

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Black History Month is unnecessary. In a place and time in which we overwhelmingly elected an African-American president, we can and should move to a post-racial approach to education. As Detroit Free Press columnist Rochelle Riley wrote in a February 1 column calling for an end to Black History Month, "I propose that, for the first time in American history, this country has reached a point where we can stop celebrating separately, stop learning separately, stop being American separately."

In addition to being unnecessary, the idea that African-American history should be focused on in a given month suggests that it belongs in that month alone. Instead, it is important to incorporate African-American history into what is taught every day as American history. It needs to be recreated as part of mainstream thought and not as an optional, often irrelevant, side note. We should focus efforts on pushing schools to diversify and broaden their curricula.

There are a number of other reasons to abolish it. First of all, it has become a shallow commercial ritual that does not even succeed in its (limited and misguided) goal of focusing for one month on a sophisticated, intelligent appraisal of the contributions and experiences of African-Americans throughout history. Second, there is a paternalistic flavor to the mandated bestowing of a month in which to study African-American history that is overcome if we instead assert the need for a comprehensive curriculum. Third, the idea of Black History Month suggests that the knowledge imparted in that month is for African-Americans only, rather than for all people.

1. The author's primary purpose in this passage is to...

- a. Argue that Black History Month should not be so commercial.
- b. Argue that Black History Month should be abolished.
- c. Argue that Black History Month should be maintained.
- d. Suggest that African-American history should be taught in two months rather than just one.
- e. Argue that African-American history is not part of mainstream curriculum.

Read the passage below and answer question 2.

PARK WILDLIFE

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks support a wide diversity of animal species, reflecting the range in elevation, climate, and habitat variety there. Over 260 native vertebrate species are in the parks; numerous additional species may be present but have not been confirmed. Of the native vertebrates, five species are extirpated (or extinct), and over 150 are rare or uncommon. There have been some studies of invertebrates in the area, but there is not enough information to know how many species occur specifically in the parks. Many of the parks' caves contain invertebrates, some of which exist only in one cave and are known nowhere else in the world. In the foothills, where summers are hot and dry and winters are mild, plant life is largely chaparral on the lower slopes, with blue oak and California buckeye in the valleys and on higher slopes. A number of animals live in this area year-round; some breed here, while others winter here. Local species include the gray fox, bobcat, striped and spotted skunks, black bear, wood rat, pocket gopher, white-footed mouse, California quail, scrub jay, lesser goldfinch, wren, acorn woodpecker, gopher snake, California king snake, striped racer, western whiptail lizard, and the California newt.

2. What was the author's purpose in writing this passage?

- a. To entertain the reader.
- b. To bore the reader.
- c. To persuade the reader.
- d. To inform the reader.
- e. To humor the reader.

Read the passage below and answer question 3.

CALIFORNIA GRAPES

Grapes are one of the oldest cultivated fruits. Hieroglyphics show that Egyptians were involved in grape and wine production. Also, the early Romans were known to have developed many grape varieties.

Grapes have been grown in California for more than 200 years. The tradition of viticulture (growing grapes) began in 1769 when Spanish friars established missions throughout California. Then the boom in grapes planted for eating arose in the early 1800s. William Wolfskill, founder of California's citrus industry, planted the first table grape vineyard in 1839 near Los Angeles.

By the 1850s, the United States had officially acquired California from Mexico, and 80,000 gold prospectors had moved to the region. A few of these had the foresight to realize that there was money in grapes as well as in gold.

Today, California wine, table grapes, and raisins are all important agricultural commodities, with approximately 700,000 acres planted in vineyards. About 85 percent of California's table grape production is in the southern San Joaquin Valley region, with the Coachella Valley region accounting for most of the remaining production.

3. The author most likely wrote this passage to...

- a. Entertain the reader.
- b. Persuade the reader.
- c. Humor the reader.
- d. Inform the reader.
- e. Sway the reader.

Read the passage below and answer question 4.

VISUAL PERCEPTION

It is tempting to think that your eyes are simply mirrors that reflect whatever is in front of them. Researchers, however, have shown that your brain is constantly working to create the impression of a continuous, uninterrupted world.

For instance, in the last 10 minutes, you have blinked your eyes around 200 times. You have probably not been aware of any of these interruptions in your visual world. Something you probably have not seen in a long time without the aid of a mirror is your nose. It is always right there, down in the bottom corner of your vision, but your brain filters it out so that you are not aware of your nose unless you purposefully look at it.

Nor are you aware of the artery that runs right down the middle of your retina. It creates a large blind spot in your visual field, but you never notice the hole it leaves. To see this blind spot, try the following: Cover your left eye with your hand. With your right eye, look at the O on the left. As you move your head closer to the O, the X will disappear as it enters the blind spot caused by your optical nerve.

O

X

Your brain works hard to make the world look continuous!

4. What is the main purpose of this passage?

- a. To persuade the reader to pay close attention to blind spots.
- b. To explain the way visual perception works.
- c. To persuade the reader to consult an optometrist if the O and X disappear.
- d. To prove that vision is a passive process.

Answers and Explanations

1. B: The entire passage makes the argument that Black History Month should be abolished, offering various reasons why this is the best course of action, as in answer choice B. Each of the other answer choices offers a method of changing or maintaining the existing celebration of Black History Month, rather than abolishing it. Therefore, they are incorrect.

2. D: Because the author structures the passage using main idea and detail and gives many facts, the reader can determine the purpose of this passage is to inform, as in answer choice D. Even if the reader did not find this passage to be entertaining, as in answer choice A, it is unlikely that the author would take the time to write a piece with the intent to bore the readers, so option B can be easily eliminated. Nor is there any attempt within the passage to make an argument for any particular position and, thus, persuade the reader of a certain viewpoint. Therefore, option C also does not apply.

3. D: Because the author structures the passage using chronological order and gives many facts and details, the reader can quickly determine that the purpose of this passage is to inform, as in answer choice D. Even if the reader did not find this passage to be entertaining, as in answer choice A, it is unlikely that the author would take the time to write a piece with the intent to bore the readers, so B can be easily eliminated. Nor is there any attempt within the passage to make an argument for any particular position and, thus, persuade the reader of a certain viewpoint. Therefore, option C also does not apply.

4. B: The passage explains the way that visual perception works. Choice B is, therefore, the best answer. The author does not attempt to persuade the reader or prove a particular viewpoint. Therefore, options A, C, and D are incorrect.