

2. What is one television show that you really enjoy? Write a paragraph that describes that show and why you like it. In your paragraph, quickly summarize what the show is about (remember, your reader may never have seen it). Then list two or three good features of the program. Illustrate each of these good features with a specific example from the show.

ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS

1. Mayer's purpose in "The Quiet Hour" is to persuade readers that a daily hour with no television at all would be a good idea. Write an essay in which you try to persuade your readers of the benefits of several other changes in their personal lives. For example, you might try to convince them to eat a low-carbohydrate diet, to begin a daily exercise program, and to spend at least one hour a day reading. Your thesis statement might be one like this: "Here is my plan for a three-part improvement program that can change people's lives."

Or you might try a humorous, opposite approach: "Here is my plan for a three-part destruction program that might be fun at first but that would in no way benefit a person's life."

2. Mayer believes that getting rid of TV for an hour each evening would benefit society. What is another widely accepted aspect of modern life that you would like to see less of? Write an essay proposing the elimination of something you think is a negative influence on society. Don't worry if your proposal is impractical—let your imagination run wild as you describe how life would be improved without, for example, money, beauty pageants, shopping malls, alcohol, advertisements, telephones, computers, automobiles, or professional sports. In your supporting paragraphs, explain the drawbacks of the particular aspect of modern life you've chosen. You might conclude by imagining what a world without that annoyance would be like.

35

Rudeness at the Movies Biff Wine

Preview

Have you been the victim of other moviegoers' thoughtless talking and noisy eating? Do you slump in your seat, despairing, when a fellow viewer discloses what is going to happen next—right before it happens? If so, you will sympathize with film critic and columnist Bill Wine, who contends that an "epidemic of rudeness" is sweeping through movie theaters today.

Words to Watch

spritzes (4): sprays
engulfed (9): swallowed up
galling (14): irritating
invariably (16): always
superfluous (16): unnecessary
prescient (20): knowing what will happen beforehand
waxing (21): becoming
provocation (23): urging
gregarious (25): sociable
Fascist-like (27): like dictators

Is this actually happening or am I dreaming?

I am at the movies, settling into my seat, eager with anticipation at the prospect of seeing a long-awaited film of obvious quality. The theater is

absolutely full for the late show on this weekend evening, as the reviews have been ecstatic for this cinema masterpiece.

Directly in front of me sits a man an inch or two taller than the Jolly Green Giant. His wife, sitting on his left, sports the very latest in fashionable hairdos, a gathering of her locks into a shape that resembles a drawbridge when it's open.

On his right, a woman spritzes^o herself liberally with perfume that her popcorn-nunching husband got her for Valentine's Day, a scent that should be renamed "Essence of Elk."

The row in which I am sitting quickly fills up with members of Cub Scout Troop 432, on an outing to the movies because rain has canceled their overnight hike. One of the boys, demonstrating the competitive spirit for which Scouts are renowned worldwide, announces to the rest of the troop the rules in the Best Sound Made from an Empty Good-n-Plenty's Box contest, about to begin.

Directly behind me, a man and his wife are ushering three other couples into their seats. I hear the woman say to the couple next to her: "You'll love it. You'll just love it. This is our fourth time and we enjoy it more and more each time. Don't we, Harry?" Tell them about the pie-fight scene, Harry. Wait'll you see it. It comes just before you find out that the daughter killed her boyfriend. It's great."

The woman has more to say—much more—but she is drowned out at the moment by the wailing of a six-month-old infant in the row behind her. The baby is crying because his mother, who has brought her twins to the theater to save on exorbitant babysitting costs, can change only one diaper at a time.

Suddenly, the lights dim. The music starts. The credits roll. And I panic.

I plead with everyone around me to let me enjoy the movie. All I ask, I wait, is to be able to see the images and hear the dialogue and not find out in advance what is about to happen. Is that so much to expect for six bucks, I ask, now engulfed^o by a cloud of self-pity. I begin weeping unashamedly.

Then, as if on cue, the jolly Green Giant slumps down in his seat, his wife removes her wig, the Elk lady changes her seat, the Scouts drop their candy boxes on the floor, the play-by-play commentator takes out her teeth, and the young mother takes her two howling babies home.

Of course I am dreaming. I realize, as I gain a certain but shaky consciousness. I notice that I am in a cold sweat. Not because the dream is scary, but from the shock of people being that cooperative.

I realize that I have awakened to protect my system from having to handle a jolt like that. For never—NEVER—would that happen in real life. Not on this planet.

I used to wonder whether I was the only one who feared bad audience behavior more than bad moviemaking. But I know now that I am not. Not by a long shot. The most frequent complaint I have heard in the last few months about the moviegoing experience has had nothing to do with the films themselves.

No. What folks have been complaining about is the audience. Indeed, there seems to be an epidemic of galling^o inconsiderateness and outrageous rudeness.

It is not that difficult to forgive a person's excessive height, or 15 malodorous perfume, or perhaps even an inadvisable but understandable need to bring very young children to adult movies.

But the talking: that is not easy to forgive. It is inexcusable. Talking— 16 loud, constant, and invariably^o superfluous^o—seems to be standard operating procedure on the part of many movie patrons these days.

It is true, I admit, that after a movie critic has seen several hundred 17 movies in the ideal setting of an almost-empty screening room with no one but other politely silent movie critics around him, it does tend to spoil him for the packed-theater experience.

And something is lost viewing a movie in almost total isolation—a 18 fact that movie distributors acknowledge with their reluctance to screen certain audience-pleasing movies for small groups of critics. Especially with comedies, the infectiousness of laughter is an important ingredient of movie-watching pleasure.

But it is a decidedly uphill battle to enjoy a movie—no matter how 19 suspenseful or hilarious or moving—with non-stop gabbers sitting within earshot. And they come in sizes, ages, sexes, colors and motivations of every kind.

Some chat as if there is no movie playing. Some greet friends as if at 20 a picnic. Some alert those around them to what is going to happen, either because they have seen the film before, or because they are self-proclaimed experts on the predictability of plotting and want to be seen as prescient^o geniuses.

Some describe in graphic terms exactly what is happening as if they 21 were doing the commentary for a sporting event on radio. ("Ooh, look, he's sitting down. Now he's looking at that green car. A banana—she's eating a banana.") Some audition for film critic Gene Shalit's job by waxing^o witty as they critique the movie right before your very ears.

And all act as if it is their Constitutional or God-given right. As if their 22 admission price allows them to ruin the experience for anyone and everyone else in the building. But why?

Good question. I wish I knew. Maybe rock concerts and ball games— 23 both environments which condone or even encourage hoothin' and

hollerin'—have conditioned us to voice our approval and disapproval and just about anything else we can spit out of our mouths at the slightest provocation^o when we are part of an audience.

But my guess lies elsewhere. The villain, I'm afraid, is the tube. We have seen the enemy and it is television.

We have gotten conditioned over the last few decades to spending most of our screen-viewing time in front of a little box in our living rooms and bedrooms. And when we watch that piece of furniture, regardless of what is on it—be it commercial, Super Bowl, soap opera, funeral procession, prime-time sitcom, Shakespeare play—we chat. Boy, do we chat. Because TV viewing tends to be an informal, gregarious^o, friendly, casually interruptible experience, we talk whenever the spirit moves us. Which is often.

All of this is fine. But we have carried behavior that is perfectly acceptable in the living room right to our neighborhood movie theater. And that isn't fine. In fact, it is turning lots of people off to what used to be a truly pleasurable experience: sitting in a jammed movie theater and watching a crowd-pleasing movie. And that's a first-class shame.

Nobody wants Fascist-like^o ushers, yet that may be where we're headed of necessity. Let's hope not. But something's got to give.

Movies during this Age of Television may or may not be better than ever. About audiences, however, there is no question.

They are worse.

29

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Freewrite for ten minutes on one of the following.

1. Did you enjoy reading this selection? Why or why not?
2. Do you think the author is right about today's moviegoers, or is he unfair to them? Why?
3. How do you feel when a stranger is rude to you? What, if anything, do you do about it?

VOCABULARY CHECK

A. Circle the letter of the word or phrase that best completes each of the following four items.

1. In the sentence below, the word *ecstatic* means
 - a. very enthusiastic.
 - b. cautious.
 - c. missing.
 - d. disappointing.

"The theater is absolutely full for the late show on this weekend evening, as the reviews have been ecstatic for this cinema masterpiece." (Paragraph 2)
2. In the sentence below, the word *exorbitant* means
 - a. too loud.
 - b. too high.
 - c. boring.
 - d. interesting.

"The baby is crying because his mother, who has brought her twins to the theater to save on exorbitant babysitting costs, can change only one diaper at a time." (Paragraph 7)
3. In the sentence below, the word *malodorous* means
 - a. pleasant.
 - b. expensive.
 - c. bad-smelling.
 - d. flowery.

"It is not that difficult to forgive a person's excessive height, or malodorous perfume, or perhaps even an inadvisable but understandable need to bring very young children to adult movies." (Paragraph 15)
4. In the sentence below, the word *condone* means
 - a. punish.
 - b. forbid.
 - c. fear.
 - d. overlook.

"Maybe rock concerts and ball games—both environments which condone or even encourage hollerin' and hollerin'—have conditioned us to voice our approval and disapproval . . . when we are part of an audience." (Paragraph 23)

- B. Circle the letter of the answer that best completes each of the following four items. Each item uses a word (or form of a word) from "Words to Watch."
5. "It really *galls* me to hear you answer the telephone like that," Mr. Roberts said to his son. Apparently his son
 - a. answers the phone very politely.
 - b. never answers the phone.
 - c. answers the phone in an inappropriate way.
 6. Someone who is *invariably* bad-tempered
 - a. very rarely gets angry.
 - b. seems angry, but really isn't.
 - c. seems always angry.
 7. If your paper contains *superfluous* details, your instructor is likely to tell you to
 - a. get rid of them.
 - b. add more of them.
 - c. explain them more fully.
 8. Which of these quotations would a *gregarious* person agree with?
 - a. "The more I see of people, the better I like my dog."
 - b. "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world."
 - c. "There's no such thing as a free lunch."

READING CHECK

Central Point and Main Ideas

1. Which sentence best expresses the central point of the entire selection?
 - a. Going to the movies used to be more fun than it is today.
 - b. The rude behavior of today's audiences is ruining the movie-going experience.
 - c. People like to talk while watching television.
 - d. Ushers must control the behavior of movie audiences.
2. Which sentence best expresses the main idea of paragraph 16?
 - a. Most people talk too much.
 - b. Some loud talking during movies is acceptable.
 - c. Talking during a movie is inexcusable.
 - d. Screaming "Fire!" in a theater is wrong.

3. Which sentence best expresses the main idea of paragraph 25?
 - a. Most of our screen-viewing time is spent watching TV, not watching movies in theaters.
 - b. Television offers a wide variety of programs, from Shakespeare plays to soap operas.
 - c. We have become accustomed to talking while watching TV.
 - d. Many homes have television sets in their living rooms and bedrooms.

Key Supporting Details

4. _____ TRUE OR FALSE? The Cub Scouts in Wine's dream are throwing popcorn at each other.
5. The author feels that movie comedies
 - a. are best viewed alone in a silent screening room.
 - b. cause people to talk even more than other movies.
 - c. lose something if they are not seen in the company of others.
 - d. are not as good as they were when he began his career as a movie critic.

Inferences

6. We might conclude that
 - a. when the author was younger, he was just as rude as the people he describes.
 - b. the author has occasionally asked other movie-goers to be quieter, but gotten little cooperation.
 - c. the author is going to quit his job as a movie critic because of the rude audiences.
 - d. the author now watches movies only in a screening room with other critics.
7. _____ TRUE OR FALSE? The author implies that teenagers are the rudest members of movie audiences.
8. At the end of the article, the author implies that unless audiences become quieter,
 - a. movie theaters will be closed.
 - b. everyone will watch less television.
 - c. children will no longer be allowed to go to movie theaters.
 - d. ushers will have to force talkers to be quiet or leave.