

The Rise of Humanism

from Essays

Essays by Sir Francis Bacon



READING 6 Understand, make inferences, and draw conclusions about the varied structural patterns and features of literary nonfiction. Analyze the effect of subtlety in literary essays. **10B** Draw conclusions about the credibility of persuasive text by examining its implicit and stated assumptions about an issue as conveyed by the specific use of language. **RC-12(A)** Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.

DID YOU KNOW?

Sir Francis Bacon ...

- enrolled in Cambridge University at the age of 12.
- was once imprisoned in the Tower of London.
- is believed by some to be the real author of Shakespeare's plays.

Background:
Tower of London

Meet the Author

Sir Francis Bacon 1561–1626

A true Renaissance man, Sir Francis Bacon had interests extending from law and public service to philosophy and science. As a literary figure, he is perhaps most famous as the father of the English essay. His edition of ten essays, published in 1597, contained the first examples of that literary form to gain popularity in England. Thomas Jefferson was profoundly influenced by Bacon's writings; he called Bacon one of the three greatest men the world has ever known.

Little Lord Bacon Francis Bacon was born into a wealthy and powerful family. His father served as Elizabeth I's Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, and his mother's relatives had powerful connections within the court as well. As a boy, Bacon often crossed paths with the queen, who greeted him fondly as "my little Lord Keeper."

Bacon studied at Cambridge University for two years but suffered from poor health while there. He began to pursue a diplomatic career in France, but he had to return home in 1579 after the sudden death of his father, who left him little money.

Rise and Fall Although Bacon would have preferred a quiet life, concentrating on his interest in natural philosophy, his financial situation forced him

to become a lawyer and a public servant. He rose steadily in royal service, acting as legal counsel to both Elizabeth I and James I. Bacon was eventually knighted, and in 1618 he was appointed to the highest judicial position in England.

Three years later, however, his career ended in scandal when he was charged with accepting bribes. He freely admitted to the charges, convinced that the bribes had never influenced his legal judgments. Bacon's accusers did not accept his defense, and he was forced to resign his post.

A Deadly Experiment Banished from public service, Bacon directed his energies to study and writing, expanding his edition of essays to a total of 58 on a variety of subjects, such as love, friendship, beauty, superstition, death, and revenge.

In addition to his essays, Bacon wrote many philosophical and scientific treatises. Unfortunately, his avid interest in science ultimately led to his death. One wintry day in March, it occurred to him that snow might slow the process of decomposition. Bacon obtained a dead chicken and carefully packed it with snow. Chilled by the experiment, he developed bronchitis and died a week later at the age of 65.

Author Online

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LITERARY ANALYSIS: ESSAY

An **essay** is a relatively brief work of nonfiction that offers an opinion on a subject. The purpose of an essay may be to express ideas and feelings, to inform, to entertain, or to persuade. Sir Francis Bacon wrote essays to persuade the reader to accept his opinions. Bacon's essays are **formal**; that is, they are highly structured and written in a serious, impersonal style using formal language. To get across his points, however, Bacon sprinkles his essays with **aphorisms**, brief statements that express general observations about life in a witty, pointed way that makes them memorable for his reader. In the following aphorism from "Of Studies," for example, Bacon comments on the value of learning:

Natural abilities are like natural plants, that need pruning by study. . . .

As you read Bacon's essays, notice the aphorisms and the characteristics of a formal essay that the essays contain.

Review: Rhetorical Devices

READING SKILL: EVALUATE OPINIONS

Bacon's essays are filled with opinions based on his experiences and observations. When you read the essays, it is important to **evaluate** these opinions, determining whether you agree or disagree with them and the assumptions upon which they are based. Make a chart like the one shown for each of Bacon's essays. As you read each essay, look for statements of opinion. Write each statement in your chart, and give a brief explanation of why you agree or disagree with it.

"Of Studies"		
Opinion	Agree	Disagree
"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed. . . ."	Not all books demand equal attention.	



Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

What's the best ADVICE you ever got?

Francis Bacon wrote his essays to help guide young men who were ambitious to succeed. Like Bacon, many people love to dispense advice and share their knowledge and experience. You've probably received advice from your family and friends on everything from how to manage your homework to what clothes to wear. What advice has made a real difference in your life?

QUICKWRITE Think of some advice that you have found especially helpful. Craft the advice into an aphorism—a brief statement that expresses the advice.



Of Studies

Sir Francis Bacon

Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse;¹ and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of business. For expert men can execute, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshaling of affairs, come best from those that are learned. To spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules is the humor² of a scholar. They perfect **A** nature, and are perfected by experience; for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need pruning by study; and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience. Crafty men contemn³ 10 studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them, for they teach not their own use; but that is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation. Read not to contradict and confute,⁴ nor to believe and take for granted, nor to

A EVALUATE OPINIONS
Reread lines 5–7. Explain why you agree or disagree with Bacon's opinions on the use of study.

Analyze Visuals ►

Consider Bacon's discussion of the uses of studies. What might the pear in this image symbolize?

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1. **discourse:** conversation.
 2. **humor:** eccentricity; peculiar whim.
 3. **Crafty men contemn:** practical men view with contempt.
 4. **confute:** prove wrong.

find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously;⁵ and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention. Some books also may be read by deputy and extracts made of them by others, but that would be only in the less important arguments and the meaner sort of books; else distilled books
 20 are like common distilled waters, flashy things.⁶ Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man. And therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, he had need have a present wit; and if he read little, he had need have much cunning, to seem to know that he doth not. Histories make men wise; poets, witty; the mathematics, subtle; natural philosophy, deep; moral, grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend. **B** *Abeunt studia in mores.*⁷ Nay, there is no stond⁸ or impediment in the wit but may be wrought out by fit studies, like as diseases of the body may have appropriate exercises. Bowling is good for the stone and reins,⁹ shooting for the lungs and breast, gentle walking for the stomach, riding for the head, and the like. So if a
 30 man's wit be wandering, let him study the mathematics; for in demonstrations, if his wit be called away never so little, he must begin again. If his wit be not apt to distinguish or find differences, let him study the schoolmen,¹⁰ for they are *cymini sectores*.¹¹ If he be not apt to beat over matters and to call up one thing to prove and illustrate another, let him study the lawyers' cases. So every defect of the mind may have a special receipt.¹² ☞



TEKS 6

B SUBTLETY

Bacon is a master of using **subtlety**, or fine distinctions, to build his argument. He frequently defines and then elaborates upon an idea by dividing it into distinct parts. For example, in lines 10-12 Bacon provides three distinct opinions about the value of studies: “crafty men condemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them. . . .” In lines 20-25, note the **aphorism** and its elaboration. What subtle distinctions does Bacon make between the acts of reading, of conversing, and of writing? What are the benefits of each? What do these subtle distinctions add to Bacon’s argument about the purpose of studies?

5. **curiously**: carefully; thoroughly.

6. **else distilled books . . . flashy things**: in other respects, abridged books are like herbal home remedies, flat, tasteless things.

7. ***Abeunt studia in mores*** (ä'bě-ōōnt stōō'dē-ä ȳn mō'rāz) *Latin*: Studies show themselves in behavior.

8. **stond**: obstacle.

9. **stone and reins**: gall bladder and kidneys.

10. **schoolmen**: medieval scholars.

11. ***cymini sectores*** (kē'mĭ-nē sĕk-tō'rāz) *Latin*: cutters of herbs—that is, people who make extremely fine distinctions; hairsplitters.

12. **receipt**: prescription; remedy.



Of Marriage and Single Life

Sir Francis Bacon

He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief. Certainly the best works, and of greatest merit for the public, have proceeded from the unmarried or childless men, which both in affection and means have married and endowed the public. Yet it were great reason that those that have children should have greatest **C** care of future times, unto which they know they must transmit their dearest pledges. Some there are who, though they lead a single life, yet their thoughts do end with themselves, and account future times impertinences.¹ Nay, there are some other that account wife and children but as bills of charges. Nay more, there are some foolish
10 rich covetous men that take a pride in having no children, because they may be thought so much the richer. For perhaps they have heard some talk, “Such an one is a great rich man,” and another except to it, “Yea, but he hath a great charge of


C EVALUATE OPINIONS

Reread the opinion expressed in lines 2–5. Do you agree or disagree with this opinion? Explain.

1. **account future times impertinences** (ˈɪm-pərˈtɪn-əns-əz): consider future times to be matters of no concern.

children”; as if it were an abatement to his riches. But the most ordinary cause of a single life is liberty, especially in certain self-pleasing and humorous minds, which are so sensible of every restraint, as they will go near to think their girdles and garters to be bonds and shackles. Unmarried men are best friends, best masters, best servants, but not always best subjects, for they are light to run **D** away, and almost all fugitives are of that condition. A single life doth well with churchmen, for charity will hardly water the ground where it must first fill a pool.

20 It is indifferent for judges and magistrates, for if they be facile² and corrupt, you shall have a servant five times worse than a wife. For soldiers, I find the generals commonly in their hortatives³ put men in mind of their wives and children; and I think the despising of marriage amongst the Turks maketh the vulgar soldier more base. Certainly wife and children are a kind of discipline of humanity; and single men, though they be many times more charitable, because their means are less exhaust, yet, on the other side, they are more cruel and hard-hearted (good to make severe inquisitors), because their tenderness is not so oft called upon. Grave natures, led by custom, and therefore constant, are commonly loving husbands, as was said of Ulysses, *Vetulam suam praetulit immortalitati*.⁴ Chaste women are often proud **E** and froward,⁵ as presuming upon the merit of their chastity. It is one of the best bonds, both of chastity and obedience, in the wife if she think her husband wise, which she will never do if she find him jealous. Wives are young men’s mistresses, companions for middle age, and old men’s nurses, so as a man may have a quarrel⁶ to marry when he will. But yet he was reputed one of the wise men that made answer to the question when a man should marry: “A young man not yet, an elder man not at all.”⁷ It is often seen that bad husbands have very good wives; whether it be that it raiseth the price of their husbands’ kindness when it comes, or that the wives take a pride in their patience. But this never fails, if the bad husbands were of their own choosing, against their friends’ consent; for then they will be sure to

40 make good their own folly. 

D RHETORICAL DEVICES

Notice the **repetition** of the word *best* in lines 16–17. What effects does Bacon achieve by repeating this word?

E ESSAY

What characteristics of a formal essay do you observe in lines 27–29?

Language Coach

Commonly Confused

Words Some words that look similar are easy to confuse. *Elder* and *older* have similar meanings, but *elder* is now mostly used to describe a senior member of a family or group. Does Bacon use *elder* (line 35) the way we do today?

2. **facile** (fās’əl): easily influenced or persuaded; pliable.

3. **hortatives** (hôr’tə-tīvz): speeches to encourage troops before battle.

4. ***Vetulam suam praetulit immortalitati*** (vē’tōō-lām sōō’ām pri’tōō-līt ĭm-mô-tā’lê-tā’tē) *Latin*: He preferred his aged wife to immortality.

5. **froward** (frō-wərd): stubborn.

6. **quarrel**: excuse; reason.

7. **he was reputed . . . not at all**: a quote from the ancient Greek philosopher Thales (thā’lēz), who lived in the sixth century B.C.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** According to “Of Studies,” why should people avoid studying too much or relying too much on their studies?
2. **Paraphrase** Reread lines 13–14 in “Of Studies.” How would you paraphrase Bacon’s advice on the purpose of reading?
3. **Recall** According to “Of Marriage and Single Life,” why are single men more charitable than married ones?
4. **Clarify** What is the point of the quotation Bacon offers in lines 34–36 in “Of Marriage and Single Life”?



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Literary Analysis

5. **Identify Author’s Purpose** Reread lines 14–17 in “Of Studies.” Why might Bacon have chosen to give this advice to his young readers?
6. **Make Inferences** Think about the aspects of marriage that Bacon describes in “Of Marriage and Single Life.” Why might he have chosen not to discuss romantic love in his essay?
7. **Draw Conclusions** After reading the two essays, what conclusions can you draw about Bacon’s views on the following subjects? Cite evidence to support your conclusions.
 - the importance of reading to a person’s development
 - the influence of marriage on a man’s temperament
 - the role of women in society
8. **Analyze Essays** What advantages did Bacon gain by presenting his advice and opinions in formal essays? What might have been the disadvantages in writing this type of essay?
9. **Evaluate Opinions** Review the opinion charts you created as you read the essays. Which opinions do you consider most useful for people living today? Which ones have become most outdated? Explain.

*What’s the best **ADVICE** you ever got?*

What is the least useful advice someone has given you? Why? What advice would have been more useful?