

Join the national conversation!



Focus Words

analyze | factor | function | interpret | structure

Weekly Passage

Why do we go to school? Some people think the primary goal of education is giving knowledge to students. They feel there is specific information that all kids should know. For instance, they want kids to know what happened in the Revolutionary War and how the food chain works. Others interpret the main role of school as one of preparing students to earn a living. They are most concerned about students learning particular skills, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Some argue that schools should introduce a set of shared values, including liberty and justice. They believe this will help students understand the structure of our democratic government. For example, they feel it is important for students to understand that while each of the three branches of government has a different function, the three work together to make sure we all enjoy certain freedoms and live by the same rules.

Some think schools should teach students to critically analyze what they see, hear, and read. They want students to be able to think

carefully about different perspectives, to respect and challenge other viewpoints, and to form their own opinions about issues that affect them. Although many people say that they want kids to be able to think for themselves, students do not always have the freedom to do so in the classroom.

What do you think the function of school is? What do you consider the most important factors in providing a good education? Which ingredients are essential in your recipe for a good school?

TEACHER

Reading Comprehension/Discussion Questions:

- ▶ What are two different interpretations of the purpose of school?
- ▶ Which function of school do you think is the most important? Why?
- ▶ What is an example of a learning activity that teaches students to analyze something?
- ▶ What are some of the structures that help schools fulfill their function?
- ▶ What are some of the factors that teachers should consider when preparing a lesson for their students?

Unit 1.01

What is the purpose of school?

Focus Word Chart

Word	Meaning	Forms			Related Words
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/Suffixes	
analyze	(v.) – to examine; study	analyzes analyzing analyzed	analysis	reanalyze analyzable analyzer analytic	analytical analytically analyst
factor	(n.) – something that influences the result of something else	factors (pl.) factor (v.) factors factoring factored		factorial	fact factory
function	(n.) – purpose; role; use	functions (pl.) function (v.) functions functioning functioned		dysfunctional functional functionally functor	
interpret	(v.) – to understand or explain something's meaning	interprets interpreting interpreted		reinterpret interpretable interpretation interpreter interpretative	
structure	(n.) – way that parts of something relate to each other and work together	structures (pl.) structure (v.) structures structuring structured		restructure structural	construct destruct instruct

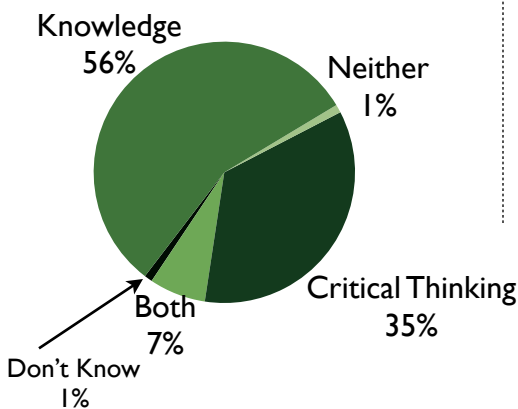
What is the purpose of school?

Problem of the Week

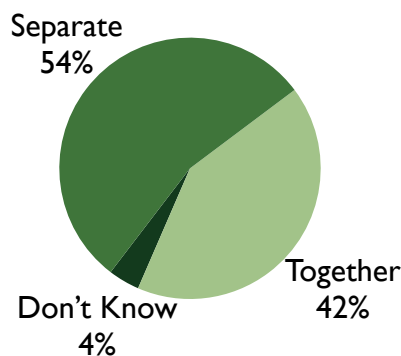


How do Americans view their public schools? **Analyze** the three graphs below. The information comes from a telephone survey taken in 1999.

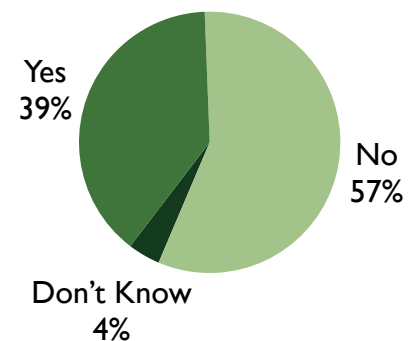
What is the proper **function** of American schools? Should they focus on giving students knowledge, or should they focus on teaching students to think critically?



What is the best class **structure** for elementary schools? Should top students, average students, and struggling students have separate classes, or should different ability levels be taught together?



Should standardized test scores be a **factor** in determining the level of funding a school receives?



Option 1: Which of the following is the best **interpretation** of the data shown in these three graphs?

- A) Americans disagree or are divided on major educational issues.
- B) Americans agree on major educational issues.
- C) Americans want all students to be equally well educated.
- D) Americans are disappointed with today's schools.

Option 2: Answer Option 1. Then determine:

What is the probability that a person responded YES to both questions: "Schools should focus on giving students knowledge," AND "Yes" to the question about making standardized test scores a factor in school funding?

Answer: The probability is $.56 \times .39 = .2184$, or a 21.84% chance

Math Discussion Question: Many teachers believe that classrooms **function** more effectively when students are actively involved. In social studies, students might present an **analysis** of U.S. foreign policy and our relationship to other countries. In Spanish class, students might **interpret** and act out a play written by a Colombian author. Students prepare and present, while the teacher acts as a guide. Is this kind of **structure** realistic for a math class? Or, when you're learning how to multiply or **factor** numbers, is having a teacher give knowledge by explaining the facts the best option?

What is the purpose of school?

Debating the Issue



I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A The primary function of school is to prepare students for the work force. Therefore, knowing what jobs students expect to have is an important factor in determining what they need to know and to be able to do.

B The primary function of school is to teach students how to think for themselves. Therefore, they should spend time in class learning how to learn, analyzing different perspectives, and defending their own positions.

C The primary function of school is to prepare students for democratic citizenship. Therefore, students should learn how to actively participate in the structures of society and government that help to ensure life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

D The primary function of school is to make sure that all students have specific knowledge about history, science, literature, and mathematics. Therefore, students should spend more time learning accepted facts than making their own interpretations.

E _____

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

I believe that...

I agree with you because. . .

You make a good point, but have you considered...

Can you show me evidence in the text that supports what you said?

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes.

TEACHER

Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions about the issue at hand.

Unit 1.01

What is the purpose of school?

Science Activity

Professor Kahn's 12-year-old daughter goes to a Montessori middle school. Montessori schools have a unique **structure**. Students choose what to learn. The teacher's **function** is to observe students as they work. Professor Kahn chose this school for her daughter because students there seemed happy. Happiness, Professor Kahn knows, is an important **factor** in school success.

But now that her daughter is getting older, Professor Kahn is beginning to worry. Do Montessori students really learn as much as traditional students?

Question:

How will 12-year-old Montessori students compare with 12-year-olds from a more traditional classroom, like Professor Kahn's?

Hypothesis:

The students from Professor Kahn's traditional classroom will score at least 5 points higher on a math test than the Montessori students.

Materials:

- ▶ 30 12-year-old Montessori students
- ▶ 30 12-year-old students from Professor Kahn's class
- ▶ Math test



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

TEACHER

With extra time, teachers can emphasize the difference between steps 4 and 5 of the procedure: analyzing the data and interpreting the data.

Analyzing the data means examining or studying it. A person analyzing the data would notice that the average score for traditional students was .2 points higher than the average score for Montessori students, and that the sample size was 30 of each kind of student.

Interpreting the data means thinking about what it means. A reasonable interpretation would be that this very small difference in average test scores suggests the two groups of students are equally knowledgeable about the material on the test.

Real Research

-These two articles talk about a study of Montessori and non-Montessori 12-year-olds that was published in 2006 in Science magazine. The study found that both groups scored equally well on math and reading tests, but that the Montessori students had better social skills and behavior. One critic of the study noted that no sweeping conclusions could be drawn because the study was so small (around 60 total subjects).

Bazon, E. (2007, May 19). The cult of the pink tower: Montessori turns 100 – what the hell is it? Slate. Retrieved on November 6, 2009 from

<http://www.slate.com/id/2166489/>

Boyles, S. (2006). Do Montessori schools have an edge? WebMD. Retrieved on November 6, 2009 from

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/09/28/health/webmd/main2050676.shtml>

Procedure:

1. Give the math test to all 60 students.
2. **Analyze** the test results. How can you describe the data?
3. **Interpret** the data. What does it mean?

Data:

	Average Test Score (out of 100)
Montessori Students	82.7
Traditional Students	82.9

Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

Not supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

The two groups of students had about the same average test score.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



Writing Prompt:

What is the purpose of school?

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

Focus Words

analyze | factor | function | interpret | structure

TEACHER
Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.
Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation notebooks as needed.

A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

Good Start

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

Pretty Good

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

Exemplary

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

[illegible]