

TRANSFER EXAM

Dept. of Foreign Languages and Literature, NTHU, July 18, 2022

Read the two passages below and answer the following essay questions.

PASSAGE ONE

Do Masks in School Affect Kids' Speech and Social Skills?

Masks can obscure a smile, muffle a voice, and make lip reading impossible. But those are minor obstacles to human interaction, says Lindsay Yazzolino, who is blind. That's why Yazzolino says she is puzzled by the current debate over masks in the classroom.

Some parents express worry that masks might interfere with children's ability to learn or to socialize. Other parents fear that unmasking will lead to more COVID-19 cases. Amid the debate, a small but growing body of research is offering hints that masks do not have a significant impact on speech or social skills.

Some of that research involves people like Yazzolino, who are blind. Their ability to master language and social skills shows that the human brain is really good at finding a way to communicate. Yazzolino, an accessible-technology consultant, has been blind since birth. But she went to school with sighted kids. She relied on braille to read and write, and it was hard for her to get some course materials in that format. But social interactions were never a problem, she says. "You hear emotion in people's voices, so I definitely used that as a cue," she says. "And I talk to people."

Yazzolino's experience is unsurprising, scientists say, because the human brain is really good at finding a way to communicate. For example, areas of the brain usually devoted to visual information are used to process sounds in people who are blind. This sort of research suggests that when sighted children encounter masks in the classroom, their brains adapt quickly.

There's not much research to directly back that claim, though. Studies show that children tend to watch mouths and faces closely when learning to speak and read emotions. But it's less clear what happens when these visual cues aren't available in the classroom.

Masks do pose a challenge for deaf or hard-of-hearing students who aren't already fluent in American Sign Language or ASL. Facial expressions and mouth movements are an integral part of signing, and masks covering up the face means the brain needs to work harder to process what is being said, especially for those who are acquiring ASL. The use of clear masks or clear plastic shields may be needed for some interactions, such as speech therapy or audiology.

While most children won't have any long-term effects from masks in classrooms, some students with autism may have difficulty because of the way that their brains combine what they see and what they hear. For many, it's like watching a movie where the soundtrack is out of sync, and the problem is worse when these children are unable to see a teacher's mouth move. Despite this, some experts have argued that for many children with autism, even a classroom with masks is better than virtual learning on a computer or tablet screen.

Source: Health News from NPR, March 15th, 2022

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/03/15/1086537324/schools-masks-kids-learning-speech-development>

QUESTIONS

1. In your own words, summarize the article in one paragraph (around 150 words). Make sure that you talk about both sides of the argument. (20%)
2. What is your opinion about the effects of masks on students' learning effectiveness? Do you agree that there could be some negative effects of everyone wearing masks in the classroom, or do you think most people can adapt and get used to it? As the Covid-19 pandemic becomes a fact of life, do you think teachers and students should continue to wear masks at all times in the classroom? Express your opinion in 250-300 words. (30%)

PASSAGE TWO

“Sticks” by George Saunders (1995)

Every year Thanksgiving night we flocked out behind Dad as he dragged the Santa suit to the road and draped it over a kind of crucifix he'd built out of metal pole in the yard. Super Bowl week the pole was dressed in a jersey and Rod's helmet and Rod had to clear it with Dad if he wanted to take the helmet off. On the Fourth of July the pole was Uncle Sam, on Veteran's Day a soldier, on Halloween a ghost. The pole was Dad's only concession to glee. We were allowed a single Crayola from the box at a time. One Christmas Eve he shrieked at Kimmie for wasting an apple slice. He hovered over us as we poured ketchup saying: good enough good enough good enough. Birthday parties consisted of cupcakes, no ice cream. The first time I brought a date over she said: what's with your dad and that pole? and I sat there blinking.

We left home, married, had children of our own, found the seeds of meanness blooming also within us. Dad began dressing the pole with more complexity and less discernible logic. He draped some kind of fur over it on Groundhog Day and lugged out a floodlight to ensure a shadow. When an earthquake struck Chile he lay the pole on its side and spray painted a rift in the earth. Mom died and he dressed the pole as Death and hung from the crossbar photos of Mom as a baby. We'd stop by and find odd talismans from his youth arranged around the base: army medals, theater tickets, old sweatshirts, tubes of Mom's makeup. One autumn he painted the pole bright yellow. He covered it with cotton swabs that winter for warmth and provided offspring by hammering in six crossed sticks around the yard. He ran lengths of string between the pole and the sticks, and taped to the string letters of apology, admissions of error, pleas for understanding, all written in a frantic hand on index cards. He painted a sign saying LOVE and hung it from the pole and another that said FORGIVE? and then he died in the hall with the radio on and we sold the house to a young couple who yanked out the pole and the sticks and left them by the road on garbage day.

QUESTIONS

1. Summarize the story in a paragraph not exceeding 50 words. (10%)
2. Who is/are the main character(s) and what is the main idea of the story? (maximum length: 150 words.) (20%)
3. If you were to give the story a new title, what would it be and why? (maximum length: 150 words.) (20%)