

from **The Spectator**

Essays by Joseph Addison



READING 2C Relate the characters, setting, and theme of a literary work to the historical, social, and economic ideas of its time. **6** Analyze the effect of overstatement in literary essays. **8** Analyze the consistency and clarity of the expression of the controlling idea and the ways in which the organizational and rhetorical patterns of text support or confound the author's meaning or purpose.

DID YOU KNOW?

Joseph Addison ...

- was shy around strangers.
- was nicknamed “the parson in a tie-wig” because of his intense moral convictions.
- was among England’s first journalists to write for both men and women.

Meet the Author

Joseph Addison 1672–1719

Together with his friend Richard Steele, Joseph Addison helped usher in a new age of journalism with the influential periodical *The Spectator*, which helped shape middle-class taste, manners, and morality during the 18th century.

From Poetry to Politics Addison attended Oxford University, where he distinguished himself as a master of Latin verse. In 1695, he wrote *A Poem to his Majesty* in praise of King William III. By dedicating the poem to John Somers, a prominent Whig politician, Addison won Somers’s patronage and was given a grant to travel abroad in Europe on diplomatic missions. In 1705, he again used poetry to further his political career, penning *The Campaign*, which glorified John Churchill, the duke of Marlborough, for his role in the British conquest of the French during the War of the Spanish Succession. The poem helped secure his position in

Whig political circles. He later served as a member of the British and Irish parliaments and eventually obtained several important government posts, including that of secretary of state.

A Friendship Rekindled

When the Whigs lost power in 1710, Addison found himself without

steady income. He reconnected with his old college friend Richard Steele, who had recently launched *The Tatler*, a journal that offered humorous pieces and political commentary with a decidedly Whig bias. Soon Addison began regularly contributing essays anonymously to *The Tatler*. They were so well received that the poet John Gay wondered why the author refused to sign “pieces which the greatest pens in England would be proud to own.”

Manners, Morals, and the Middle Class

The Tatler folded in January 1711, but two months later Steele and Addison inaugurated *The Spectator*, which, unlike their earlier venture, was nonpartisan. A masterful prose stylist, Addison was responsible for a considerable amount of the journal’s content. Addison and Steele were successful in their attempt to bring philosophy “out of closets and libraries . . . and in[to] coffeehouses,” partly because the light, humorous style of *The Spectator* made its moral content acceptable to its 18th-century audience. By praising marriage and honesty while ridiculing hypocrisy and pride, Addison sought to improve the morals and manners of the readers. His scenes of everyday life continue to provide readers valuable insights into how the emerging middle class of early 18th-century England lived.

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-600



LITERARY ANALYSIS: NEOCLASSICISM

The literary style that prevailed in England from the Restoration to nearly the end of the 18th century is referred to as **neoclassicism**, or “new classicism.” In this age, many writers intentionally modeled their works on classical Greek or Latin texts, which they had studied in school. Neoclassicists believed that such ancient works were valuable because they revealed universal and timeless truths about the human condition. These authors respected order, reason, and rules and viewed humans as essentially limited and imperfect. Their writing typically favors society, reason, and observable facts over individuality, emotions, and opinions. As you read, consider the ways in which Addison’s essays embody the spirit and principles of the neoclassical movement.

READING SKILL: ANALYZE AUTHOR’S PURPOSE

Writers create their works to fulfill one or more of these general **purposes**: to express thoughts or feelings, to persuade, to inform, or to entertain. In the essay “Plan and Purpose,” Addison states plainly:

I shall endeavor to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality, that my readers may, if possible, both ways find their account in the speculation of the day.

These works both inform and entertain, inspiring readers to acknowledge and change awkward or inappropriate behaviors. As you read Addison’s essays, examine the way in which he achieves his dual purposes by including these elements:

- amusing situations or **anecdotes**
- a gently mocking **tone**, or attitude toward his subject
- forms of exaggeration, such as **overstatement**

Record your observations in a chart like the one shown.

Essay	Details That Inform	Details That Entertain



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Whose OPINIONS matter?

In the early 18th century, Joseph Addison wrote about matters that resonated with people of his class and background. His opinions helped people navigate their social sphere. Today, people still look to newspaper columnists, comedians, and other media personalities for advice on everything from how to vote to where to find the best pizza.

DISCUSS With a group of classmates, brainstorm a list of influential media figures. Discuss the way they present their opinions and the techniques of persuasion they use. Why do you think they are able to exercise influence over so many people?

Influential Media Figures

1. Anna Quindlen

2.

3.

4.

The SPECTATOR

Joseph Addison

BACKGROUND In the late 1600s, certain writers began to offer moral instruction in periodicals, displaying a casual, good-natured approach to society's ills. Although hundreds of these periodicals were published before the 18th century, none enjoyed the popularity of those written by Joseph Addison and his friend Richard Steele in the early 1700s. Together, Addison and Steele created a form of writing that has remained popular for nearly three centuries—a predecessor of modern newspaper and magazine columns.

PLAN AND PURPOSE

It is with much satisfaction that I hear this great city inquiring day by day after these my papers, and receiving my morning lectures with a becoming seriousness and attention. My publisher tells me that there are already three thousand of them distributed every day. . . . Since I have raised to myself so great an audience, I shall spare no pains to make their instruction agreeable, and their diversion useful. For which reasons I shall endeavor to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality, that my readers may, if possible, both ways find their account in the speculation of the day. . . . The mind that lies fallow but a single day, sprouts up in follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous culture.¹ It was said of Socrates,² that he brought philosophy down from heaven to inhabit among men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea tables and in coffeehouses. **A**

Analyze Visuals ►

What sort of family is represented in the painting? Which details indicate the family's social class?

A NEOCLASSICISM

Reread lines 1–13. What details suggest that Addison prefers public rather than private themes in his writing?

1. **The mind . . . culture:** The mind that is uncultivated for a single day sprouts up in foolishness that can be killed only by constant and careful cultivation. Addison is comparing an idle mind to an unsown field in which weeds sprout up.

2. **Socrates** (sŏk'ŕə-tēz'): an ancient Greek philosopher and teacher.



I would therefore in a very particular manner recommend these my speculations to all well-regulated families, that set apart an hour in every morning for tea and bread and butter; and would earnestly advise them for their good to order this paper to be punctually served up and to be looked upon as a part of the tea equipage.³ . . .

COUNTRY MANNERS

The first and most obvious reflections which arise in a man who changes the city
20 for the country are upon the different manners of the people whom he meets
with in those two different scenes of life. By manners I do not mean morals, but
behavior and good breeding, as they show themselves in the town and in the
country. . . .

Rural politeness is very troublesome to a man of my temper, who generally
takes the chair that is next me and walks first or last, in the front or in the rear,
as chance directs. I have known my friend Sir Roger's⁴ dinner almost cold before
the company could adjust the ceremonial and be prevailed upon to sit down. . . .
Honest Will Wimble,⁵ who I should have thought had been altogether uninfected
30 with ceremony, gives me abundance of trouble in this particular. Though he has
been fishing all the morning, he will not help himself at dinner till I am served.
When we are going out of the hall, he runs behind me; and last night, as we were
walking in the fields, stopped short at a stile⁶ till I came up to it, and upon my
making signs to him to get over, told me, with a serious smile, that sure I believed
they had no manners in the country. . . . **B**

B AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

Reread lines 28–34. What is Addison's **tone** toward Honest Will Wimble? Cite specific words and phrases to support your answer.

ON COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

Before marriage we cannot be too inquisitive and discerning in the faults of the
person beloved, nor after it too dim-sighted and superficial. However perfect
and accomplished the person appears to you at a distance, you will find many
blemishes and imperfections in her humor,⁷ upon a more intimate acquaintance,
which you never discovered or perhaps suspected. Here therefore discretion and
40 good nature are to show their strength; the first will hinder your thoughts from
dwelling on what is disagreeable, the other will raise in you all the tenderness of
compassion and humanity, and by degrees soften those very imperfections into
beauties. . . . **C**

C NEOCLASSICISM

In “On Courtship and Marriage,” which details reflect the neoclassical idea that reason is more important than emotions?

3. **equipage** (ěk'wə-pīj): equipment.

4. **Sir Roger's**: referring to Sir Roger de Coverley, the central figure of a group of fictional characters that Addison sketches in his essays.

5. **Will Wimble**: another in the group of fictional characters that Addison portrays in his essays.

6. **stile**: a set of steps used to climb over a fence.


7. **humor**: disposition; temperament.

LUGUBRIOUS PEOPLE

There are many persons, who, by a natural uncheerfulness of heart, mistaken notions of piety, or weakness of understanding, love to indulge this uncomfortable way of life, and give up themselves a prey to grief and melancholy. Superstitious fears, and groundless scruples, cut them off from the pleasures of conversation, and all those social entertainments which are not only innocent but laudable; as if mirth was made for reprobates, and cheerfulness of heart denied those who are
50 the only persons that have a proper title to it.

Sombrius⁸ is one of these sons of sorrow. He thinks himself obliged in duty to be sad and disconsolate. He looks on a sudden fit of laughter, as a breach of his baptismal vow. An innocent jest startles him like blasphemy. Tell him of one who is advanced to a title of honor, he lifts up his hands and eyes; describe a public ceremony, he shakes his head. . . . All the little ornaments of life are pomps⁹ and vanities. Mirth is wanton,¹⁰ and wit profane. He is scandalized at youth for being lively, and at childhood for being playful. He sits at a Christening, or a marriage feast, as at a funeral; sighs at the conclusion of a merry story; and grows devout when the rest of the company grow pleasant. . . . **D**

ADVANTAGES OF MARRIAGE

60 There is another accidental advantage in marriage, which has likewise fallen to my share; I mean having a multitude of children. These I cannot but regard as very great blessings. When I see my little troop before me, I rejoice in the additions which I have made to my species, to my country, and to my religion, in having produced such a number of reasonable creatures, citizens, and Christians. I am pleased to see myself thus perpetuated, and as there is no production comparable to that of a human creature, I am more proud of having been the occasion of ten such glorious productions, than if I had built a hundred pyramids at my own expense, or published as many volumes of the finest wit and learning. . . . 



TEKS 6

D OVERSTATEMENT

Reread lines 51–59. Addison uses **overstatement**, or exaggeration, to mock what he considers the annoying behavior of those who are too often, for no good reason, “a prey to grief and melancholy.” He invents a fictional character, Sombrius, whose very name is a pun on doom and gloom. Addison exaggerates Sombrius’s demonstrations of despair as much as possible: laughter is immoral, playful children scandalize him, and he is as sorrowful at weddings as he is at funerals. By using such overstatements, Addison reveals just how silly he finds Sombrius’s excessively gloomy behavior. How does making the reader laugh help Addison achieve his purpose in this passage?

Language Coach

Roots and Affixes The suffix *-tion* turns a verb into a noun. Thus, *produce* becomes *production* (line 65). Add *-tion* to *perpetuate*, the root of *perpetuated*, which means “caused to continue” (line 65). What is the resulting word, and what does it mean?

8. **Sombrius**: another fictional character that Addison sketches in his essays.

9. **pomps**: ostentatious or overly showy rituals or displays.

10. **wanton** (wŏn'tən): immoral or impure.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** What advice does Addison have for “well-regulated” families?
2. **Clarify** Why does Addison object to some practices stemming from “rural politeness”?
3. **Summarize** According to Addison, how should a person regard his or her beloved before marriage? after marriage?



READING 2C Relate the characters, setting, and theme of a literary work to the historical, social, and economic ideas of its time. **8** Analyze the consistency and clarity of the expression of the controlling idea and the ways in which the organizational and rhetorical patterns of text support or confound the author’s meaning or purpose.

Literary Analysis

4. **Make Inferences About the Author** In his work, Addison comments on his own life, including his temperament (lines 24–27) and his children (lines 62–64). Summarize his statements and then explain what each reveals about his personality.
5. **Examine Neoclassicism** Reread “Plan and Purpose,” lines 1–18. Explain how the selection exemplifies key aspects of neoclassical writing.
6. **Analyze Author’s Purpose** Review the chart you completed as you read the essays. Among the purposes you identified, how important is the purpose of entertaining the reader? Cite examples or passages from the essays to support your opinion.
7. **Compare Texts** Compare and contrast the third and fifth excerpts from Addison’s essays with Sir Francis Bacon’s essay “Of Marriage and Single Life” (page 467). What differences in **subject matter** and **tone** do you notice? Use a chart like the one shown to help you organize your thoughts.

	Addison	Bacon
Subject Matter		
Tone		

Literary Criticism

8. **Critical Interpretation** The author Samuel Johnson once described Addison’s writing in the following way: “His prose is the model of the middle style; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not groveling.” Cite specific examples and passages from the essays that support this opinion.

Whose **OPINIONS** matter?

What influential media figure’s opinions do you consider overrated today and why? Which media figure do you think deserves a wider audience for his or her opinions? Why?

An Eye for Social Behavior

Everyone has something to say about society. Eavesdrop on almost any conversation and you're bound to hear comments about how people dress, how they treat their dogs, the latest election, or what's on television these days. The social observations of Samuel Pepys, Daniel Defoe, and Joseph Addison have held their place in literary history because of their keen insight and detailed description of English life during the Restoration and 18th century.

"May 23. . . . All the afternoon the King walking here and there, up and down (quite contrary to what I thought him to have been), very active and stirring. Upon the quarter-deck he fell in discourse of his escape from Worcester. Where it made me ready to weep to hear the stories that he told of his difficulties that he had passed through. As his traveling four days and three nights on foot, every step up to his knees in dirt, with nothing but a green coat and a pair of country breeches on and a pair of country shoes, that made him so sore all over his feet that he could scarce stir."

—*The Diary of Samuel Pepys*

Writing to Analyze

Covering both the mundane and the majestic, the writings of Pepys, Defoe, and Addison reveal a great deal about English society. What might these accounts have to offer that a history book would not? Write an essay in which you analyze the value of these writings as a window into a historical time.

Consider

- descriptive details provided by Pepys, Defoe, and Addison about historical events
- commentary by these writers about the events
- how a history book might cover these same events

Extension Online

INQUIRY & RESEARCH

Internet bloggers can be considered the modern-day heirs to the social observers of the 17th and 18th century. Search the Internet for personal weblogs offering social commentary, whether on high school life, national politics, the music business, or some other social arena. Choose two or three that in your opinion offer the most insightful observations. What, if anything, do these bloggers have in common with Pepys, Defoe, and Addison?



WRITING 15A Write an analytical essay.