

Polly Pupil

Mrs. Tina Teacher

Language Arts

8 June 2019

A Drinking Problem

Downing a Monster or Red Bull energy drink brings a welcomed buzz to many teens, but the harmful long-term consequences of these beverages are simply too numerous and frightening to ignore. Due to the health risks that accompany these drinks, many communities, from Los Angeles to Chicago, have considered laws banning the sale of energy drinks to people under age 18 (“L.A. May Become”). Such laws are wise and should be approved throughout the nation because these products bring far more harm than good to teen consumers.

With splashy advertising and sponsorships of hip music festivals and extreme sports events, energy drinks are seen by many teens as edgy and cool, but the truth is that these cans of chemicals are slowly poisoning our youth. A recent report by the World Health Organization says the products are potentially “a significant public health problem,” especially for youth (Breda). Teens generally weigh less than adults of similar height and their tolerance for caffeine is much lower; these two factors create a magnification of caffeine’s effect on their bodies (Alfonsi). In fact, teens are so susceptible to the negative effects of large doses of caffeine, including high blood pressure and heart palpitations, that a handful of deaths have been connected to these products (Breda). Take the case of 14-year-old Anais Fournier, who died from a heart attack in December 2011 after consuming two 24-ounce cans of Monster Energy (Alfonsi). Moreover, consider the case of Lanna Hamann, a 16-year-old girl who went into cardiac arrest in June 2014 after guzzling Red Bull energy drinks while on vacation in Mexico (Sifferlin). Ongoing lawsuits have been filed against these beverage companies, but any judgment won’t bring back these young lives. The best move is to legislate changes before more young people’s lives are taken.

Another argument in favor of restricting access to these toxic beverages is simply financial. Most energy drinks cost about \$2 per serving (Amazon). While that seems like a small amount of money, a teen’s daily habit of popping open a can of Monster will add up to

hundreds of dollars over a 180-day school year. For example, my friend Chris arrives each day to our first-period English class with a 24-ounce Monster energy drink that he chugs before the bell rings. After lunch, he'll down a 5-Hour Energy shot to help him through his afternoon classes. On average, he drops \$4 a day at the convenience store, which adds up to \$720 over the course of the school year. It's an outrageous amount to spend, especially when he bemoans the fact that he never has gas money for his car and couldn't afford to go on last summer's vacation with our circle of friends. Taking a broader perspective on this issue, researchers estimate that youth spent \$2.3 billion on energy drinks in 2013 (Zuraw). Surely, there are better things that today's teens could do with that money, from purchasing less-expensive healthier snacks to saving for future college expenses. A quick buzz is not worth the cost to their bodies or their wallets.

Many critics of the proposed law change argue that there is already too much government intervention in people's lives and that teens are mature enough to spend their own money as they wish. While it's true that we should be cautious when considering any change to the law, we must remember that a different set of rules apply to teenagers and our forefathers wisely gave us the right to amend laws as needed to evolve with the ages. People under age 18 don't have the same rights, or responsibilities, as full-fledged adults. Our government already limits teens' access to addictive and dangerous products, such as tobacco, lottery tickets, alcohol, and firearms. Large doses of caffeine fall within this same category. Furthermore, these drinks do nothing to improve the lives of children and teens. Wise and caring politicians should work to preserve the health of our young people and proposed laws restricting access to these harmful beverages will be an important step in protecting the next generation.

When one considers health risks, financial implications, and legal precedent, it is clear that approving this new law is the right move. There will be plenty of time in teens' adult lives to work long hours, neglect their health, and addict themselves to caffeine. In the meantime, we need to take steps to preserve the well-being of our youth today. The next time a teen faces a daunting amount of homework or needs to cram for final exams, the best move should be to take a short nap, enjoy a brisk walk, or gulp a large glass of water instead of consuming chemical crud.

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8 June 2019

Quenched

Many of us enjoy a warm cup of coffee to help get the day started. Later, we might grab a soda, chocolate bar, or energy drink to fix a mid-afternoon slump. Consuming these items should not be a crime, yet some legislators have decided to take aim at energy drinks, unfairly painting them as a public menace. Due to the suspected health risks that accompany these caffeinated beverages, many communities, from Los Angeles to Chicago, have considered laws banning the sale of energy drinks to people under age 18 (“L.A. May Become”). Such laws are well-intentioned, but short-sighted because the legislators’ claims not only lack scientific support, but also insult responsible citizens.

Proponents of the law change warn that energy drinks include excessively high amounts of caffeine that threaten the lives of our young people (Alfonsi). The truth, however, is that energy drinks pose less of a health risk than coffee (Sullum). In fact, an exhaustive study has shown that when compared ounce-for-ounce to regular coffee, there’s actually less than half the amount of caffeine in a Monster Energy drink than in a Starbucks standard house brew (DiSalvo 1). None of the lawmakers, of course, would ever argue that teens be barred from ordering an after-school latte or that coffeeshops be required to card patrons. Furthermore, cases of fatal caffeine toxicity in the U.S. are so rare that each is investigated by the Food and Drug Administration (DiSalvo 2). Interestingly, in all five of the cases studied in 2012, the F.D.A. concluded that caffeine consumed from energy drinks merely “triggered a pre-existing” heart condition in all of those patients (DiSalvo 2). There’s no telling whether a strenuous workout or intense roller-coaster ride could have set the same tragedies in motion, yet it would be ridiculous to outlaw those activities for millions of teens based on the heart conditions of a few. Also, it should be obvious to all consumers that excessively high consumption of not just caffeinated products, but any single product can cause unwanted effects. Take, for instance, the case of 28-year-old California mother Jennifer Strange, who died of water poisoning after drinking six liters of water in three hours to try to win a Wii gaming console

in a radio station contest (Ballantyne). Arguing that access to bottles of water needs to be restricted seems silly, yet that's precisely the same argument being launched against the energy drink industry. Until science can support the proposal, it's wildly inappropriate to alter laws based on a hunch.

Additionally, lawmakers and pediatricians who support the law change say that young people cannot be trusted to regulate their consumption of caffeine and are being manipulated by slick advertising (Alfonsi). These adults must not know any actual teens. If they spent any time with my circle of friends, they would discover that we are thoughtful and incredibly careful with our money; we take advanced classes, participate in sports and theater productions, and hold down part-time jobs. Each week, I work 15 hours at my family's restaurant, tutor a middle school girl in math two days after school, and manage my own heavy homework load, which often keeps me up working past midnight. If I want to grab a Red Bull to help me push through a marathon work session, there's no harm done. In fact, my parents agree that since I'm earning two paychecks, cover my own car insurance and gas, and keep my grades high, I'm old enough to decide how to spend my own money. This is good practice for two years from now when I'll be out on my own and, to be honest, I like an occasional Red Bull. It's cheap, doesn't hurt anyone, and helps me get a lot accomplished.

Finally, it's foolish to try to legislate what should be an obvious parenting responsibility. No sensible person would allow a 10-year-old to drink a Red Bull, slurp a 30-ounce Big Gulp, or devour an entire bag of chocolate bars (Edwards). Consequently, no one has proposed prohibiting the sale of all junk food to minors because making this move would be unreasonable and unnecessary. Let parents do their job. And if there is a parent out there allowing Red Bulls, Big Gulps, and king-sized Kit Kats to fill a child's belly, then that family faces bigger problems than could be addressed by a local law restricting access to energy drinks.

When one considers the absence of scientific proof, the desire for fairness in the marketplace, and individual rights and responsibilities, it is clear that proposed laws to prohibit energy drink sales to minors should be defeated. In our country, it is difficult to change a law. The process encourages us to think through proposals and fully examine an issue before we ink a new rule that will govern all of our lives. After looking closely at this issue, it's obvious that the evidence simply does not support this ill-conceived legislation.

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Deconstruct the Essays

After reading both essays, go back and mark the following:

1. Draw a star on top of the sentence that includes the writer's **claim**
2. Underline the writer's **reasons** that she believes her claim is true.
3. Highlight or use a colored pencil to underline everything that should be considered **evidence**.
4. Circle any sentences that include the opponent's **counterclaim**.
5. Draw a rectangle around any **transitional words or phrases**.

Feeling stuck?

Transition words and phrases
help smooth the flow of your argument.
Here are a few to help get you moving again...

For example,
Yet another example...
For instance,
Next,
Not only...but also...
Surely,
With this in mind,
Equally important is...
Most convincingly,
Indeed,
Another key point...
In fact,
The truth is...
Also,
Take, for instance, the case of...
Additionally,
In addition,
Furthermore,
In a similar way,
Similarly,
Finally,
Consequently,
As a consequence,
Moreover,
It must not be forgotten that...