What in the world?!?!?!?!
“A Modest Proposal” Notes

by Jonathan Swift

- Purple book—pp. 502 - 508
- Green book—pp. 622 - 631
“A MODEST PROPOSAL” CONCEPT

FOR PREVENTING THE CHILDREN OF POOR PEOPLE IN IRELAND FROM BEING A BURDEN ON THEIR PARENTS OR COUNTRY, AND FOR MAKING THEM BENEFICIAL TO THE PUBLICK
"A MODEST PROPOSAL” AND SATIRE

"A Modest Proposal" is an essay that uses satire to make its point.

- A satire is a literary work that attacks or pokes fun at vices, abuses, stupidity, and/or any other fault or imperfection.
Satire

- Satire may make the reader laugh at, or feel disgust for, the person or thing satirized.
  - Impishly or sardonically, it criticizes someone or something, using wit and clever wording—and sometimes makes outrageous assertions or claims.

- The main purpose of a satire is to spur readers to remedy the problem.
Satire and Verbal Irony

The main weapon of the satirist is verbal irony, a figure of speech in which words are used to ridicule a person or thing by conveying a meaning that is the opposite of what the words say.
Horatian vs. Juvenalian Satire

- **Horatian**: Sympathetic, playful tone; light humor; criticizes folly

- **Juvenalian**: Harsher tone; more insult than humor; moral indignation; criticizes evil
The Age of Reason – 1660-1780

Swift wrote his satires during “The Age of Reason.”

In Europe in the late 17th to the end of the 18th century, there was a general intellectual and literary movement known as The Enlightenment.

The movement is characterized by *Rationalism* – a philosophy that emphasized the role of reason rather than sensory experience or faith in answering basic questions of human existence.

Concern regarding human existence led to a need to address social problems.

This movement is sometimes known as the Neoclassical Age.
Historical Background

- Over the centuries, England gradually gained a foothold in Ireland.
- In 1541, the parliament in Dublin recognized England’s Henry VIII, a Protestant, as King of Ireland.
- In spite of repeated uprisings by Irish Catholics, English Protestants acquired more and more estates in Ireland.
- By 1703, they owned all but ten percent of the land.
Historical Background

Meanwhile, legislation was enacted that severely limited the rights of the Irish to hold government office, purchase real estate, get an education, and advance themselves in other ways.

- As a result, many Irish fled to foreign lands, including America.
- Most of those who remained in Ireland lived in poverty, facing disease, starvation, and prejudice. It was this Ireland—an Ireland of the tyrannized and the downtrodden—that Jonathan Swift attempted to focus attention on in “A Modest Proposal” in 1720.
Jonathan Swift faced such a situation in the late 1720’s when starvation was widespread in Ireland.

- Irish harvests had been poor for years.
- Farmers couldn’t pay the rents demanded by their English landlords.
- Beggars and starving children filled the streets.
- England’s policies kept the Irish poor.
Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

- Well-known as the author of the satirical political fantasy, *Gulliver's Travels*
- Swift published “A Modest Proposal” in 1729 as a pamphlet (a kind of essay in an unbound booklet).
- At this time, and for many years afterward, Ireland (not an independent country) was very poor.
- Most people born in Ireland were Roman Catholics & employed as agricultural laborers or tenant farmers.
- The landlords (landowners) were paid from the produce of the land at rates which the workers could rarely afford.
The ruling class was usually Protestant.

Many of them were not born in Ireland, nor did they live there permanently.

If the laborers lost their work, there would always be other poor people to take it up.

There was no social security system and starvation was as common as it is in the Third World today.
Purpose of “A Modest Proposal”

Jonathan Swift wrote “A Modest Proposal” to call attention to abuses inflicted on Irish Catholics by well-to-do English Protestants.

- Swift himself was a Protestant, but he was also a native of Ireland, having been born in Dublin of English parents.
- He believed England was exploiting and oppressing Ireland.
A Modest Proposal?
Appalled by the misery in Ireland, Jonathan Swift set out to make the English more responsive to their neighbors’ suffering.

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After Reading:

- Group 1 – 1 - 4
- Group 2 – 5 - 8
- Group 3 – 9 - 12
- Group 4 – 13 - 15
- Group 5 – 16 - 17
- Group 6 – 18 - 19
- Group 7 – 20 - 25
- Group 8 – 26 - 29
- Group 9 – 30 - 32
- If 8 groups, then put 5 & 6 together

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QUESTIONS TO PONDER – Write each question then answer each.

1. **Occasion:** What were the social conditions in Ireland that caused Swift to write his essay?

2. **Audience:** Who was his target audience?

3. **Solution:** What solution does Swift propose? How will this solution solve the problems of Ireland?

4. **Satire:** At what point in the essay did you recognize that Swift’s proposal is meant to be satiric? How can you tell this is satire?
“A Modest Proposal”: Close Reading Analysis

- Choose your favorite paragraph from “A Modest Proposal.”

- Write a well-developed essay discussing how this particular paragraph uses satirical devices to achieve Swift’s purpose in criticizing society. Make sure you label which paragraph it is (such as the 18th paragraph) as well as the page number(s). Identify and justify if it is Horatian or Juvenalian (or both). Minimum 213 words in your essay. *Do a word count.* Put quotation marks around quotes from the book.

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1080/1080-h/1080-h.htm

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Cute Proposal

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YMqXEM62cg&feature=youtu.be