

Zach Finger, D6, 2/10/23

Project Summary:

The purpose of my project is to shine a light on the ultra-religious schools that underprepare students for the world by teaching fundamentalist principles. I want to encourage people to go out and vote to change the schools that teach this way. I don't want to use this as a way to bash religion or religious beliefs but demonstrate how when it is used in the school curriculum, it negatively impacts the students. This is because students who are educated in religious schools tend to have lower scientific literacy in topics contested and not contested by their religion [1]. This implies that they are not only lacking in topics like evolution, but view science in a lesser light than it should, impacting opinions on other topics like climate change and vaccinations.

Statement of Positionality

I am of the belief that in school all students should be taught pure science and fact. That school is a place where you should receive a complete education, not one that changes the science based on your religion. At school you should learn how to think, and form your own opinions. I do not believe that is possible with fundamentalist religious beliefs being imposed on students. If someone arrives at the conclusion that fundamentalist beliefs are the truth after having been taught the scientific fact, then that is fine but students need the opportunity to learn.

Personal experiences related to this:

I am Jewish but my immediate family is not very religious. Even most of my extended family is not and believe in science as I come from a long line of doctors and teachers. However, I have some Aunts, Uncles, and cousins who are Orthodox Jewish. Those cousins were sent to an Orthodox Jewish school and grew up under fundamentalist beliefs. As someone who strongly values education, it was never right to me that kids were subjected to their parent's beliefs in school.

Background

Scopes Monkey Trial:

The first piece of background information needed is about the scopes monkey trial. The Scope Monkey Trial could be thought of as the origin of this debate [2]. There used to be the Butler Act in Tennessee which prohibited schools from teaching evolution in class as it went against the Bible [2]. In one school a substitute teacher for a science class named John Scopes taught evolution and was sent to court for it. Scopes was found guilty but that verdict was later reversed, and the Butler Act was eventually repealed [2].

Today's Religion in Schools:

Despite this, today many religious schools still do not teach science as fact. Currently, Montana is trying to pass a bill that bans the teaching of many scientific theories in school, including evolution [3]. This shows that the problem is graying the line between separation of Church and State in our schools is becoming very relevant in today's society.

Target Audience Description

Who and Why?

I would have loved for the audience to be the students attending these religious schools to give them a little more perspective. However, due to the level of censorship those parents impose, those kids will likely never be able to see this film. Instead my audience becomes non ultra religious, voting Americans. One of the main problems with fixing the Yeshiva schools is that the orthodox Jewish community has an incredible amount of voting power. When elected officials say they will make a change, they never follow through because they know they will be voted out of office. I believe that people might not know exactly what the situation is and how it is impacting these students. They also may not be aware of bills similar to the Butler Act trying to be passed today that they have the power to vote off.

What Kinds of People? Expectations?

These are people over the age of 18 who come from all different races and backgrounds. They would have to be non-ultra religious, however, they do not have to be agnostic or atheist either. I believe many normal, spiritual or religious people will agree with my claim and support a systemic change. I think the main type of projects/ texts they consume is through social media. However, sufficiently entertaining films are making a big comeback, and becoming more accessible through streaming platforms like Netflix. Therefore, I think a film that sends a message, but in an entertaining way, will be seen by a large amount of my audience, and will then hopefully be discussed and spread through social media.

Primary Research Experience

Although I have some family members who attended these schools, I am hesitant to talk to them directly about the subject as I do not want to come off as disrespectful. To begin I will start by talking with my Mom about the subject, as it is her Sister who is Orthodox and chose the Orthodox school for my cousins. I believe my Mom will get me some good primary knowledge on the topic. If not, I will reach out to one of my cousins and ask how the science curriculum was taught there. Another resource is emailing local religious schools and asking them for a course breakdown or plainly asking them how they go about teaching science.

Detailed Deliverables

I will be producing an outline for a full length feature film including about 8-10 pages of the actual screenplay. This generally corresponds to about 5-6 minutes of on screen time so about one scene. The premise of the film is a modern take on the Scopes Monkey Trial. It asks, what would happen today, if a teacher came into a religious school and taught topics like evolution? How would the school react? How would the parents react and would it be different from the way the students react? Although it is not illegal to teach those topics, it certainly would not be acceptable in those communities.

The Scene I am Writing:

While this is subject to change, the scene I would like to write would be the climactic point where the teacher needs to answer for his “crimes”. Although a real court trial would never happen, a meeting with the school board and the teacher with parents in attendance is a likely outcome. This is somewhat inspired by the ending of the film, “Scent of a Woman”, in which Charlie is in a school court and defended by the Colonel. In this trial-esque situation, the teacher would be questioned on what he did, likely harassed by the parents, but it would end with a nice long monologue where he can really get what he has to say off his chest. I believe that this scene will most clearly state my position on the topic, be the most impactful, and utilize most of my sources. Additionally, it will be a fun challenge as a monologue can make or break an entire screenplay.

Resources

Tools for Research:

There are no real tools that I need that are not easily accessible on the internet. Most of my research will be through phone calls, emails, or searches on google and google scholar.

Tools for the Project:

The only tool I would really need is a screenwriting software but there are free online ones. Arc Studio will probably be my software of choice as I have used it a little bit before.

Detailed Timeline

February 20th: look into local religious schools and reach out about their curriculum

March 1st: finish reading all necessary journals

March 6th: Reviewed all resources I have on screen writing and watched a few films for inspiration

March 13th: semi-detailed film outline and first draft of just the monologue done

March 27th: Fully completed film outline and fully completed monologue

April 23rd: Fully completed scene with monologue put in

List of Proposed Resources

1. McPhetres, Jonathon, and Miron Zuckerman. "Religiosity predicts negative attitudes towards science and lower levels of science literacy." *PloS one* vol. 13,11 e0207125. 27 Nov. 2018, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0207125
2. Linder, D. (2007). *State v. John Scopes (the monkey trial)*. SSRN Electronic Journal. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1024297>
3. Dunhill, J. (2023). *New Montana Bill Would Prevent Schools Teaching "Scientific Theories"*. <https://www.iflscience.com/new-montana-bill-would-prevent-schools-teaching-scientific-theories-67451>
4. Interview with my mom about my cousins school
5. Cohen, H. (2022). *New York's ultra-Orthodox schools go under the microscope*. *The Jerusalem Post* | JPost.com. Retrieved March 3, 2023, from <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-717284>
6. Miyamoto, K. (2017, October 18). *Aristotle's six golden rules of screenwriting*. *ScreenCraft*. Retrieved March 3, 2023, from <https://screencraft.org/blog/aristotles-six-golden-rules-of-screenwriting/>
7. YouTube resources to learn how to use ArcStudio
8. Notes from the Aaron Sorking Masterclass that I used
9. Chan, J., & Erduran, S. (2023). *The Impact of Collaboration Between Science and Religious Education Teachers on Their Understanding and Views of Argumentation*. *Research in science education*, 53(1), 121–137. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-022-10041-1>
10. *Actual Scent of a Woman Screenplay*: Goldman, B. (Writer). (1992). *Scent of a Woman* [Film]. Universal Pictures.