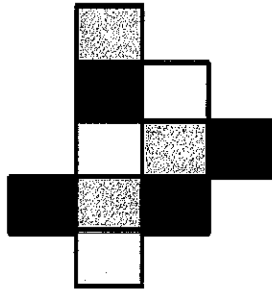

Grades 6-12 English Language Arts Program

ELA High School Course

Module 1: Analyzing Arguments

Student Reader

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Module 1: Analyzing Arguments

Excerpt from *Reality Is Broken* by Jane McGonigal

About this text:

This is an excerpt from the introduction and opening chapter of McGonigal's 2011 *New York Times* bestseller. The premise of the book may be summarized in the subtitle: "Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World." Jane McGonigal, Ph.D., is the Director of Game Research and Development at the Institute for the Future.

As you read:

Look for the central claim of these opening pages, and read to identify how McGonigal supports her claim.

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Gamers have had enough of reality.

They are abandoning it in droves—a few hours here, an entire weekend there, sometimes every spare minute of every day for stretches at a time—in favor of simulated environments and online games. Maybe you are one of these gamers. If not, then you definitely know some of them.

Who are they? They are the nine-to-fivers who come home and apply all of the smarts and talents that are underutilized at work to plan and coordinate complex raids and quests in massively multiplayer online games like *Final Fantasy XI* and the *Lineage* worlds. They're the music lovers who have invested hundreds of dollars on plastic *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* instruments and spent night after night rehearsing, in order to become virtuosos of video game performance.

They're the *World of Warcraft* fans who are so intent on mastering the challenges of their favorite game that, collectively, they've written a quarter of a million wiki articles about the fictional universe—creating a wiki resource nearly one-tenth the size of the entire Wikipedia. They're the *Brain Age* and *Mario Kart* players who take handheld game consoles everywhere they go, sneaking in short puzzles, races, and minigames as often as possible, and as a result nearly eliminating mental downtime from their lives.

They're the United States troops stationed overseas who dedicate so many hours a

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And so, there is a growing perception in the gaming community:

Reality, compared to games, is broken.

In fact, it is more than a perception. It's a phenomenon. Economist Edward Castronova calls it a "mass exodus" to game spaces, and you can see it already happening in the numbers. Hundreds of millions of people worldwide are opting out of reality for larger and larger chunks of time. In the United States alone, there are 183 million *active gamers* (individuals, who in surveys, report that they play the computer or video games "regularly"—on average, thirteen hours a week). Globally, the online gamer community—including console, PC, and mobile home gaming—counts more than 4 million gamers in the Middle East, 10 million in Russia, 105 million in India, 10 million in Vietnam, 10 million in Mexico, 13 million in Central and South America, 15 million in Australia, 17 million in South Korea, 100 million in Europe, and 200 million in China.

Although a typical gamer plays for just an hour or two a day, there are now more than 6 million people in China who spend at least twenty-two hours a week gaming, the equivalent of a part-time job. More than 10 million "hard-core" gamers in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany spend at least twenty hours a week playing. And at the leading edge of this growth curve, more than 5 million "extreme" gamers in the United States play on the average of forty-five hours a week.

With all of this play, we have turned digital games—for our computers, for our mobile phones, and for our home entertainment systems—into what is expected to be a $68 billion

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greatest efforts to playing games, creates its best memories in game environments, and experiences its biggest successes in game worlds.

Maybe this is hard to believe. To a nongamer, this forecast might seem surreal, or like science fiction. Are huge swaths of civilization really disappearing into game worlds? Are we really rushing headlong into a future where the majority of us use games to satisfy many of our most important needs?

If so, it will not be the first time that such a mass exodus from reality to games has occurred. Indeed, the very first written history of human gameplay, Herodotus' *Histories*, the ancient Greek account of the Persian Wars—dating back more than three thousand years—describes a nearly identical scenario. While the oldest known game is the ancient counting game Mancala—evidence shows it was played during Egypt's age of empires, or the fifteenth to the eleventh centuries BC—it was not until Herodotus that anyone thought to record the origins or cultural functions of these games. And from his ancient text, we can learn a great deal about what's happening today—and what's almost certainly coming next.

It's a bit counterintuitive to think about the future in terms of the past. But as a research director at the Institute for the Future—a nonprofit think tank in Palo Alto, California, and the world's oldest future-forecasting organization—I've learned an important trick: to develop foresight, you need to practice hindsight. Technologies, cultures, and climates change, but our basic human needs and desires—to survive, to care for our families, and to lead happy,

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We often think of immersive gameplay as "escapist," a kind of passive retreat from reality. But through the lens of Herodotus' history, we can see how games could be a *purposeful* escape, a thoughtful and active escape, and most importantly an extremely helpful escape. For the Lydians, playing together a nearly full-time activity would have been a behavior highly adaptive to difficult conditions. Games made life bearable. Games gave a starving population a feeling of power in a powerless situation, a sense of structure in a chaotic environment. Games gave them a better way to live when their circumstances were otherwise completely unsupportive and uninhabitable.

Make no mistake: we are no different from the ancient Lydians. Today, many of us are suffering from a vast and primal hunger. But it is not a hunger for food—it is a hunger for more and better engagement from the world around us.

Like the ancient Lydians, many gamers have already figured out how to use the immersive power of play to distract themselves from their hunger: a hunger for more satisfying work, for a stronger sense of community, and for a more engaging and meaningful life.

Collectively, the planet is now spending more than 3 billion hours a week gaming.

We are starving, and our games are feeding us.

McGonigal, Jane. *Reality Is Broken.* New York: Penguin Books, 2011.

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"The Endangered Human Moment" from *Focus* by Daniel Goleman

About this text:

This is an excerpt from Daniel Goleman's 2013 book subtitled "The Hidden Driver of Excellence." Goleman is a psychologist and former *New York Times* journalist who has authored multiple books on the subject of emotional intelligence.

As you read:

Look for the central claim contained in this excerpt, and try to identify the strategies Goleman uses to support his claim.

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his bike.

A friend reports, "I visited some cousins in New Jersey recently and their kids had every electronic gadget known to man. All I ever saw were the tops of their heads. They were constantly checking their iPhones for who had texted them, what had updated on Facebook, or they were lost in some video game. They're totally unaware of what's happening around them and clueless about how to interact with someone for any length of time."

Today's children are growing up in a new reality, one where they are attuning more to machines and less to people than has ever been true in human history. That's troubling for several reasons. For one, the social and emotional circuitry of a child's brain learns from contact and conversations with everyone it encounters over the course of a day. These interactions mold brain circuitry; the fewer hours spent with people—the more time spent staring at a digitized screen—portends deficits.

Digital engagement comes at a cost in face time with real people—the medium where we learn to "read" nonverbals. The new crop of natives in this digital world may be adroit at the keyboard, but they can be all thumbs when it comes to reading behavior face-to-face, in real time—particularly in sensing the dismay of others when they stop to read a text in the middle of talking with them.

A college student observes the loneliness and isolation that go along with living in a virtual world of tweets, status updates, and "posting pictures of my dinner." He notes that his

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At the extremes, Taiwan, Korea, and other Asian countries see Internet addiction—to gaming, social media, virtual realities—among youth as a national health crisis, isolating the young. Around 8 percent of American gamers between ages eight and eighteen seem to meet psychiatry's diagnostic criteria for addiction; brain studies reveal changes in their neural reward system while they game that are akin to those found in alcoholics and drug users. Occasional horror stories tell of addicted gamers who sleep all day and get violent when family members try to stop them.

Rapport demands joint attention—mutual focus. Our need to make an effort to have such human moments has never been greater, given the ocean of distractions we all navigate daily.

Source: Goleman, Daniel. *Focus.* New York: Harper, 2013.

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"The Flight from Conversation" by Sherry Turkle

About this text:

Originally published in *The New York Times*, this op-ed presents Turkle's claim about the effects of modern technology and digital devices on personal lives and relationships. Turkle is a clinical psychologist and a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is a frequent speaker and commentator on the connections between technology and human relationships.

As you read:

Look for the primary claim of Turkle's text, and identify the multiple strategies she uses to support her claim.

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A businessman laments that he no longer has colleagues at work. He doesn't stop by to talk; he doesn't call. He says that he doesn't want to interrupt them. He says they're "too busy on their e-mail." But he pauses and corrects himself. "I'm not telling the truth. I'm the one who doesn't want to be interrupted. I think I should. But I'd rather just do things on my BlackBerry."

A 16-year-old boy who relies on texting for almost everything says almost wistfully, "Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I'd like to learn how to have a conversation."

In today's workplace, young people who have grown up fearing conversation show up on the job wearing earphones. Walking through a college library or the campus of a high-tech start-up, one sees the same thing: we are together, but each of us in our own bubble, furiously connected to keyboards and tiny touch screens. A senior partner at a Boston law firm describes a scene in his office. Young associates lay out their suite of technologies: laptops, iPods and multiple phones. And then they put their earphones on. "Big ones. Like pilots. They turn their desks into cockpits." With the young lawyers in their cockpits, the office is quiet, a quiet that does not ask to be broken.

In the silence of connection, people are comforted by being in touch with a lot of people — carefully kept at bay. We can't get enough of one another if we can use technology to keep one another at distances we can control: not too close, not too far, just right. I think of it as a Goldilocks effect.

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online connections, we start to expect faster answers. To get these, we ask one another simpler questions; we dumb down our communications, even on the most important matters. It is as though we have all put ourselves on cable news. Shakespeare might have said, "We are consum'd with that which we were nourish'd by."

And we use conversation with others to learn to converse with ourselves. So our flight from conversation can mean diminished chances to learn skills of self-reflection. These days, social media continually asks us what's "on our mind," but we have little motivation to say something truly self-reflective. Self-reflection in conversation requires trust. It's hard to do anything with 3,000 Facebook friends except connect.

As we get used to being shortchanged on conversation and to getting by with less, we seem almost willing to dispense with people altogether. Serious people muse about the future of computer programs of psychiatrists. A high school sophomore confides to me that he wishes he could talk to an artificial intelligence program instead of his dad about dating; he says the A.I. would have so much more in its database. Indeed, many people tell me they hope that as Siri, the digital assistant on Apple's iPhone, becomes more advanced, "she" will be more and more like a best friend — one who will listen when others won't.

During the years I have spent researching people and their relationships with technology, I have often heard the sentiment "No one is listening to me." I believe this feeling helps explain why it is so appealing to have a Facebook page or a Twitter feed — each provides

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have to be alone. Indeed our new devices have turned being alone into a problem that can be solved.

When people are alone, even for a few moments, they fidget and reach for a device. Here connection works like a symptom, not a cure, and our constant, reflexive impulse to connect shapes a new way of being.

Think of it as "I share, therefore I am." We use technology to define ourselves by sharing our thoughts and feelings as we're having them. We used to think, "I have a feeling; I want to make a call." Now our impulse is, "I want to have a feeling; I need to send a text."

So, in order to feel more, and to feel more like ourselves, we connect. But in our rush to connect, we flee from solitude, our ability to be separate and gather ourselves. Lacking the capacity for solitude, we turn to other people but don't experience them as they are. It is as though we use them, need them as spare parts to support our increasingly fragile selves.

We think constant connection will make us feel less lonely. The opposite is true. If we are unable to be alone, we are far more likely to be lonely. If we don't teach our children to be alone, they will know only how to be lonely.

I am a partisan for conversation. To make room for it, I see some first, deliberate steps. At home, we can create sacred spaces: the kitchen, the dining room. We can make our cars "device-free zones." We can demonstrate the value of conversation to our children. And we can do the same thing at work. There we are so busy communicating that we don't often have time

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