

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

Know Your Perspective



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- Editorial Cartoons: Tom Toles: Taking Aim at Gun Issues
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The First Amendment guarantees an open exchange of ideas and protects the individual's rights of conscience. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes expressed this idea: "I think that we should be eternally vigilant against attempts to check the expression of opinions that we loathe and believe to be fraught with death, unless they so imminently threaten immediate interference with the lawful and pressing purposes of the law that an immediate check is required to save the country."

POINTS OF VIEW

In 2016, 2017 and 2018, many individuals found their

voices. They discovered other women who shared their experiences and marched. Men and women declared #TimesUp. They fought for and against removal of Civil War statues from public places. Some contributed to causes, many used social media to spread their views, others dressed in black to visibly show their solidarity.

This marketplace of ideas can be confusing, confrontational and contradictory — especially as students are hearing opposing ideas and deciding what they believe. As shootings resulting in death and injury have taken place in elementary, middle and high schools and public venues, with increasing incidence and numbers of victims, students know this is not an ideological exercise. The debate over the right to gun ownership and the right to a safe environment, the differing views of who at what age and with what restrictions should be allowed to purchase a gun, has real consequences. The health care needs of individuals is real. The responsibility of legislators to their constituents versus to financial backers is real.

With respect for the law and the First Amendment, editorial writers, editorial cartoonists, columnists and writers of letters to the editor are among those who express knowledgeable points of view.

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The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

EDITORIALS

Are you serious about gun control, Mr. Trump? Prove it.

PRESIDENT TRUMP had very little to say about gun control in his first year in office, even after 58 people were killed on the Las Vegas Strip in the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history last October. But this week — in the aftermath of the school shooting in South Florida that claimed 17 lives and amid a rising student movement for gun control — Mr. Trump signaled he is open to modest gun-control measures, including a ban on “bump stocks” and improved background checks. We would like to believe that Mr. Trump is sincere when he says he has been deeply affected by recent events and wants to bring about change. But his approach to one needed reform — banning the bump stocks that were used to such terrible effect by the Las Vegas gunman — raises questions about just how serious he is.

Mr. Trump said Tuesday he has ordered the Justice Department to issue regulations that would prevent the devices that can be attached to legal semiautomatic weapons

to simulate the rapid fire of illegal machine guns. “We cannot merely take actions that make us feel like we are making a difference,” said Mr. Trump. “We must actually make a difference.”

That approach, though, is guaranteed not to produce immediate action. The agency that regulates firearms, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, made clear — first in 2010 and again in 2013 — that it does not have the legal authority to ban bump stocks. An attempt to ban the devices through regulation would prompt a battle that would likely tie the issue up in court for years and allow continued sales of bump stocks. No doubt that’s the aim of the National Rifle Association, which coyly suggested it supported a ban even as it opposed legislation to bring it about.

If Mr. Trump is genuinely committed to banning bump stocks, he should back legislation sponsored by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) that would bar them, along with other

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JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS

Jonathan Blank, left, and Julia Cordover, who survived the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School mass shooting, listen to President Trump during a meeting on school safety and guns at the White House on February 21.

devices that have been created to circumvent the intent of federal gun laws. And he should recognize that eliminating bump stocks falls far short of a solution to the epidemic of mass shootings. Semiautomatic, assault-style weapons — like the one used without a bump stock at Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School — continue to pose a risk to public safety and should be banned or, at the very least, subject to stringent regulation. That a 19-year-old with a history of troubled behavior was able to easily and legally acquire an

AR-15 rifle underscores the need for better controls.

Mr. Trump also signaled interest in legislation that would strengthen the system of national background checks as well as raise the minimum age for purchase of certain weapons. Congress should take his cue and pursue measures, including pending legislation on background checks, that would enact these small reforms. Though not an adequate response to the students, it would be a start.

— February 21, 2018

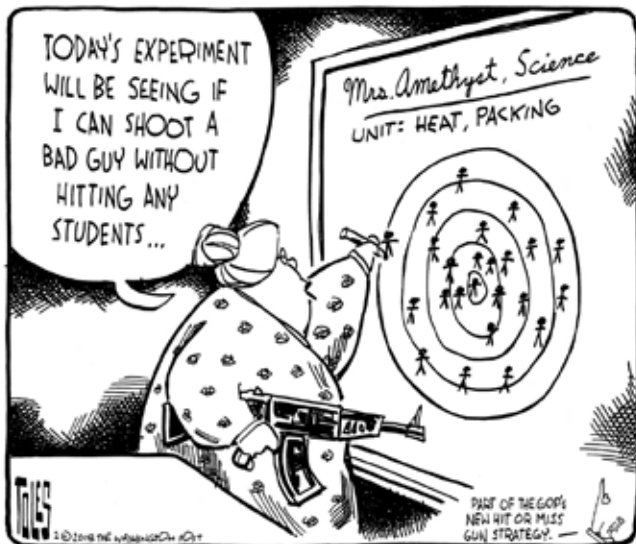
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Tom Toles | *Taking Aim at Gun Issues*

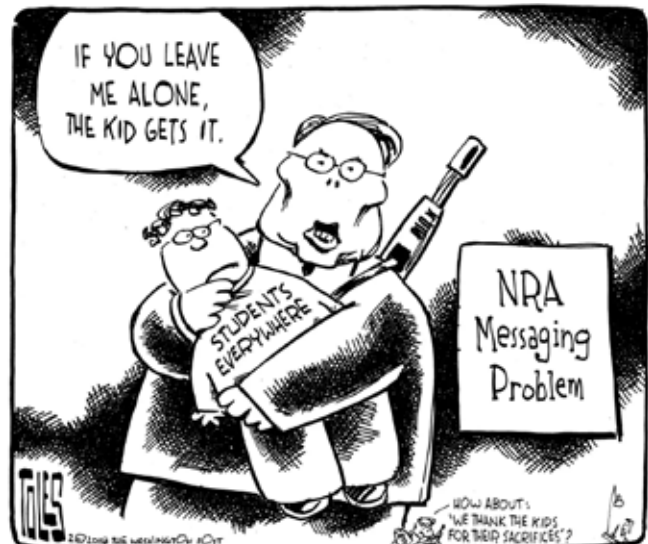
Mass shootings are not new to Americans. In 1949 a WWII veteran killed 13 people who happened to be on the same streets. Thirteen were killed at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, by fellow students. When 17 students and staff were killed at a high school in Florida, students voiced their pleas for adults to do something. To let theirs be the last school mass shooting.

Tom Toles also expressed his point of view on the issue. For each cartoon, Toles' alter ego appears in the lower right corner to emphasize the word play, satirize actions, expand the image or add another dimension to his point of view. "Read" each political cartoon before answering the questions.

February 23, 2018 *Reading, 'Riting and Reloading*



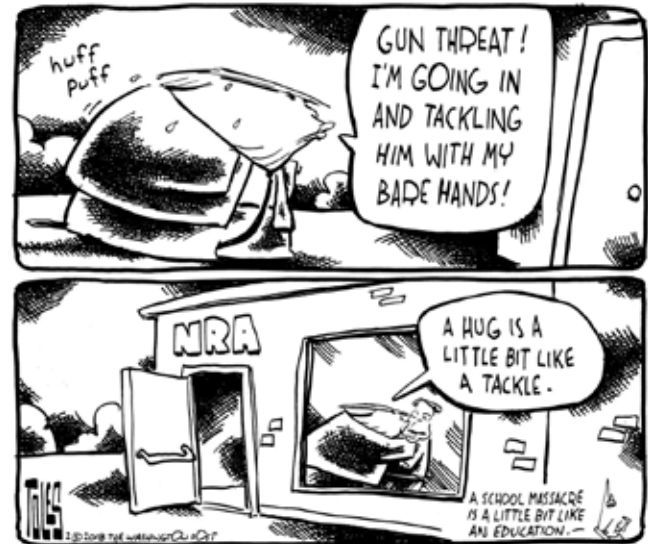
February 25, 2018 *The Kid Gets It*



February 27, 2018 *The Legal Age*



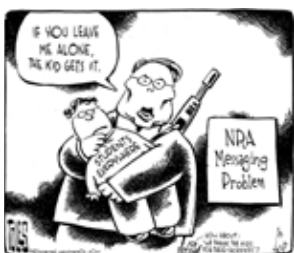
February 28, 2018 *Gun Threat*



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Tom Toles | *Taking Aim at Gun Issues***Read the Editorial Cartoons****February 23, 2018** *Reading, 'Riting and Reloading*

1. What is the profession of the main figure in the editorial cartoon?
2. What does she carry? To what is this a reference?
3. Tom Toles often uses puns and word play. Give three examples found in this editorial cartoon.
4. Summarize the issue to which Toles alludes. What is his point of view on the topic?
5. What is your point of view on this issue?

February 25, 2018 *The Kid Gets It*

1. Editorial cartoonists use labels to be sure their subject is clear. What does “NRA” stand for?
2. Who are the two figures in the cartoon? Why are they in this relationship?
3. Is the comment in the balloon that of the NRA or Toles? Explain.
4. Instead of the alter ego commenting in the lower right corner, NRA makes an alternative statement. To what does “their sacrifices” refer?
5. Sketch your own editorial cartoon to comment on students’ relation to the NRA and its stands after the mass shooting at a high school in Florida?

February 27, 2018 *The Legal Age*

1. Toles uses iconic symbols. Who are the three figures pictured in the editorial cartoon? What are they doing?
2. Many suggestions have been made to address shootings at schools. To which one does Toles refer?
3. What is meant by “legal age for being a shooting victim”? Is this statement ironic? Who would disagree with this?
4. Editorial cartoonists give their points of view on complex issues. Put in your own words what Toles’ alter ego might mean.
5. What is your point of view on this topic?

February 28, 2018 *Gun Threat*

1. Who is the figure commenting in this two-panel visual commentary? Who is “him”? Why the “huff, huff”?
2. This editorial cartoon responds to a comment made on Feb. 26 at a White House meeting with this country’s governors. The president said he would have “run in even if I didn’t have a weapon.” What is the news peg to which he is referring?
3. The building is labeled. What is implied by the change of attitude and action — a tackle to a hug?
4. Through a comparison, what idea is the alter ego expressing?
5. Summarize the point of view that Tom Toles is presenting.

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Why I'll never carry a gun in my classroom

BY VICTORIA BARRETT

Several years ago, I taught a student who seemed capable of shooting up a classroom. He radiated contempt for me, his freshman composition classmates and the assignments, muttering about the stupidity of his peers and rolling his eyes when they spoke. His writing displayed a generalized hatred toward women and some violent fantasies involving hypothetical, gruesome gun crimes against cheating girlfriends. One day, as I rounded the corner, I heard him berating a female student in the hallway because she had defended me against whatever complaints he aired. Spittle flew from his face toward hers.

Eventually, as is almost always the case with such students, he found reason to complain to my boss about my teaching. He took issue in particular with my having deleted a violent comment on the class blog. My boss explained that it was my right and responsibility to maintain a safe learning space for the whole class, which sometimes meant censoring comments. The student became irrational and nonsensical.



STOCK PHOTO

“I am an educator. I will not be drafted into an ideological war.”

After he left, my boss walked straight to my office to say she was concerned for my safety, and had referred the student to the appropriate office for assessment of a possible threat.

Teaching freshman comp courses, like teaching high school, is routinely high-stakes, high-emotion work. Students who are still teenagers, who are struggling with leaving home for the first time, and who have probably been told that a college education is the key to a successful future carry an incredible level of stress. We're accustomed to tantrums, shouting

and a wide range of irrational behavior. In my courses, that behavior tends most frequently to come from young men. But this student had evoked a more threatening tone. If anyone in the 17 years I've taught college might have shown up with a firearm, this student was the one.

So far, this sounds like a viable argument for arming teachers, an idea that bubbles up after every school shooting in this country and one that President Trump expressed support for on Wednesday. But my fellow teachers and I did not enter this profession

to be security guards. And if this proposal becomes a reality, we will not have safer schools. We will have confusion, possibly more tragedy and an exodus of educators at a time when our country can't afford it.

If this student had shown up with a weapon determined to harm us, what would my responsibility have been? Talk? De-escalate? Beg? Run? It seems clear that under any policy that arms teachers, it would be my responsibility to shoot my student dead. This creates more problems than it solves. If I miss or fail to fire, and he murders the other students,

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can their loved ones sue me? What if my shot ricochets and hurts or kills one of them? What if his gun turns out to be a walkie-talkie, a misidentification that happened outside my campus's library last year, and I shoot my student dead for possession of an unusual electronic device? In these scenarios, some more outlandish than others, teachers become soldiers, and schools become liable when students aren't protected in such circumstances as a shooting.

But legal liability isn't the reason I will never carry a firearm into a classroom. If it's my responsibility to shoot someone to protect 25 others, I will have been drafted unwillingly into an ideological army to protect the rights of some civilians to own and operate military-style weapons. And I will not be conscripted.

The National Rifle Association has been accelerating and expanding the ideological warfare it wages on behalf of gun manufacturers for decades.

Once legitimately a member-driven organization focusing on service and safety, it is now devoted to lobbying on the part of gun manufacturers. Because guns last a long time and are often kept and passed down, there's only one way to support the continued manufacture and sale of guns: by rebranding them as fetish properties to collect and own with pride. That is how we come to a situation where 3 percent of Americans own half of the guns in the United States, with collections averaging 17 guns per owner, and individuals frequently owning 40-plus guns. Add in a load of specialized and controversial accessories like bump stocks and silencers, and you have a business that can stay solvent for a little longer. Another way to boost sales? Arm teachers. The Department of Education counts roughly 100,000 schools in the United States. The number of classrooms varies, of course. A gun in each one looks like a very profitable bulk order.

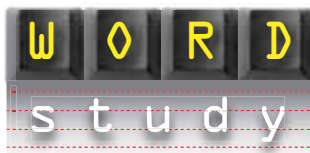
But whatever its logic and motivation, I will not join that army. I will never kill for a civilian's "right" to own a military weapon. Perhaps, like the draft dodgers of my parents' generation, I'll have to leave for a country where the laws make more sense. Anything to avoid the addition of "taking a life" to my job description, when that job is supposed to be about preparing young people to thrive for the rest of theirs. More likely, I will leave the profession if I cannot feel safe in my workspace, as will many others.

Our job is to teach; the job of legislators is to pass laws that serve the public. None of us are required to entertain a "solution" to school shootings that only stands to serve the interests of the gun lobby, not our students.

— February 25, 2018

Victoria Barrett is a writer and writing teacher in Indianapolis. She is the editor and publisher of Engine Books.

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The squishy definition of ‘mass shooting’ complicates media coverage

BY CALLUM BORCHERS

• Originally Published October 4, 2017

A powerful *New York Times* editorial paints a dispiriting portrait of U.S. gun violence, using three numbers and one calendar.

Here’s the headline: “477 Days. 521 Mass Shootings. Zero Action From Congress.”

According to an accompanying graphic, there has been at least one mass shooting on most days since a gunman killed 49 people at an Orlando nightclub June 12, 2016. There is little other text, but there is this note: “A mass shooting involves four or more people injured or killed in a single event at the same time and location.”

That’s one standard. But “mass shooting” is a term without a universally-accepted definition, which complicates news coverage of events such as Sunday’s massacre in Las Vegas. Stephen Paddock’s rampage clearly meets any mass-shooting standard (59 people dead and more than 500 others injured), but the question is how it fits into a broader trend.

The Washington Post Fact Checker explained the range of standards in December 2015, after 14 people were shot and killed in San Bernardino, Calif.

The FBI does not officially define “mass shooting” and does not use the term in Uniform Crime Report records. In the 1980s, the FBI established a definition for “mass murder” as “four or more victims

slain, in one event, in one location,” and the offender is not included in the victim count if the shooter committed suicide or was killed in a justifiable homicide, according to a Congressional Research Service report detailing the definitions.

After the 2012 shootings in Newtown, Conn., Congress defined “mass killings” to mean “three or more killings in a single incident.” Some media outlets and researchers still use the four-fatality definition, and have adopted the CRS definitions of “mass shooting” and “mass public shooting.” Other researchers include injuries in the victim count. Some researchers include acts of terrorism, drug deals gone wrong or gang conflict in their research. Others don’t.

Some media reports, such as those of our Wonkblog colleagues, and advocates use a broader definition used by the Mass Shooting Tracker maintained via Reddit, an online forum. In this case, mass shootings are incidents in which four or more people, including the gunman, are killed or injured by gunfire. By this count, the San Bernardino shooting is the 355th mass shooting this year. (In comparison, CRS counted 317 mass shooting incidents from 1999 to 2013.)

Those last couple of numbers should give you a sense of how differently the frequency of mass shootings can be depicted, depending on the definition of the term. By one metric, the total was 355 in a single year; by another, it was 317 over 15 years.

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The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

EDITORIALS

Guns are killing our inalienable right to life

IT WAS a stunning moment: The father of a 14-year-old girl killed in a mass shooting at her high school confronted a U.S. senator: “Look at me and tell me. Guns were the factor in the hunting of our kids in this school this week. And look at me and tell me you accept it and you will work with us to do something about guns.”

Those words from Fred Guttenberg at CNN’s town hall just seven days after his daughter Jaime (“the energy in the room”) was one of 17 people murdered at a South Florida school were unnerving to Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), and we hope to other members of Congress. Finally they must recognize that there is a crisis of guns in this country, and that they have an urgent responsibility to do something about it.

We know. We have been here before: after 32 people were killed at Virginia Tech in 2007; after a U.S. congresswoman was grievously wounded and six people killed in 2011 in Tucson; after 28 people, most of them just 6 or 7 years old, were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. After nine people were killed at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015. And, after 58 people were killed at a music festival in Las Vegas last year in what was the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

This time, though, it seems there is a difference. Students who lived through the horror at

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School refuse to let the deaths of their friends and teachers — and the terror they felt hiding in closets and running from bullets — fade from memory, as has happened too often before. These wondrous young people have marshaled grief, fury and energy into a potent grass-roots movement. It may be — and we say this guardedly, still stung by the absence of action after Sandy Hook — a breakthrough moment.

The first step, as Mr. Guttenberg emphasized, must be to actually say what the problem is — and the problem clearly is guns. Yes, there are other issues at play, such as mental health and violence in our culture, and they too must be addressed. But troubled people and violent videos exist in other countries and yet only the United States is awash in gun deaths — from homicides, suicides, accidental shootings and the ever-increasing mass shootings.

Americans, according to Everytown for Gun Safety, are 25 times more likely to be murdered with a gun than people in other developed countries. On an average day, 96 people are killed with guns in the United States, and for every person killed two more are injured. In addition to the human toll, there are enormous financial costs in the form of medical bills, lower property values and higher taxes; some estimate the annual tab at upward of \$100 billion. Behind those sobering facts is another

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statistic: Americans make up about 4.4 percent of the global population but own 42 percent of the world's guns.

To seriously confront gun violence — save lives and prevent injuries — there have to be fewer guns. We would start with banning the semiautomatic rifles that — along with large-capacity ammunition magazines — have become the weapon of choice of mass shooters wanting to kill as many people as possible in the shortest period of time. A radiologist who treated gunshot victims from Stoneman Douglas wrote in *The Atlantic* about the devastating effect of high-velocity bullets delivered by the AR-15. Internal organs were obliterated “with nothing left to repair” leaving the victims “with no fighting chance at life.” These weapons are for war, not civilians. Those who say they enjoy the sport of shooting them as target practice need to ask themselves if their hobby is really worth the lives lost and the fear that has been instilled in such simple customs as going to school, worshipping at church or watching a movie.

The ban on assault weapons that was in place in the United States from 1994 to 2004 helped reduce the frequency and lethality of mass shootings, according to analysis by *The Post's* Christopher Ingraham. There were some limitations but, after the ban expired, mass shootings increased. Australia imposed sweeping gun control, including regulations for storing guns and requirements for gun registry, and started a buyback program in the wake of the 1996 Port Arthur massacre that killed 35 people. The result was that gun homicide rates and suicides plummeted. Reacting to a wave of gang shootings in the early 1990s, Connecticut started requiring people to get a purchasing license and pass a background check and a gun safety training course before buying a handgun. Killings fell.

We should be learning from that history and not wasting time on silly talk about arming teachers, walling off schools or fitting children's backpacks with Kevlar shields. That there has been some acknowledgment — including by President Trump — of the need to raise the minimum age for some gun purchases and strengthen the background-check system is encouraging. But the modest improvements outlined in a bipartisan bill now before Congress don't go far enough. The background checks should be universal, with no exceptions for gun shows or buying from a stranger on Craigslist. And the FBI needs to have more than three days to collect information and determine who is high risk.

Just as there is the expectation of responsibility and accountability for people who drive cars, so there should be for people who own guns. That means requiring registration, training and insurance.

Other steps are needed. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives should be strengthened so it can do its job of regulating and tracing guns. Innovations should be encouraged that make weapons safer, such as improved gun triggers or smart guns. Laws should be amended to keep weapons out of the hands of domestic abusers. And research funding should be directed at determining what has worked in reducing gun violence.

Don't be scared by the hysteria that the National Rifle Association is trying to drum up about the Second Amendment being shredded and the government coming after you. Be scared that Congress again will do nothing, and that another inalienable right — that to life and happiness — will be further eroded.

— February 23, 2018