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Evaluating Arguments and Claims in a Text




Introduction

THEME: >>> Other Times and Places

A writer's **argument** is his or her position on an issue. When authors write to make an argument or convince readers of something, they make **claims** in a text, or statements that they believe to be true. Then the writer backs up each claim with **evidence**, or information that supports the claim. It is up to you, the reader, to evaluate whether or not the claims are true based on the evidence the author provides.

Read the magazine advertisement below.



Drink Peerless Juice, Because You Need the Best!

Stop giving your body what it doesn't need—or want.

Peerless Juice contains a bounty of delicious and easily digestible ingredients that will uplift your mind and restore your health. Peerless Juice is made with the freshest organic fruits and vegetables. Our product is made with ingredients from sustainable, responsible farmers only. Each bottle is loaded with antioxidants, such as beta-carotene and vitamin E, that will help you fight heart disease and cancer.*

**Statements not approved by the FDA*

Fill in the table about the ad's claim and the evidence to support it.

Claim: Peerless Juice will uplift your mind and restore your health.		
Evidence	Does Evidence Relate to Claim?	Is Evidence Valid?

Based on the table, is the claim valid? Explain why or why not.

In determining the validity of an informational passage, it is important to trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims the author makes. You must determine if the evidence and reason is good enough to support the claims.

Read the first part of the passage. Then answer the questions.

The Making of the Transcontinental Railroad

- 1 On May 10, 1869, the transcontinental railroad was finally complete. After seven years of very difficult labor, challenging circumstances, and political maneuvering, the east and west coasts of the United States were connected by train. For the first time, individuals could travel the width of the nation with ease.
- 2 An interest in the west coast began to develop among settlers in the decades that preceded, especially after gold was discovered in California in 1849. However, the journey westward was a very dangerous and long one. Traveling across plains, rivers, mountains, and deserts was tough and risky. As a result, some people traveled six months by sea instead, putting themselves at risk for yellow fever and other fatal diseases.
- 3 Seeing an opportunity, entrepreneur Asa Whitney asked Congress in 1845 to fund a railroad that would extend to the Pacific Ocean. However, the proposal was met with resistance. Some 15 years later, Theodore Judah got involved. He formed the Central Pacific Railroad Company with investors and helped convince the United States government to sign the Pacific Railroad Act.
- 4 Construction of the railroad began simultaneously on both coasts of the United States. The Central Pacific Railroad started laying tracks in Sacramento, while another company, the Union Pacific Railroad, began construction at the Missouri River. The intention was that the tracks would meet somewhere in the middle of the nation. For every mile of track they laid, the government would give them a certain amount of acres of land and government bonds. As a result, the two companies were fiercely competitive.
- 5 The construction took years to actually begin. Judah became disillusioned with his investors. They had little experience in such undertakings and took advantage of legal loopholes to maximize government funding. Unfortunately, while Judah was on his way to recruit new investors, he caught yellow fever and died. Meanwhile, the Union Pacific Railroad Company was taken over illegally by Dr. Thomas Durant. As a result, Durant gained complete control of the project.

A CLOSER LOOK

Underline the central idea of paragraph 5. Circle details that support it.

Think About It 

What claim does the author make in paragraph 2 that is supported by details in the same paragraph? Determine a point the author makes in the paragraph, as well as the information the author includes to back up that claim.

What is the topic of the passage? _____

What is the central idea of paragraph 2? _____

What details are included in the paragraph that support the central idea of paragraph 2? _____

In your opinion, did the author give sufficient evidence to support his claim? Explain your answer. _____

Continue reading the passage. Then answer the question.

6 In the years that followed, both companies struggled to make progress. Challenged by the formidable landscape of the Sierra Mountains, Central Pacific Railroad's construction was very slow going. At the same time, the workers of the Union Pacific Railroad suffered violent attacks by the Native Americans, who were understandably threatened by the construction.

7 In 1865, after losing workers due to the difficulty of the job, Central Pacific Railroad began hiring Chinese laborers. The move proved very fruitful. The Chinese were tireless workers. By 1867, about 14,000 were laboring under brutal conditions, blasting through the Sierra Nevada mountains with gunpowder and nitroglycerine.

8 At that time, the Union Pacific had laid almost four times as much track as the Central Pacific Railroad. Eventually, however, Central Pacific broke through the mountains, finally overcoming their most difficult terrain. Working within just miles of each other, both companies raced full speed ahead to lay as much track as possible.

9 Frantically competing for the government's funds, newly elected President Ulysses S. Grant forced the two companies to decide on a meeting point. That location ended up being Promontory Summit, near Salt Lake City, Utah. There, on May 10, 1869, the final spike was driven into the ground, linking the Central Pacific and Union Pacific. The transcontinental railroad was finally whole.

How does the title of the passage relate to the claims made within it?

Which of the following is a claim that is supported by the *most* relevant and sufficient evidence within the second part of the passage?

- A Dr. Thomas Durant was a selfish man who was uninterested in the development of the railroad.
- B Both railroad companies encountered serious difficulties as they constructed the railroad.
- C The Native Americans were understandably threatened by the construction of the railroad.
- D The Chinese workers enjoyed tackling the dangers of blasting through the Sierra Nevada Mountains.



DISCUSS IT

Does the author make any claims in the passage that are *not* supported by relevant and valid details? Turn to another student and discuss.

Read the excerpt. Then answer the questions.

How the Transcontinental Railroad Affected Native Americans

1 The transcontinental railroad was one of the greatest engineering accomplishments of the 19th century. After more than six years of labor, the nation far and wide celebrated when it was completed. Bells were rung from San Francisco to Washington, DC. One hundred guns were fired in New York City. Steam whistles sounded and cannons fired in Chicago. But the endeavor came at a great cost to others, especially the Native Americans.

2 The Native Americans arrived on the land now known as the United States long before settlers from England and elsewhere had arrived. However, the transcontinental railroad pierced through the Great Plains, leaving a streak of destruction and violence in its wake. The lives of countless Native Americans were taken. Millions of buffalo were killed, and the species was almost driven to extinction.

3 Violence against Native Americans began before the construction of the transcontinental railroad. By the end of the Civil War, many Native Americans died battling with the settlers. Others lost their lives by contracting deadly European diseases they had never known before. Although the United States government had ratified almost 400 treaties with the Plains Indians, incentive to expand westward continued, and many of those treaties were broken.

4 As the transcontinental railroad reached into the Plains, the Native Americans tried to halt expansion. As a result, General Sherman and his troops were sent to protect the area surrounding the construction. But the Native Americans were difficult enemies for the United States to conquer. They used tactics United States soldiers had never encountered before. They also outnumbered General Sherman's troops.

5 In time, General Sheridan took over and got the support and supplies he needed to fight against the Native Americans. During the Winter Campaign of 1868–69, Sheridan destroyed their food, shelter, and livestock with tremendous force. The Native Americans had little choice but to admit defeat or risk starvation.

6 The violence the United States Army perpetuated against Native Americans also reached the buffalo that inhabited the Great Plains. At that time, it's believed that as many as 60 million buffalo roamed this area. They earned the nickname "Thunder of the Plains" because of the powerful sound they used to make as they ran

A CLOSER LOOK

As you read, underline the details in paragraphs 3, 4, 5, and 6 that state the actions the United States Army took against the Native Americans.

together in large groups. However, massive hunting parties began arriving by train, eventually destroying all but a few hundred buffalo.

7 With the buffalo population now nearly gone, warring with the Native Americans ended. Their means of support, mode of living, and habits of life had all been annihilated. The Army forced Native Americans to live on reservations without compensation, forever changing their way of life.

What is the main point of the passage?

1 Part A

Below are three claims that could be made based on the article "How the Transcontinental Railroad Affected Native Americans."

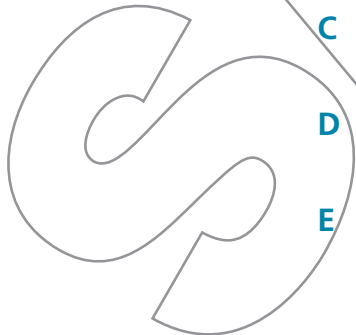
Claims	The transcontinental railroad was a tremendous engineering achievement.
	General Sheridan displayed little regret at killing Native American men, women, and children.
	The Native American population was never the same after the United States' westward expansion.

Write the claim that is supported by the *most* relevant and sufficient evidence within the passage.

Part B

Select two sentences from the passage that *best* support the answer in Part A.

- A** "In time, General Sheridan took over and got the support and supplies he needed to fight against the Native Americans."
- B** "After more than six years of labor, the nation far and wide celebrated when it was completed."
- C** "Their means of support, mode of living, and habits of life had all been annihilated."
- D** "The violence the United States Army perpetuated against Native Americans also reached the buffalo that inhabited the Great Plains."
- E** "The Army forced Native Americans to live on reservations without compensation, forever changing their way of life."

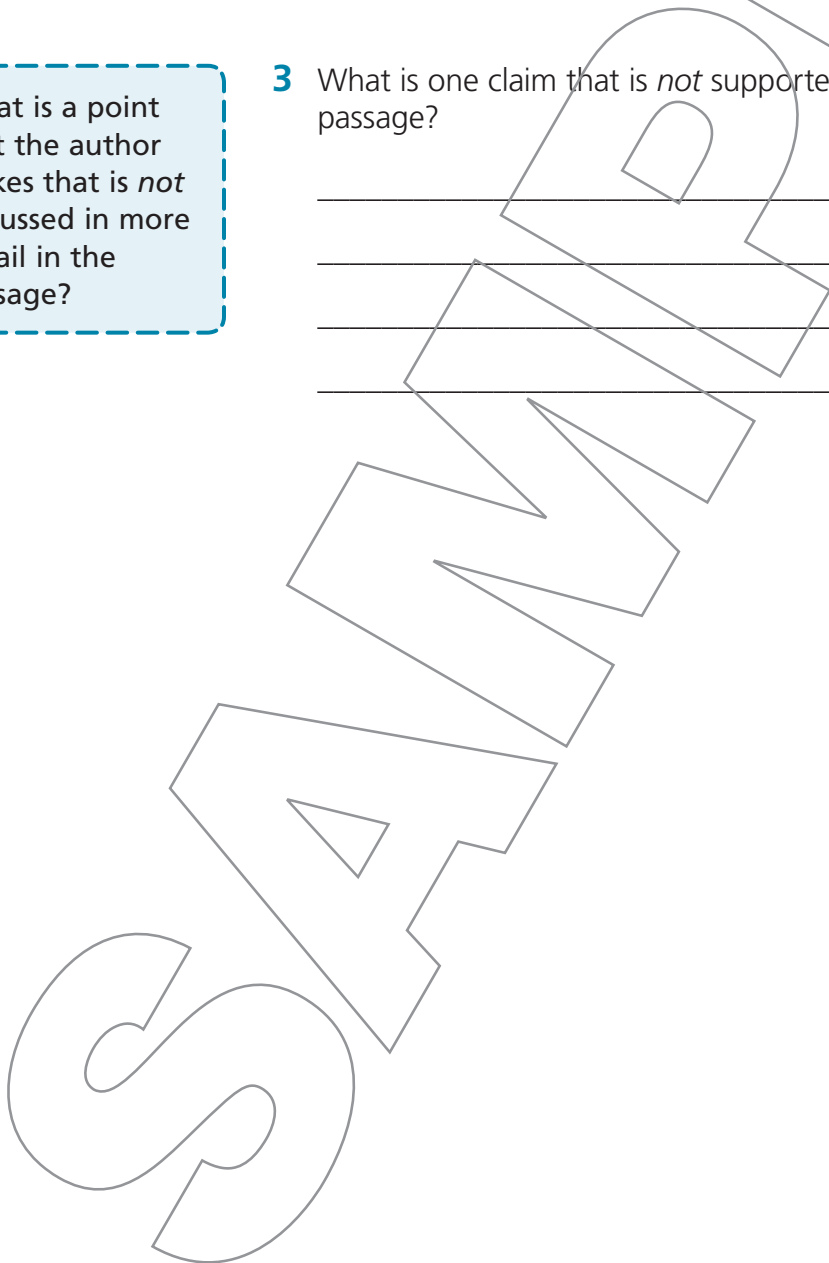


A **claim** is a point the author makes.

2 Identify a claim the author made in the passage and two details included in the passage that support the claim.

What is a point that the author makes that is *not* discussed in more detail in the passage?

3 What is one claim that is *not* supported with evidence from the passage?



Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Changing Times: The Invention of the Automobile



- 1 People today don't think twice when they see an automobile or take a drive on a highway. However, in the beginning of the 20th century, it was quite the opposite. Once the automobile became feasible for people to purchase, everyday life in the United States as it was once known was forever changed.
- 2 The first gasoline-powered automobile in the United States was invented by brothers Charles and Frank Duryea in 1893. Originally, Charles Duryea was in the rapidly expanding bicycle business, but that all changed when he attended the Ohio State Fair in 1886. There, he saw a gasoline engine that was small enough to propel a carriage or wagon. By 1891, he had created a design based on it. Charles and his brother Frank then constructed a car and engine using this design, and on September 22, 1893, the car was successfully driven down the street.
- 3 While the Duryea brothers' invention was hugely significant, it was Henry Ford's "Model T" car that had a much larger impact on everyday life. Built from 1908 to 1927, the Model T was practical and affordable, making it feasible for many people to purchase. Due to the advent of assembly-line production, the price of the Model T went from \$850 in 1908 to less than \$300 in 1925. Over 15 million Model Ts were constructed during this time period, and Ford's intention to "democratize the automobile" was essentially realized.
- 4 Soon, however, Ford's Model T began losing favor to bigger, more powerful, and more comfortable cars. The automobiles created in the Model T's wake continued to change many aspects of everyday life. For example, the motor vehicle allowed people to travel farther than they had ever been able to before. During the days of horse-drawn transportation, people couldn't travel farther than 10 or 15 miles. As a result, those who lived more than this short distance from a railroad station or waterway

were isolated. The automobile changed all that. The roads that were built to facilitate travel between rural and urban communities meant that farmers could expand their businesses by reaching customers they previously couldn't. Both socially and economically, the ability to travel between cities, suburbs, and rural areas changed living habits significantly.

5 The motor vehicle altered life in many other ways as well. For example, more people began making purchases using credit. Although individuals had paid for purchases in installments before, the marketing of the motor vehicle expanded that practice greatly. This was due largely to manufacturing of medium-priced cars, which were more expensive than the Model T. In order for a higher-priced automobile to be affordable to more people, they allowed people to buy them on credit. Eventually, most cars were bought by paying in installments. As a result, people became accustomed to making other purchases through payment plans.

6 However, there were also downsides to the incorporation of the automobile in everyday life. Two significant challenges the motor vehicle caused were traffic congestion and air pollution. City streets had long been congested, but the problem was made much worse by the number of cars that entered or exited a city during rush hour. The fact that more and more people kept purchasing cars and that most cities were not designed for automobile traffic made this predicament hard to solve. Some estimates state that about two-thirds of all the cars in cities were there only to pass through.

7 Rerouting all of this traffic was an expensive and difficult undertaking. Doing so would involve creating roadways that allowed drivers easy access to a city's business district. Often, the construction required to aid this growing problem was met with opposition. It would disturb neighborhoods and demolish scenic and historic areas. One way the problem could be diminished would be to increase the use of public transportation, such as buses and subways. The trouble was that many people lived outside of the city. As a result, mass transit within a city wouldn't change the driving habits of those who needed to travel to and from suburban or rural areas.

8 Like traffic congestion, air pollution also existed before the automobile was invented. However, the widespread use of cars made the problem of air pollution significantly worse. In large cities, half of all the pollution in the atmosphere is due to car exhaust. In cities where smog forms easily, the amount of car exhaust that contributes to air pollution is said to be even greater. In the 1960s, to help solve the problem, the United States government required motor vehicles to restrict the pollution they emitted. Some 40 years later, many scientists agreed that the emissions of motor vehicles, along with power plants and industrial processes, were contributing to the build up of carbon monoxide in the air. This build up traps heat and causes Earth's temperature to increase. As a result, some governments created laws that required better fuel economy. In addition, automobile manufacturers have begun designing cars that use alternative power sources, such as fuel cells.

9 The incorporation of the automobile in everyday life continues to create challenges. However, the impact on our living habits has largely been positive.

1 Part A

Below are three claims that could be made based on the article "Changing Times: The Invention of the Automobile."

Claims	There have been downsides to the incorporation of the automobile in everyday life.
	The invention of the automobile had a considerable impact on everyday life.
	Ford's Model T greatly affected everyday life.

Write the claim that is supported by the *most* relevant and sufficient evidence within the passage.

Part B

Select two sentences from the passage that *best* support the answer in Part A.

- A** "Both socially and economically, the ability to travel between cities, suburbs, and rural areas changed living habits significantly."
- B** "Some estimates state that about two-thirds of all the cars in cities are there only to pass through."
- C** "Due to the advent of assembly-line production, the price of the Model T went from \$850 in 1908 to less than \$300 in 1925."
- D** "In large cities, half of all the pollution in the atmosphere is due to car exhaust."
- E** "Although individuals had paid for purchases in installments before, the marketing of the motor vehicle expanded that practice greatly."

- 2 Read the sentence from the passage.

“However, the widespread use of cars has made the problem of air pollution significantly worse.”

Which of the following sentences from the passage does *not* support this claim?

- A** “Some 40 years later, many scientists agreed that the emissions of motor vehicles, along with power plants and industrial processes, were contributing to the build up of carbon monoxide in the air.”
- B** “In cities where smog forms easily, the amount of car exhaust that contributes to air pollution is said to be even greater.”
- C** “Like traffic congestion, air pollution also existed before the automobile was invented.”
- D** “In large cities, half of all the pollution in the atmosphere is due to car exhaust.”
- 3 Identify a claim the author makes in paragraph 4 and three details included in the paragraph that support the claim.

- 4 Which of the following claims is *not* supported by evidence in the text?

- A** The use of credit to make purchases had a negative effect on the economy.
- B** The Model T had a larger impact on everyday life than the Duryea brothers' car.
- C** The automobile made travel easier for people living in remote areas.
- D** The automobile made air pollution a larger problem.