

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

## Reporting's Risks



- Post Reprint: “Mrs. Graham’s Legacy: Fearlessness”
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## OPINION

# Katharine Graham's Legacy: Fearlessness

BY FREDERICK J. RYAN JR.

•Originally Published June 15, 2017

Katharine Graham, the iconic former publisher of *The Washington Post*, was born 100 years ago Friday. We remember her on this centennial not only for her deep and lasting contributions to *The Post*, but also for her unwavering commitment to the journalistic values that continue to guide news organizations across the country.

Mrs. Graham's role as the first lady of American journalism was never preordained, but today, nearly 16 years after her death, her legacy is inseparable from *The Post*, just as *The Post* will forever be linked to Mrs. Graham. Her rise to lead the newspaper and the greater Washington Post Co. was a formative part of the company's history; that history in turn serves as a source of strength as the news organization charts its course through new and challenging times.

While not directly involved in the day-to-day management of the company until 1963, Mrs. Graham had a front-row seat to newspapering through her father, Eugene Meyer, who bought *The Post* at a bankruptcy auction in 1933, and her husband, Philip L. Graham, whom she succeeded as publisher after his death. In those days, *The Post* was an underdog. Through grit and



ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Katharine Graham poses in her office at The Washington Post in 1964.**

determination, and through strong management and a competitive mind-set, the Grahams turned it into the preeminent newspaper in the nation's capital and one of the most respected newspapers in the country.

In her Pulitzer Prize-winning memoir, *Personal History*, Mrs. Graham recalled how years of inaction from the *Washington Star* — the region's “self-satisfied and complacent” market leader

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— ultimately led to its downfall, even after heroic efforts to save it. I can't help but imagine that memory running in the back of her mind when *The Post* took its first steps into the digital era with the launch in 1995 of Digital Ink, a predecessor to *washingtonpost.com*.

Mrs. Graham was determined never to let *The Washington Post* fail. She instilled that deeply held principle in her son Donald E. Graham and her granddaughter Katharine Weymouth — the chairman and publisher, respectively, who made the difficult decision in 2013 to sell *The Post* to an owner who shared their passion for the mission that Mrs. Graham held dear. Today, she would be proud to know, *The Washington Post* is thriving.

In her first decade as publisher, working with Executive Editor Ben Bradlee, Mrs. Graham faced some of the most severe threats to an independent press in U.S. history. In 1971, she had the courage to publish the Pentagon Papers, a secret history of the Vietnam War. She made that decision even though The Post Co. was going public the same week, and despite threats to its licenses to operate television stations.

She continued to face the specter of retaliation by the Nixon administration — including one now-famous threat involving “a big fat wringer” — as The Post published Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's reporting on the 1972 Watergate break-in and its ultimate ties to the White House.

While the challenges we face



DENNIS COOK/AP

**Katharine Graham poses with Donald Graham and then-Executive Editor Ben Bradlee in 1991. Donald Graham started his career at *The Post* as a reporter.**

today are different from those Mrs. Graham encountered decades ago, the values that guide our decision-making remain the same. The media landscape is changing more rapidly than ever, and many newsrooms around the country are struggling to fund their operations. The rise and weaponization of fake news by those who wish to advance agendas at odds with the facts are among the latest threats facing our industry and society.

We hold on to Mrs. Graham's courage of her convictions as we continue pursuing the kind of accountability journalism for which *The Post* has long been known. Real journalism — the kind Mrs. Graham worked so hard to protect — is more important than ever. Readers understand that when they see reporting from *The Washington Post*,

they are seeing “the truth as nearly as the truth may be ascertained,” to steal a line from Mrs. Graham's father.

Just as she was a publisher of the news, Mrs. Graham was a subject of the news. She took setbacks along with success and never let them derail her, or *The Post*. She was a shrewd business executive in an industry where few women of her generation were able to rise to her rank. And her love for *The Post* was abundantly returned by the organization she so cherished.

But what we will remember most about Mrs. Graham is that she was fearless. In times like these, that might be her most important lesson of all.

*Frederick J. Ryan Jr. is publisher and chief executive of The Washington Post.*

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# To fight bigotry and hate, don't muzzle it. There's a better way.



**Margaret Sullivan**

“One of the problems with defending free speech,” the celebrated author Salman Rushdie said, “is you often have to defend people that you find to be outrageous and unpleasant and disgusting.”

Those descriptions, and worse, certainly apply to the white supremacists, neo-Nazis, racists and bigots whose message has caused such turmoil over the past week in two cities, Charlottesville and Boston.

Their message may be vile. But in America, they get to say it. And letting them do so might be the smartest way to fight back.

Consider a third location: Skokie, Ill., the Chicago suburb and residence of many Holocaust survivors where, 40 years ago, a free-speech battle erupted after Nazis planned to march through the streets.

Court battles, protests and righteous anger followed. In the end, the march was allowed, and heavy police protection was ready — but the Nazis never showed up, choosing to rally in downtown Chicago instead.

The executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union at that time wrote recently in the *Chicago Sun-Times* that Skokie's lessons were clear: “In a country where free speech generally prevails, it is best

to take hate speech in stride,” Aryeh Neier said. “Ignoring it sometimes works, as does overwhelming it with the peaceful expression of contrary views.”

Boston chose the latter approach, with perhaps 40,000 mostly peaceful protesters showing up to the “free speech” rally in Boston Common.

Americans of all political beliefs are struggling with these free-speech issues as “fringe groups” become more vocal — empowered by a president elected, in part, by appealing to racism and bigotry.

Justin Silverman, executive director of the New England First Amendment Coalition, is worried

about the suppression of speech by those who disagree with it.

“When that speech is racist or anti-Semitic, it's easy to accept that suppression. But we shouldn't,” he told me.

Beware of the “hecklers’ veto,” he said. That's what happens when a speech or rally is shut down in advance because of the fear of violent reaction.

In April, for example, a neighborhood group in Portland, Ore., decided to cancel an annual parade after “anti-fascist” groups threatened violent protests if the local Republican Party participated.

This month, the University of



SALWAN GEORGES/THE WASHINGTON POST  
**A protester is escorted by law enforcement as counterprotesters gather around him during the “free speech” rally at Boston Common on Saturday, Aug. 19.**

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Florida and Texas A&M University canceled campus appearances by the white-nationalist group National Policy Institute, headed by neo-Nazi Richard Spencer. And last spring, the University of California at Berkeley canceled a speech by conservative firebrand Ann Coulter.

Jeffrey Herbst, president of the Newseum and a former college president, sees a crisis in free expression on college campuses, which “should be bastions of free speech.”

“Today, they often seem to be the very places in American society where there is the least tolerance for controversial ideas,” he wrote recently.

Herbst worries about student attitudes and apparent lack of knowledge about the First Amendment.

“All too often, students want to carve out an exception to the right of free speech, which is not to allow speech that offends an identifiable group,” he told me. That’s not what the Constitution provides for, and far better is to allow offensive speech — and forcefully condemn it.

“Tactically, if people are opposed to Coulter’s views,” Herbst said, “the

worst thing they can do is keep her from speaking. That makes her sympathetic and plays right into her hands.”

Safety, of course, is a real concern, as was obvious in Charlottesville, where a young female protester was killed.

That’s why it made sense for the ACLU to decide last week that it would no longer defend the rights of white-supremacist groups who carry firearms. And why it’s necessary for law enforcement to be far better prepared than it was in Charlottesville.

Boston police did much better, though Silverman was concerned about the huge “buffer zone” police created between the rally participants and the protesters, which kept some — including several journalists — from hearing the speakers.

Why not just forbid these demonstrations altogether? If you think that might be wise, here’s a thought experiment: Imagine a civil rights march that is shut down because officials fear a violent response from racists.

“It’s not that difficult to remember a time when rallies for equality and civil rights were considered offensive

and unpopular,” Silverman said. “The First Amendment exists to protect that offensive and unpopular speech.”

And there’s not much agreement on what’s offensive. Some people, after all, want to keep Colin Kaepernick off the NFL field for not showing allegiance to the national anthem as he protests police brutality. Others cheered the firing of the Google employee who disparaged his female colleagues in a memo.

“Off with their heads” seems to be the prevailing response when we hear something that strikes us as vile.

That’s not what America stands for, as Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in dissenting to a decision (eventually overruled) denying citizenship to a Quaker pacifist woman who wouldn’t state that she would take up arms in defense of the United States.

“If there is any principle of the Constitution that more imperatively calls for attachment than any other,” Holmes wrote, “it is the principle of free thought — not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate.”

— August 20, 2017

# Give Voice to Both Sides?

## WHAT YOU KNOW

1. What five rights does the First Amendment guarantee?
2. In what way(s) does freedom of speech apply to a public school student?  
Hint: Not sure? Review *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969).

## WHAT SHE WROTE

3. Margaret Sullivan is a *Washington Post* media columnist. As a columnist, she expresses her opinion on current events, issues and actions. Read her August 20, 2017, column, “To fight bigotry and hate, don’t muzzle it. There’s a better way.” What is the “better way”?
4. When should speech be denied?
5. When should protesters and counterprotesters be detained or arrested?
6. Write two questions you would want to ask columnist Margaret Sullivan after reading her column, “To fight bigotry and hate, don’t muzzle it. There’s a better way.”

## WHO SHE QUOTED

Sullivan begins her column with a quotation and builds her thesis with additional sources to support her point of view.

7. Match the individual who Sullivan quoted with his description.

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| _____ a. Jeffrey Herbst        | m. Author of 12 novels, life was threatened after publication of his fourth novel. |
| _____ b. Oliver Wendell Holmes | n. Former college president and Newseum official                                   |
| _____ c. Aryeh Neier           | o. New England First Amendment Coalition, executive director                       |
| _____ d. Salman Rushdie        | p. American Civil Liberties Union, former executive director                       |
| _____ e. Justin Silverman      | q. Supreme Court Justice, advocate of broad freedom of speech                      |

8. All of the above have experiences that make them reliable sources on freedom of speech. Select one of them. What idea does he present to explain the American perspective on freedom of speech?

## WHAT DO YOU SAY?

- 9-10. Compose a short statement addressing freedom of speech. Your readers should clearly know your point of view. For full credit include a quotation from Margaret Sullivan’s column to support or contrast with your perspective.

## READ FOR FURTHER UNDERSTANDING

Read more about the Supreme Court decisions on freedom of speech. Here are some cases to begin your search.

*Schenck v. United States* (1919)

*West Virginia Board of*

*Education v. Barnette* (1943)

*Brandenburg v. Ohio* (1969)

*National Socialist Party v.*

*Skokie* (1977)

*Bethel School District #43 v.*

*Fraser* (1987)

*Texas v. Johnson* (1989)

*R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul* (1992)

*Virginia v. Black* (2003)

*Morse v. Frederick* (2007)

*Snyder v. Phelps* (2011)

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## ANALYSIS

# After a CNN interviewee erupts in anger, disaster reporting standards come into focus

BY PAUL FARHI

• Originally Published August 31, 2017

CNN reporter Rosa Flores may have inadvertently discovered the most passionate media critic to emerge from Hurricane Harvey on Tuesday.

Flores approached the woman, identified only as Danielle, and her young daughter in a Houston shelter and began asking her about the hazards and discomfort they had encountered when the woman unloaded on Flores on live TV:

“She walked through four feet of water to go get them food on the first day,” the woman said, referencing her daughter. “Yeah, that’s a lot of s---. But y’all sitting here, y’all trying to interview people during their worst times. Like, that’s not the smartest thing to do.” (“Sorry,” began Flores.) “Like, people are really breaking down, and y’all sitting here with cameras and microphones trying to ask us, ‘What the f--- is wrong with us?’ (“I’m so sorry. . . .”) And you’re really trying to understand with the microphone still in my face. When she’s shivering cold and my kid’s wet and you still putting a microphone in my face!”

“Sorry,” said Flores, backing away as the woman appeared ready to



JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Glenda Montelongo, Richard Martinez and his two sons are helped out of a boat after being rescued near Tidwell Road and Toll Road 8 in Houston.**

burst into tears of rage.

Anchor Jim Acosta broke into the tirade. “Rosa Flores, it sounds like you’ve got a very upset family there,” he said. “We’re going to take a break from that.”

Media coverage of disasters can be like that — wild, uncertain, erratic. Stuff happens that wouldn’t happen if the story didn’t sprawl over hundreds of square miles and involve the lives of millions of people. When there’s chaos near and far, it’s hard to know when an ordinary interview will turn into an act of fury.

CNN found out the hard way that disaster reporting requires a different approach. People are vulnerable and

hurting; they’ve lost property, perhaps family, and certainly a sense of safety and privacy, says Bruce Shapiro, director of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, a Columbia University project that focuses on disaster and violence reporting. “A disaster of this scale challenges all of our reporting practices,” he said. “Our day-to-day tool kit isn’t always equal to this.”

It wasn’t clear how Flores approached the woman before their interview or what their pre-interview conversation had been. But Shapiro says reporters need to seek “small gestures of permission” from people in such circumstances. Asking for

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consent and explaining the purpose of an interview can restore a small measure of control to those who've lost much of theirs, he says.

(A CNN spokeswoman, Barbara Levin, responded to a question about the encounter with a statement reading, "The people of Houston are going through a very difficult time. Our hearts go out to this woman and her family. Our reporter handled the situation graciously.")

While it wasn't hard to relate to the Houston woman's pain and distress, sustained news coverage of disasters such as Hurricane Harvey largely has a positive effect. News reporting stimulates government relief efforts and private donations. It also inspires heroic volunteers. Some of the most heartening images of the past few days, in fact, have been those of ordinary citizens employing kayaks and other recreational vessels to rescue people from flooded homes.

News coverage also plays a vital social role in a crisis by providing information that can bind a community together. The ways and means are many: stories about heroism or human interest, warnings about ongoing hazards, weather forecasts, details about relief operations, the location of missing people. Shapiro says some New Orleanians wept when the local paper, the *Times-Picayune*, distributed its first

copies to the battered evacuees at the city's convention center and Superdome after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Nonetheless, misreporting is a constant feature of natural disasters, too. One of the great media-fed myths of Katrina was that criminality, violence and looting swept New Orleans after the breach of the city's levees. There were apocalyptic stories about snipers shooting at rescue helicopters, roving gangs indiscriminately killing and raping throughout the flooded city, and the Superdome overflowing with dead bodies.

Almost none of it was true.

Much of the defective reporting stemmed from exaggerated or wholly inaccurate comments from official sources, including the mayor and police chief, said W. Joseph Campbell, the author of *Getting It Wrong: Debunking the Greatest Myths in American Journalism*.

Because official sources are often themselves shaky amid catastrophe, disaster coverage requires extra restraint and circumspection, said Campbell, a communication professor at American University. "It's an occasion to be more cautious than ever," he said. "A good rule of thumb might be to restrict yourself only to what you can see."

Campbell said he hasn't seen any "outright phony reporting" from Hurricane Harvey — yet. But there might be some of the inadvisable kind. On Tuesday, ABC News reporter Tom Llamas caught some social-media pushback after he tweeted: "#Breaking: We're witnessing looting right now at a supermarket in the NE part of Houston & police has just discovered a body nearby."

Some pointed out that it might not exactly be "looting" for desperate people to take the only available food in sight. But Llamas went on, tweeting that he had "informed police of the looting," and that Coast Guard and police had responded.

More criticism followed. One website called Llamas's second comment "the worst tweet in history." It questioned Llamas's decision to involve police and then tweet about it. Eventually, Llamas deleted his original tweet and tried to clarify his intent by saying that he was already with police at the time and "mentioned we saw ppl w/faces covered going into a supermarket nearby."

ABC News had no comment; Llamas had no further tweets on the matter.

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## Faces, Microphones and Disaster Reporting's Risks

Reporters covering Hurricane Harvey stated that nearly 35,000 people were in shelters, thousands of homes were submerged and the death toll was likely to rise as water receded in Houston and small Texas cities to the east in late August. What these numbers mean to real people, is known through photographs and on- and off-camera interviews. These give the tragic situation a human face. Read "After a CNN interviewee erupts in anger, disaster reporting standards come into focus" by *Washington Post* media reporter Paul Farhi.

1. Farhi quotes from the on-air interview conducted by CNN reporter Rosa Flores. Summarize what Danielle said to Flores.
2. Do you agree with Danielle and her reaction to the reporter's questions?
3. Farhi turned to Bruce Shapiro for his perspective on the Flores' interview.
  - a. Why is Shapiro a reliable source?
  - b. What main point does Shapiro make about reporting during disasters?
4. State three positive effects of sustained news coverage of disasters.
5. Reporters and their editors are committed to truth and fairness in covering stories for their readers. *The Washington Post* policy states: "Fairness includes completeness."
  - a. Are interviews with victims relevant?
  - b. Do interviews offer more complete coverage?
6. Give two reasons for and two reasons against media organizations sending their reporters and photographers to disaster areas.
7. Farhi includes a downside to disaster reporting.
  - a. Summarize his example.
  - b. What advice is given by W. Joseph Campbell to reporters who are covering catastrophes?
8. What does the example of ABC News reporter Tom Llamas add to the discussion of media coverage of disasters?
9. The Society of Professional Journalists has a code of ethics. One main tenet is to "Minimize Harm." By this, SPJ expects journalists to [b]alance the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness." How does this apply in covering natural and manmade disasters?
10. Create five tips to give reporters who are sent to cover natural disasters.

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# THE HOMECOMING

A young woman at ‘peak enlightenment’ returns to her roots in Trump country.

BY STEPHANIE MCCRUMMEN

IN KAHOKA, MO



MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Emily Reyes leans in the service window of her family’s well-stocked concession stand at the fair.**

It was the first full day of the Clark County Fair, and over at the concession stand Emily Reyes was reading the novel *Ulysses*, raising her head every few paragraphs to look out through the window.

Same as ever, she thought. The old oaks along the midway. Ron from the Lions Club with the ice cream tent. Marvis selling tickets in the shade of the grandstand, where the demolition derby was the biggest draw. Emily’s younger brother Cyrus was going to be in it — Cyrus, who, along with her parents and most of Clark County had voted for Donald Trump, a reality Emily was now preparing herself to face.

She was 22 and home from a liberal-arts college near Kansas City, where she had majored in English and

cross-cultural studies, spent a semester in Germany, worked a summer with refugees in Greece, and met and married a Guatemalan man who would be arriving tomorrow. She kept reminding people that she was Emily Reyes and no longer Emily Phillips — “Yes, Ray-ez,” she kept saying. “It means kings in Spanish, so I’m royalty now.”

Her father liked to say that his daughter had attained “peak enlightenment,” a sarcastic jab that Emily knew pointed to a larger truth. Her worldview had changed since she left Kahoka. She had voted against Trump. She had become increasingly worried about the country since the election. And at a moment when the phrase “cold civil war” was being used to describe the nation’s

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seemingly irreconcilable differences, coming home was beginning to feel like crossing over to the other side.

Emily looked around the concession stand she would be running with her family for the next three days: a long counter where she had put her iPhone speaker next to the paper cups; a shelf where she had put her bag of Starbucks coffee next to the tubs of ketchup; a fan blowing air that smelled like cows and sugar.

All the way home, she had thought about how she was supposed to act in this place she loved but now felt so conflicted about. How was she going to talk to people when every conversation seemed to slip into arguments about the fate of America? How was she going to get along for three days at a county fair?

She put down the novel about a young Irish man searching for meaning on an ordinary day in Dublin and began making some jalapeño poppers. A white-haired farmer in denim overalls arrived at the window.

“Small cup of coffee,” he said.

“It’s Starbucks!” Emily began, realizing as soon as the words came out that “Starbucks” was of course a symbol of the urban elite liberal, which was exactly what she did not want to seem to be. She poured him a large cup of coffee and slid it across the counter.

■

She had always been known here as “Keith and Connie’s daughter,” the fourth of five children, an introvert who grew up absorbing the conservative values of a place where patriotism was the guy who parachuted out of her dad’s Cessna with an American flag on national holidays. Kahoka, population 2,007, was a town in the rural northeastern corner of Missouri where almost every person was white, most were Republican and many were Trumps, an old Kahoka family name that has no relation to the president.



MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Connie Phillips, from left, Hannah Ross, Emily Reyes — formerly Phillips — and Emily’s husband, Cristian Reyes, chat in the concession stand. The Clark County Fair has been the main cultural ritual in Kahoka, Mo., for 136 years.**

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The Clark County Fair had been the main cultural ritual for 136 years. Every summer, it was the 4-H kids and the cows, the trailer-size rides, the open art show paintings of backyard flowers, the campers huddled around the crabgrass edges of the fairgrounds. At election time, the fair was also a venue for politics. Last year, a huge Trump banner hung inside the commercial building where the Clark County Republican sign usually was, and here and there, “Make America Great Again” hats replaced the usual John Deeres. Nearly 3 of every 4 voters in the county went for Trump. The fair was the living, breathing example of his rural Midwestern audience.

Emily had been going since she was a girl, and had always looked forward to the feeling of ease, the lull while the corn was rising, the unhurried conversations. But nothing felt easy to her since the election, especially conversations of the sort that she had learned could arise here.

She had tried talking to her parents during other visits home, telling them that a vote for Trump was a vote “to deport your future son-in-law.” She had tried

with Cyrus, and their relationship had only suffered. She and her best friend Hannah had decided not to talk about Trump at all because of the strain the subject had put on their friendship. A sister-in-law had told Emily that she had become difficult to talk to lately, self-righteous and angry.

Now she had to figure out another way. She turned on some Bob Dylan at a low volume, opened *Ulysses* and settled into a folding chair, advancing 10 pages before Hannah arrived to help. Hannah Trump was her maiden name. Her uncle ran Trump Trucks. An aunt ran a bed-and-breakfast called Trump Haus. Her brother played football and was booed at an out-of-state game recently because of the name Trump on his jersey. Emily silently reminded herself not to mention Trump.

They began making biscuits and gravy, talking about an old high school classmate studying at the University of Missouri.

“She was asking me to help her work on a project about diversity in small towns — she wants to know about any racial targeting,” Emily began.



MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

**The demolition derby is one of the main attractions at the Clark County Fair.**

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“You may not see my opinion Emily, but around here a college degree is not as needed,” Hannah said.

Emily tried bringing up an English teacher they both had.

“Remember we took that class from him, contemporary issues? And we had to pick an issue and talk about it? It was so good for us kids,” Emily said.

“Yeah, he said he was conservative but he was more liberal,” Hannah said.

“He made me love literature,” Emily said.

Hannah slid some biscuits into the oven.

“Two minutes,” she said.

They talked about other classmates, one who was a lawyer in Arizona, another who was a hair stylist in Los Angeles, and then Hannah considered Emily.

“You’re different, but probably not so different as you think,” she said.

“What do you mean?” Emily said.

“You’ve always been different than everybody else. A lot of people who grew up here want to get out, but you’re different in that you like coming home,” said Hannah.

Emily decided not to spoil the moment by explaining how complicated home was to her now, how difficult it was to understand how Hannah could vote for a person who had demonized the Syrian refugees and immigrants that Emily now considered her friends, or how a liberal arts education really was worthwhile because it had taught her how complicated the world could be, or how all of this related to her growing concern about the country. She let the conversation wane.

“We need some music,” Emily said. “What do you want to listen to Hannah?”

“Anything,” Hannah said, so Emily turned on some country music, and when Hannah left to take care of her dog, she went back to “Ulysses.”

She was on page 246 when her husband Cristian arrived, a relief because he understood everything about this situation. He was 22 and a natural diplomat, an immigrant from Guatemala who grew up from the age of 8 in a mostly white corner of southwestern Missouri where Trump had gotten 72 percent of the vote. He wore a T-shirt with a huge American flag, and assured Emily he was in “full PR mode.”

He was chopping potatoes when Emily’s brother Cyrus arrived to help with lunch and began talking about a friend of his who was in the military. The friend had told Cyrus he agreed with Trump’s attempt to ban transgender people from the service. Cyrus was saying he agreed with Trump too.

“It just costs too much,” he said, dropping potatoes into hot oil.

“It’s not true,” began Emily, feeling her anger rising, then deciding to stifle it. “I mean, some people think that. But.”

She retreated to the sink to wash dishes.

“I’m not allowed to serve in the military,” Cristian said.

“Why?” said Cyrus.

“I’m not a citizen,” Cristian said.

“Can’t you go to training camp?” Cyrus pressed.

Emily sensed the conversation veering toward an argument and tried for a distraction.

“The fries!” she said.

“Oh!” Cyrus said, dumping the charred potatoes into a paper boat.

“They look good,” Cristian said.

“Try one,” Cyrus said, and Cristian did, and they moved on to talking about a sick cow Cyrus had to take care of, and the car he was driving in the demolition derby.

“Hey Em, are you going to watch me in the demo?” Cyrus said.

“I’d love to if I can get away,” Emily said, calming down, and after Cyrus left, Cristian said to Emily, “It’s like how do you say anything without offending him?” and Emily said, “Yeah.”

Maybe the best path forward was avoidance, Emily thought. Avoid Trump, avoid all related controversial subjects. Talk about biscuits and fries and the demolition derby and appreciate what Kahoka was, not what it wasn’t.

She ate a tenderloin. She ate a fried peach pie. She and Cristian shared some Lion’s Club ice cream, which was mysteriously good, and after a while, she began to feel more relaxed.

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MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

**The Reyeses stroll the fairground. Emily, 22, home from college, worked a summer with refugees in Greece and met and married Cristian, also 22, an immigrant from Guatemala.**

They decided to drive to the grocery store for supplies, pulling out of the fairgrounds and under the wrought-iron arch that said “Clark County Fair, 1883.”

They turned onto a two-lane road and got stuck behind the only traffic, a man on a riding lawn mower. Emily looked out the window as they inched along. A cornfield. A decaying brick bowling alley. Trump Haus.

“I forget,” she said, referring to the slow pace of home.

Back at the stand, they unloaded the potatoes and buns and were talking about how fried tenderloin is sort of like the Spanish dish chicharron, when Emily’s father arrived, red-faced and sweating from the farm, and began talking about how the expected rain hadn’t fallen.

“We were supposed to get three inches,” Keith Phillips said, working on the french-fry slicer. “We got about a quarter inch.”

Soon, Hannah arrived and she and Keith began comparing rainfall totals, talking about the scourge of Japanese beetles this year and whether global warming

was a factor, which Keith thought was overblown, like so many things, including all the anxiety over Trump, and for that matter all the talk about divisions in America.

Emily listened, spraying ant killer on the line crawling across the counter.

“It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy,” Keith went on. “Everybody agrees to be divided. Where if you just let the walls down, talk and just be open, you soon realize you have a whole lot more in common.”

Emily wiped the counter, listening to her dad rather than engaging him, or arguing about global warming, or explaining how hard it was to understand why her father — the person she considered “one of the most generous people I know” — could vote for a man like Trump, whose character seemed his opposite.

She stayed quiet and took orders at the window. And when there was a nice long lull later in the evening, instead of bringing up any of those things, she started talking about soda.

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MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Drivers round the track in a harness-racing event at the fair.**

“We’re a Pepsi family,” Emily said.

“I’ve been seeing a lot of those glass bottles of Coke made in Mexico using real sugar,” said Cristian.

“When we were in Nicaragua,” Keith said, referring to a mission trip he took there once, “they had these coolers full of grape pop and it was so good.”

■

And that was how conversations were going, not only at the concession stand but all over the Clark County Fair.

At a moment when Trump was making news almost every day, when the Trump campaign was under investigation for possible ties to Russia, when some Americans were still rooting for his agenda and others were convinced that his presidency amounted to a national crisis of historic dimensions — no one seemed to be talking about Trump at all.

In the very heart of Trump country, no Make America Great Again hats were in sight. No Trump T-shirts. No Trump bumper stickers or placards.

When asked, people said the standard things Trump voters have been saying, that the president should “stop tweeting so much,” or Congress should “give him a chance,” or that he was always “the lesser of two evils.” Then they went back to talking about how good the corn

was looking, or the car crash yesterday, or which garden photo won the open art show.

Sitting in the shade of the grandstand, Marvis Trump, a member of the fair board and owner of Trump Haus, had her theory. She had supported Trump, she said, and for a while, she even had a Trump sign up at her house because it irritated her liberal daughter-in-law. It was a lot of fun, she said, but sometime around Easter, she said, that feeling faded.

“Probably the fun’s over now,” she said.

“The smoke from the election, it’s gone out of here,” said Karl Hamner, another fair board member, idling in his golf cart for a moment before zipping down the midway.

And that was one way of understanding the 136th annual Clark County Fair, as a return to normal at a moment when nothing in America was normal. That was how Emily wanted to feel. She wanted the kind of ease she had with her family and friends before all of this, before college, before Germany, before meeting Syrian refugees in Greece, before everything became more complicated and almost everyone she knew and loved voted for Trump.

“You guys been down to the cattle show?” she said to a man in jeans and boots.

“Hot out there?” she said to a man in a John Deere hat.

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In the evening, Emily's dad arrived to help with the dinner rush, and when she asked him a question about the tenderloin batter, he said, "Should someone reading *Ulysses* be asking that question?" and Emily let it go.

When Hannah arrived and joked that the only reason Emily was reading *Ulysses* was because she "wanted to say she had read *Ulysses*," Emily kept her mouth shut.

She put *Ulysses* on the shelf by the ketchup tubs. She ate a homemade doughnut. She stirred barbecue sauce into the pulled pork.

Soon, her mother arrived to help, and with all of them there chopping potatoes and frying pork, Keith said, "We got the Phillipses here and we got the Trumps! What more do you need?"

Emily thought maybe father was right. Maybe this was all that was needed after one of the most divisive elections in U.S. history — the Phillipses, the Trumps, fried meat and the Clark County Fair, the same as ever.

Then Cristian arrived with the new Reyes wing of the family. His mother Ana and his older brother Oscar had driven two hours from their home in Iowa to visit, and now Emily rushed outside and hugged them.

Because Ana and Oscar spoke little English, and Emily spoke little Spanish, they mostly smiled and nodded in silence, and when the dinner rush was over, Emily's parents came outside to say hello.

Ana gave Emily's mother a gift she'd brought for her, a glass serving dish.

Emily's mother gave Ana the cake she'd made for her. "Oh thank you! It's beautiful," said Connie.

"Oh, thank you," said Ana.

"Thank you for coming," said Keith, and seeing all this, Emily felt relieved.

This was what she wanted, too, for Cristian's family to feel welcome, especially here and especially now. And that was how the second day of the Clark County fair ended. In the heart of Trump country, it wasn't the Phillipses and the Trumps but the Phillipses and the Reyeses lingering a while in the grass.

■

On the third day of the fair, Cristian had to drive back to Kansas City, and said goodbye to Emily's mother at the concession stand.

"Thanks for everything," he said.

"No, thank you," Connie said, hugging him as Emily looked on.

It was the last big night of the fair, demolition derby night, and soon the midway was busy and people were lining up at the concession stand, where Emily's dad was working the fryer, and Emily and her mom were taking orders at the window.

"Mom, can we cut the tenderloin in half?" said Emily, who had decided by now that the best way to get along was to stick to fair talk and see what happened.

"Yes we can," said Connie, who sometimes wished she understood her daughter better.

The truth was she was amazed by how much Emily seemed to know, and was also self-conscious when conversations turned to politics or global issues, because she had never finished college herself.

As Connie put it, "Sometimes I'm like, 'Oh, I didn't know that I didn't know that.'" And sometimes the impasse made her feel sad "because as a mom, you want your kids to think you're cool, and then she moves four hours away and things change. But."

In the calm before the rush, Emily turned on some Louis Armstrong, and as Connie made a pulled pork sandwich she said to her daughter, "You know that song 'Losing Cinderella'?"

"I don't listen to country that much," Emily said.

"Come on, you know it — I heard it at church, and it made me cry," Connie said.

"I don't know it," Emily said, turning back to the window.

"You think I'm hallucinating," Connie persisted, and looked it up on her phone.

"'Stealing Cinderella' — that's what it is. Stealing, not losing," Connie said, referring to a song about a daughter leaving her parents for a new life, but Emily was taking an order at the window. She asked her mom a question.

"What's that, honey?" Connie said.

"Fries?" Emily said to her mom.

"Fries coming," said Connie, dropping the conversation.

A band she didn't know was playing on Emily's iPhone, and she made a request for something more familiar. "You have any Ronnie Milsap?" she asked, and

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MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

**Rick Huffman puts his hand on his heart during the national anthem as a harness-racing event begins.**

Emily scrolled through her phone and found the relic songs of her childhood.

“Here you go mom, ‘Smokey Mountain Rain!’” Emily said, turning up the volume and belting out the lyrics word for word.

“I didn’t know you knew that song!” Connie said to Emily, and soon, they were dancing around the concession stand, and Keith was remembering the last time they went to a Ronnie Milsap concert, and they continued dancing and singing until the loudspeakers along the midway crackled to life.

A man announced that the demolition derby was starting soon, and asked people to please be silent for the national anthem. Emily turned the music off.

Up and down the midway, people stopped wherever they were, facing the barns, or the grandstand, or the fair gates and every which direction because there was no obvious, centrally located American flag.

In the concession stand, Emily and her parents listened, and when it was over, she headed over to the dirt track to watch Cyrus in the demolition derby.

She inched up to the fence as the sedans began revving their engines, spotting her brother’s green car among the other wrecks.

“Five! Four! Three! Two! One! Go, go, go!” the announcer yelled, and as the cars bashed into each other, smoke rising, dust flying, the crowd cheering, Emily joined in. “Wool!” she yelled.

■

The next morning, the fair was over except for some harness racing in the grandstand, a last vestige of how the fair used to be, but otherwise everything was shutting down. Trucks were hauling off the carnival rides. Trailers were hauling off the cows and sheep. The campers were almost gone, the fairgrounds reverting to barren acreage.

Emily arrived at the concession stand in the early afternoon to pack up.

She dumped the ice out of the cooler, poured the last tenderloin batter into the grass, and put some paper cups in her tote bag, where *Ulysses* was buried at the bottom. Her mom and dad stopped by to help with the last of it all. They looked around the concession stand.

“It is what it is,” Keith said.

“Anything else?” Connie said.

“No, that’s it for now,” Emily said, and it was.

She thought about the conversations she had avoided, about Trump, about racism, about everything that disturbed her about this moment in America.

She thought about the conversations she’d had.

She padlocked the screen door.

“Dad, are you going to be home later?” Emily asked.

“Yes,” Keith said.

“I’ll see you at home,” she said, knowing she wanted to swing by before leaving Kahoka.

He watched her pack up her car, her iPhone speaker, her coffee.

“You going to go home tonight?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Emily said, deciding she wanted to get back to Kansas City sooner rather than later. “I think I will.”

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# Emily and the Clark County Fair

Read *The Washington Post* feature article, “The Homecoming: A young woman at ‘peak enlightenment’ returns to her roots in Trump country.” The following questions are provided to help guide your reading of the article and understanding the writer’s choices.

Use your own paper to record your responses.

1. The **lede** (first paragraph) presents the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN and HOW to give a foundation for the article.
  - a. What do the 5 Ws and H communicate to the reader?
  - b. What do you know about *Ulysses*? For example, is it light summer reading?
  - c. It is journalistic practice to state the full name of people included in news and feature articles. What does her full name communicate to you?
2. **Details** that result from observation and interviewing bring the setting and people to life and establish verisimilitude.
  - a. What detail indicates where Emily is?
  - b. What does the book Emily reads indicate about her?
  - c. Paragraph 2 flows with details about the fair and hometown people. It begins with a statement of her thought: “Same as ever.” Note the order of the pieces of information that follow. What do these details together reveal about the fair and county?
  - d. Through the details provided in paragraph 3, what do you know about Emily?
  - e. Select one detail from paragraph 4. Explain how it supports and expands what the reporter was establishing about Emily in paragraph 3.
  - f. From later in the feature, select a detail(s) that interest you. Indicate the paragraph, state the detail(s), explain what it/they add to the feature and why you found this interesting.
3. **Dialogue** plays an important role in this feature. Some exchanges are a few sentences. Others extend over a conversation between several individuals.
  - a. Select an example of dialogue developing the personality of individuals. Be sure to include who is involved and what gets communicated about each through what he or she says.
  - b. What does dialogue reveal about the underlying tension and people? Give an example.
4. **Action**. There are times when Emily is silent, working on a task that needs to be done in the concession stand. Why do you think the reporter includes these times?
5. **Summarize** a main idea presented through Emily.
6. The reporter chose to include the visit of Cristian’s family. This **interaction** is true to what happened on the second day of the county fair.
  - a. What do the eight paragraphs add to the feature article and its theme?
  - b. Note the end of the paragraph before Cristian arrives with his mother and brother. It ends: “... the Phillipses, the Trumps, fried meat and the Clark County Fair, the same as ever.” This is a careful word choice. What is achieved through this repetition of phrase from the beginning of the feature?
7. On the third day, Emily “had decided by now that the best way to get along was to stick to fair talk and see what happened.” The next paragraphs begin with this small talk, then the reporter shifts to Emily’s mother’s **point of view**. In what way(s) does this writer choice add depth to the feature?

8. Throughout the feature, **music** has been included. Find one such time and tell what it adds to the feature article.
9. **Description** appears throughout the article. People, the fair, and traditions are brought to life. McCrummen brings the culminating event to life. Near the end of the third day, she writes:

A man announced that the demolition derby was starting soon and asked people to please be silent for the national anthem. Emily turned the music off.

Up and down the midway, people stopped wherever they were, facing the barns, or the grandstand, or the fair gates and every which direction because there was no obvious, centrally located American flag.

In the concession stand, Emily and her parents listened, and when it was over, she headed over to the dirt track to watch Cyrus in the demolition derby.

She inched up to the fence as the sedans began revving their engines, spotting her brother's green car among the other wrecks.

"Five! Four! Three! Two! One! Go, go, go!" the announcer yelled, and as the cars bashed into each other, smoke rising, dust flying, the crowd cheering, Emily joined in. "Woo!" she yelled.

- a. What does this scene add to the recreation of three days of a county fair?
  - b. Think back to Emily readers met in the first paragraphs of the feature. Compare and contrast her to the Emily at the demolition derby.
10. How might "THE HOMECOMING" be used for a series of feature stories? What other homecomings might be covered?

**YOUR TURN****Experiment with Focus and Theme**

1. Have you attended a county fair or other annual event held in your community?
  - a. Why are these events held? What do they provide the community and their visitors?
  - b. In what way(s) does the county fair remind people of their heritage and American values?
2. There are many people at the Clark County Fair that *Post* reporter Stephanie McCrummen introduces in “THE HOMECOMING.” Why do you think Emily Reyes was selected to be the focus of the article?
3. What is the underlying theme or idea of the feature written by Stephanie McCrummen?
4. Select five main persons in this feature. What point of view or dimension does each present?
5. Select one of the people other than Emily. Why does this person interest you?  
Keeping this person in mind, re-read the feature article and highlight where this person appears.
6. What do you know about this person through the details and interaction included in the feature?
  - a. Can you describe this person? Through physical features and/or through interests held? Does this person appear in one or more photographs so you can use photograph(s) as a source of information?
  - b. What sections of dialogue reveal something about the character of this person?
  - c. What additional interview questions would you like to ask this person?
  - d. What do you observe this person doing?
7. Feature stories are human interest stories. Readers get to know people, their concerns, their interests, achievements and failures. It may reveal something of the complexity of emotions. Thinking about the person you selected, questions 4-6, what human interest element does he or she provide?
8. If you were to write the feature story set at the Clark County Fair, what theme or idea would you like to focus on?
  - a. How might changing the “main character,” keeping his or her point of view, influence the theme of the feature article?
  - b. Will you keep the same theme but approach it from a different angle because of your choice of individual on whom to focus?
  - c. If you change the theme using the county fair and maintaining the details given about this annual event, what will your theme be?
9. How will you now begin your revised feature? Will the person appear immediately or be introduced later?  
Rewrite the first ten paragraphs of the article, as you would begin your feature.
10. Read your lede. What type of lede have you chosen? Quotation, question, description, comparison and contrast? Other? How does it help the reader to know where they are, what is happening or who might play a significant role in the rest of the feature?
11. What segments of the dialogue in the original feature will you include? Why?
12. In McCrummen’s feature, Emily is preparing to head to her new home. How might you end your feature? Will this be enforcing an idea? Or bring a conclusion to an action introduced in the lede?