concentration of nicotine in the outdoor campus setting would be 0.051µg/m³ (microgram/cubic meter). Compared to the concentration of nicotine in secondhand smoke indoors, which is 29.2 µg/m³, that number is miniscule. Even with the previous outdoor smoking areas on campus, the effects on non-smokers were minimal. By further isolating the smoking areas, the effects could easily be eliminated altogether. When looked at this way, the benefits of isolated outdoor smoking areas outweigh the negative effects that this kind of controlled smoking would have on the general student population.

Smoking is a social event, a chance to escape outdoors and share a calming activity with friends. Those who feel anxious around others, and often avoid social situations, suddenly have a reason to join a group of smokers. They ask for a lighter and let themselves get swallowed into a group

wherein their cigarette is physical proof of membership. Smokers share experiences and an identity just by smoking. They exhale an amiable nonchalance about the frailty of their lives, letting their vice permeate their day-to-day lives in a physically destructive, emotionally liberating recesses, while banded together in spite of, but not against, the grimaces of passers-by. For me, a non-smoker, seeing the groups of people clustered around a bench or a walkway talking and laughing with a cigarette is always a comforting sight.

Smoking is not just a social experience, it's also a coping mechanism. We all have them, but we like to categorize and judge others based on their dependence and their effects. On the spectrum of coping mechanisms, smoking is probably on the "bad" end because of its adverse effects on health, and its shameless ability to cause addiction. [quote]While I'm a strong advocate for health, I'm also an advocate for doing what makes you happy.[/quote] Of course, there's a line to be drawn here, but the way I see it, cigarettes fall short of that line. College is stressful and some personalities are better equipped to handle that stress than others. It's unfair to take away what some people consider their form of stress relief in the place they probably need it most.

While it's unfair to compare SDSU to a Chinese village, I admire the uninhibitedness of the latter. A campus that promotes a homogenous lifestyle is sacrificing an element of diversity and freedom. Students should be free to smoke on campus as long as they are not affecting the health of others, regardless of how they affect others' sensibilities. Having a smoke-free campus misrepresents the diversity of the characters that make up our student body. The student plagued with anxiety is as much a part of our community as the confident and collected student; while one craves the stimulation of class work and deadlines, the other just needs to step outside and smoke a cigarette.

Any student here is made well aware of the effects of cigarettes on his or her health, so I see no reason why isolated smoking should be prohibited on campus.

Rockmore, "How Texas Teaches History"

By ELLEN BRESLER ROCKMORE. *New York Times*, Oct 21, 2015

A TEXAS high school student and his mother [recently called attention](#) to a curious line in a geography textbook: a description of the Atlantic slave trade as bringing "millions of workers" to plantations in the American South. McGraw-Hill Education, the publisher of the textbook, has since acknowledged that the term "workers" was a misnomer.

The company's chief executive also promised to revise the textbook so that its digital version as well as its next edition would more accurately describe the forced migration and enslavement of Africans. In the meantime, the company [is also offering to send stickers](#) to cover the passage.

But it will take more than that to fix the way slavery is taught in Texas textbooks. In 2010, the Texas Board of Education [approved a social studies curriculum](#) that promotes capitalism and Republican political philosophies. The curriculum guidelines prompted [many concerns](#), including that new textbooks would downplay slavery as the cause of the Civil War.

This fall, [five million public school students](#) in Texas began using the textbooks based on the new guidelines. And some of these books distort history not through word choices but through a tool we often think of as apolitical: grammar.

In September, [Bobby Finger of the website Jezebel](#) obtained and published some excerpts from the new books, showing much of what is objectionable about their content. The books play down the horror of slavery and even seem to claim that it had an upside. This upside took the form of a distinctive African-American culture, in which family was central, Christianity provided “hope,” folk tales expressed “joy” and community dances were important social events.

But it is not only the substance of the passages that is a problem. It is also their form. The writers’ decisions about how to construct sentences, about what the subject of the sentence will be, about whether the verb will be active or passive, shape the message that slavery was not all that bad.

I teach freshman writing at Dartmouth College. My colleagues and I consistently try to convey to our students the importance of clear writing. Among the guiding principles of clear writing are these: Whenever possible, use human subjects, not abstract nouns; use active verbs, not passive. We don’t want our students to write, “Torture was used,” because that sentence obscures who was torturing whom.

In the excerpts published by Jezebel, the Texas textbooks employ all the principles of good, strong, clear writing when talking about the “upside” of slavery. But when writing about the brutality of slavery, the writers use all the tricks of obfuscation. You can see all this at play in the following passage from a textbook, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, called Texas United States History:

Some slaves reported that their masters treated them kindly. To protect their investment, some slaveholders provided adequate food and clothing for their slaves. However, severe treatment was very common. Whippings, brandings, and even worse torture were all part of American slavery.

Notice how in the first two sentences, the “slavery wasn’t that bad” sentences, the main subject of each clause is a person: slaves, masters, slaveholders. What those people, especially the slave owners, are doing is clear: They are treating their slaves kindly; they are providing adequate food and clothing. But after those two sentences there is a change, not just in the writers’ outlook on slavery but also in their sentence construction. There are no people in the last two sentences, only nouns. Yes, there is severe treatment, whippings, brandings and torture. And yes, those are all bad things. But where are the slave owners who were actually doing the whipping and branding and torturing? And where are the slaves who were whipped, branded and tortured? They are nowhere to be found in the sentence.

In another passage, slave owners and their institutionalized cruelty are similarly absent: “Families were often broken apart when a family member was sold to another owner.”

Note the use of the passive voice in the verbs “were broken apart” and “was sold.” If the sentence had been written according to the principles of good draftsmanship, it would have looked like this: Slave owners often broke slave families apart by selling a family member to another owner. A bit more powerful, no? Through grammatical manipulation, the textbook authors obscure the role of slave owners in the institution of slavery.

It may appear at first glance that the authors do a better job of focusing on the actions of slaves. After all, there are many sentences in which “slaves” are the subjects, the main characters in their own

narrative. But what are the verbs in those sentences? Are the slaves suffering? No, in the sentences that feature slaves as the subject, as the main actors in the sentence, the slaves are contributing their agricultural knowledge to the growing Southern economy; they are singing songs and telling folk tales; they are expressing themselves through art and dance.

There are no sentences, in these excerpts, anyway, in which slaves are doing what slaves actually did: toiling relentlessly, without remuneration or reprieve, constantly subject to confinement, corporal punishment and death.

The textbook publishers were put in a difficult position. They had to teach history to Texas' children without challenging conservative political views that are at odds with history. In doing so, they made many grammatical choices. Though we don't always recognize it, grammatical choices can be moral choices, and these publishers made the wrong ones.