

Mencken Handout

Directions: Working in small groups, paraphrase each paragraph and respond to the discussion questions.

Paragraph No.	Paraphrase
Paragraph 1	Americans were expected to make changes to the English language, just as they made changes to the political system. This prediction of an American dialect was made by Thomas Jefferson, a U.S. President and writer of the Declaration of Independence.
Paragraph 2	Noah Webster also demanded the need for an American dialect. He cites the explanation that Americans were done submitting to British authority and would have new ideas and mingle with new people, including Native Americans, all of which would necessitate the birth of a new dialect.
Paragraph 3	What neither Jefferson nor Webster could have known is that “advances in communication” have actually brought Americans back closer to their English counterparts. Furthermore, the British claim language seniority and American professors back them up, dissuading anyone from changes to the English language.
Paragraph 4	Americans are not fluent in English. The language is contained to rules of grammar that were created long ago by “English Latinists”, and although Americans may learn to write it, they will never absorb it as a native tongue.
Paragraph 5	Americans stubbornly stick to the concepts of English, even as it forces everyone to become bilingual. No professors have given studious attention to the way people really speak; they are only concerned with the almost unattainable goal of how books say we ought to speak.

Question	Answer
What is Mencken’s central argument?	Mencken believes that Americans have their own dialect, but have been persuaded by academics and the British to

<p>What is Mencken's purpose?</p> <p>What evidence does Mencken use to support his central idea?</p>	<p>write with a dialect that does not belong to them. He writes that the British use their "mere cultural seniority" to convince Americans to preserve the British form of speaking. His argument continues then to reveal his purpose, persuading his audience that there should be an American dialect. "In no department are American universities weaker," Mencken writes, "than in the department of English."</p>
<p>How does Mencken's rhetorical use of prominent American thinkers contribute to the persuasiveness of his argument?</p>	<p>Mencken's argument is strengthened by the quoting of two prominent American thinkers: Thomas Jefferson and Noah Webster. These men are quoted as calling for an American dialect and Mencken makes a similar argument. Because people respect and revere these two prominent Americans, Mencken believes they will respect and revere his argument because it agrees with them.</p>
<p>What contrasting points of views are presented by Mencken?</p> <p>How does the presence of contrasting points of view develop the author's purpose?</p>	<p>Mencken's purpose is to persuade the audience with his argument that it is time for an American dialect, one that would match the writings of our people with their spoken language. In presenting contrasting points of view, such as conceding that English has a beauty, Mencken is strengthen his argument and appearing to be more balanced.</p>