

Using Diction to Extrapolate Tone

Consensus Thesis

Directions: Read the attached article and ascertain the **TONE** the author has towards the subject. **Highlight words and/or phrases that helped you decide upon that tone. Arrive upon a thesis statement for the following prompt:** *Analyze the text to determine how Cottle crafts her essay to reveal her attitude towards her topic.*

1. Read the article.
2. Re-read the article to examine diction – highlight words/phrases that reveal tone.
3. Develop a thesis for the prompt.
4. In groups of 3, discuss each thesis and arrive upon a consensus thesis.
5. Share your group's thesis with the class and arrive upon a class consensus thesis.

*Remember to T.A.G. your thesis – title, author, and genre!

An A for Effort? Talk About a Lousy Idea
Michelle Cottle

There's a wicked little piece in today's NYT about how college students' somehow, somewhere along the way came to believe that if they put in the effort then they automatically deserve a high grade, regardless of the actual quality of their work.

The article cites research into the subject. For instance:

A recent study by researchers at the University of California, Irvine, found that a third of students surveyed said that they expected B's just for attending lectures and 40 percent said they deserved a B for completing the required reading.

But the tastiest bits are the too-entitled-to-be-believed quotes from real, live college students. As Sarah Kinn, a junior English major at the University of Vermont, told the Times:

"I feel that if I do all of the readings and attend class regularly that I should be able to achieve a grade of at least a B."

Wow. Now there's a gal looking to set the world on fire. Remind me to set Ms. Kinn up with a TNR internship ASAP. Because, honestly, the only thing we look for in an intern around this joint is a warm body who can get to work more or less on time and remain conscious long enough to slog through some of the more tedious manuscripts that land on the editors' desks.

Then again, Ms. Kinn's insights into this subject aren't nearly as trenchant as those of Jason Greenwood, a senior kinesiology major at the University of Maryland:

"I think putting in a lot of effort should merit a high grade," Mr. Greenwood said. "What else is there really than the effort that you put in?"

"If you put in all the effort you have and get a C, what is the point?" he added. "If someone goes to every class and reads every chapter in the book and does everything the teacher asks of them and more, then they should be getting an A like their effort deserves. If your maximum effort can only be average in a teacher's mind, then something is wrong."

No, Jason. What would be wrong is if a university trained its students to believe that they were excellent simply for getting up off their futons and doing what was expected of them. Did the reading? Attended class? Stayed up late working on a paper? Good for you, puppy! Sure, you did a craptastic job on that paper--not to mention the final--suggesting that you have no more than a fourth-grader's grasp of the material. But what the hell!? You worked hard. You showed up--even when you had that reallllly bad hangover. You may not have learned much, but you sure did try. Have a nice fat A. And here's hoping it comes in handy when your first employer fires you for not being able to tell your ass from your elbow when it comes to doing your job.

Sweet Jesus, where did such dizzying nonsense come from? Sure, it's easy to blame today's youth for being whiny, spoiled, and entitled. But the kids had to get these delusional ideas from somewhere. I suspect at least part of the blame lies with all those well-intentioned self-esteem-boosting messages that anxious parents, educators, and coaches feel compelled to spout in this era of making every child feel like a winner all the time. You know, the cheery, you-can-do-it mantras along the lines of, "All that matters is that you tried," "The only way to fail is not to try at all."

Um. No. While I understand the self-defeating doubt that we're trying to short-circuit here, there are, practically speaking, lots of ways to fail--much less fail to get an A. One of those is by not having much of an aptitude for a particular area of study. Not all of us are equipped to be rocket scientists, economists, or playwrights, just as not all of us are equipped to be actors or professional basketball players. If anything, a student who tries really, really, really hard at something and still repeatedly falls short might benefit from realizing that his talents lie elsewhere. (As could the rest of us: Not to state the obvious, but I don't want a brain surgeon who graduated at the top of his class because he had perfect attendance. I want one who is an artist with a scalpel.) Go ahead: Aim for the stars. Don't let anyone tell you you can't do something. But if you actually try that thing and it turns out that you're not so hot at it, don't whine about unfair grading. Acknowledge that you have major room for improvement and decide where to go from there. The sooner kids learn how to deal with failure and move on, the less likely we are to have a bunch of whiny, fragile, self-entitled, poorly qualified adults wandering around wondering why their oh-so-stellar efforts aren't properly appreciated in the real world.

Alternatively, now might be a good time to revisit my dream of becoming a concert pianist. I've never had much of an ear for music, but I bet if I quit my day job and worked at it really, really hard--or at least showed up at all my lessons and did the homework--someone would eventually reward my "excellence."