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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman alerts us to the dangers brought about by the way television conditions us to tolerate the brevity of visual entertainment. His message is that with each new technological medium introduced, there is a significant trade-off. His primary example was the medium of television.

TV is structured to provide information to the viewer on a platform which is both quick and entertaining. This discourages any viewer subjectivity, allowing television to shape and dictate politics, education, religion, and journalism the essence of our discourse. Except for a few pages of "enlightenment", the entire book was a conglomerated resource of evidence to support his hypothesis.

Important facts underlined generalizations to present logical and agreeable viewpoints.(e. g. " Television is our culture's principle mode of knowing about itself. Therefore..

. how television stages the world becomes the model for how the world is properly to be staged..."(Postman 92) In other words, how life is depicted on television is how we expect life to be.) And in most cases some truth could be found in Postman's statements (e. g.

" For no medium is excessively dangerous if its users understand what its dangers are.") (Postman161) Postman's final critical point was not merely enlightenment, but was a message to his reader and a solution aimed at educators: " the point I am trying to make is that only through a deep and unfailing awareness of the structure and effects of information, through a Bibbs 2 demystification of media, is there any hope of our gaining some

measure of control over television , or the computer, or any other medium.” (Postman 161) I agree. Until we begin to question the content, origin, and purpose of what is expressed through television, only then can we truly understand and control the medium known as TV.

More specifically my report will stress the merit of chapters six through eleven. The Age of Show Business is essential to the development of Postman’s primary example of how the structure of television influences American culture. “ The problem is not that Tv presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining...” (Postman 87) Plainly stated, American television is devoted entirely to supplying its audience with entertainment. Television has made a profound impact on the American society.

Postman claims that due to the influence of television as a medium, Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. In chapter six of *Amusing Ourselves to Death* , Neil Postman goes on to point out that because of television we do not exchange ideas; we exchange images. I found this to be a valid hypothesis when considering if and how television had been an influence on my styles of learning. While performing an in-class questionnaire, I discovered that the exercise both identified and defined several characteristics of what seemed to be a trend set in my learning pattern. Of the five categories mentioned in Kathleen McWhorter’s *Study & Critical Thinking Skills in College*, collectively they revealed that I was a social, visual, and pragmatic but not opposed to creative learner.

Bibbs 3 McWhorter defined a social learner as one who prefers to work closely with others and enjoys personal interaction; which explains my active classroom participation. Visual learners process information more effectively by seeing it in print, film, or through other visual mediums. Finally, “ pragmatic learners are practical, logical, and systematic... and are comfortable following rules.” (McWhorter 113) In all cases I can see where I fit the “ diagnosis”.

With this information it was evident that television had played a role in the development of my learning style. To make the connection, I will attempt to use a children’s television show. Sesame Street was my favorite show to watch on television; as a child my choices were limited! At that early age, Sesame Street was in a way programming me to become both a social and visual learner, or so I thought. Through the association of puppets with real people they provided a “ pseudo-learning environment” that encouraged kids to “ sing-along” the alphabet and attempt to solve arithmetic problems by counting sheep or how many cookies the cookie monster ate. This not only promoted a group atmosphere, but also displayed the learning that was taking place on screen, or did it? Although the show did try to instill into children a set of everyday values, (such as do unto others as you would have them do unto you) I don ‘ t believe that the show alone (or those like it) could ever replace the classroom setting. Under closer discretion I realized that the classroom provides a place of social interaction which is essential to the healthy development of children. The viewing of television is more or less a private, secluded act. In class, children can ponder the essence of

questions asked by their teachers either amongst themselves or with their teacher.

This is very important in the development of linguistics, the Bibbs 4 basis of higher elementary education, whereas television merely demands attention to images. Looking more deeply into the subject, I started to wonder if my learning styles would account for my exceptional aptitude and intellectual level being poorly portrayed through my high school transcripts. High school is largely conducted on an independent and auditory scale resulting with instructors hoping to find in their students some aspect of creativity. In my eyes, that concept is totally paradoxical. If educators encourage the institution of such “ educational programs” which supplement long listening activities with quick editing, up-beat tunes, and fun images, when do they expect the student to adapt to lectures and critical analyzing ? Although I found a side of truth in my questioning, it was still no excuse; it didn’t apply to me! Frankly I find myself surprised to say that I probably would have fared about the same without the influence of television in my life.

The printing press would have served as well as television in the aspect of becoming a visual learner. From just reading alone, I would assume to be a more logical thinker, causing my pragmatics to increase. And as far as being a social learner- well... I’ve always been a social person.

In conclusion, I don’t agree with Mr. Postman in the belief that our public discourse through the medium of television, is making us less social in the sense of conversation and epistemology. I feel that it is the way of 20th century man to communicate through his most for lack of a better term

effective medium of communication as was that of our predecessors to communicate through theirs (i. e. print or debate). We are only following suit or maybe the natural course of man to be entertained by our discourse
McWhorter, Kathleen.

Study Skills and Critical Thinking for College Students Postman, Neil. Amusing
Ourselves to Death Bibliography: