Assignment 1 Separating Facts from Opinions

These scripts will be used for listening practise in your class. Please do not read them before class.

Script 1 The Case for Tolerating E-Cigarettes

By Amy L. Fairchild and James Colgrove https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/09/opinion/the-case-for-tolerating-e-cigarettes.html

DEBATE over e-cigarettes — battery-powered cigarette look-alikes that heat liquid nicotine but emit a harmless vapor — is raging. New York City and Chicago are considering adding e-cigarettes to their bans on smoking in bars, restaurants and parks, and Los Angeles is moving to restrict e-cigarette sales, even though e-cigarettes don't generate smoke and, while not proved to be entirely safe for users, are undoubtedly less hazardous than tobacco cigarettes.

The evidence, while still thin, suggests that many e-cigarette users, hoping to kick the habit, use e-cigarettes as a safer alternative to tobacco. Research also suggests that e-cigarettes may be better at helping to sustain smoking cessation than pharmaceutical products like nicotine patches or gums.

No one believes nicotine addiction is a good thing, and our qualified support for e-cigarettes is not one we reach lightly. Although some e-cigarette manufacturers have no links to the tobacco industry, Big Tobacco is consuming an ever-greater share of the e-cigarette market. It is hard for public health advocates like us to look favorably on anything the industry wants. But history shows that harm reduction — the doctrine that many risks cannot be eradicated and that efforts are best spent on minimizing the resulting harm — has had an important place in antismoking efforts and suggests that regulation is better than prohibition.

It's been only a half-century since the federal government took an interest in making tobacco products safer. In 1964, Surgeon General Luther L. Terry issued a watershed report definitively linking smoking with lung cancer. But he also described research into new kinds of cigarettes as "a promising avenue for further development." In the early 1970s, the government spent some $6 million a year to try to develop safer tobacco products. Even the health secretary Joseph A. Califano Jr., who called smoking "Public Enemy No. 1," saw, in 1978, a place for "research aimed at creating a less hazardous cigarette." As late as 1981, the surgeon general advised smokers who couldn't or wouldn't quit to switch to low-tar and low-nicotine brands.

The American Cancer Society, while worried that the development of less hazardous cigarettes might derail efforts to deter people from smoking or getting them to quit, supported "frank scientific discussion about the possibilities of developing cigarettes that will be less harmful and still satisfying to smokers."

This effort came to a halt in the 1980s, when stunning revelations from high-profile court cases demonstrated that the tobacco industry had lied about the dangers of smoking for decades and even manipulated the levels of nicotine in its products to ensure that smokers stayed hooked. The magnitude of the deception made it nearly impossible to consider the possibility of a "safer" tobacco product. It inspired, among advocates, opposition to anything less than total cessation.

This new stance was supported by the availability of over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapies and a focus on protection of bystanders from secondhand smoke. As the head of the American Heart Association put it in 2000: “There is no such thing as a safer cigarette.”

The irony is that, during these same years, AIDS prompted public health advocates to support needle exchange for users of intravenous drugs, a harm-reduction approach that also drew fire from those who favored complete elimination of drug use. Fears that such programs would lead to greater illicit drug use have been definitively put to rest.

Of course the analogy is not exact: Unlike clean needles, which present no independent harms to injecting drug users, less risky alternatives to smoking, like smokeless chewing tobacco and the moist tobacco product known as snus, carry a grave risk: oral cancers.

E-cigarettes potentially overcome that barrier. Most experts consider nicotine harmful only at extremely high doses. Tobacco control advocates tolerate the long-term use of therapies like the nicotine patch and nicotine gum despite their approval only as temporary smoking-cessation aids. In 2000, the chairman of a Public Health Service panel called tobacco dependence a “chronic condition that warrants repeated treatment,” even if that meant treating smokers “for the rest of their lives.”

Advocates fear that e-cigarettes will serve as a gateway to deadly cigarettes — or sustain smokers in public settings where lighting up is banned. “Waiting to act,” New York City’s health commissioner, Thomas A. Farley, said, “is a risk we should not take.”

But there is a price to such rigidity. Emotion should not rule out harm reduction, even if eradication of smoking is the ultimate goal. Banning vaping in public won’t help. Instead, e-cigarettes should be regulated by the Food and Drug Administration as products “sold or distributed for use to reduce harm or the risk of tobacco-related disease.” The industry can’t be trusted to provide safer products. The historical mistake was not the pursuit of a safer cigarette, but championing that cause with dishonest partners.

If e-cigarettes can reduce, even slightly, the blight of six million tobacco-related deaths a year, trying to force them out of sight is counterproductive.

Script 2 Mexico's Soda Pop Ploy

By David Toscana, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/04/opinion/mexicos-soda-pop-ploy.html

My first job out of college, in 1983, was working for Coca-Cola. The training, which lasted a month, was the same for everyone: all day in a truck, making deliveries, mostly to rural areas. We would leave before dawn and return as the sun was setting. We delivered soft drinks to churches and whorehouses. We went to places that didn't appear on any map, where there were no roads beyond the tracks left by trucks like ours. We went where the government didn't go, where there were no hospitals, no schools and sometimes even no running water.

The other vehicles we passed on the road were trucks belonging to Pepsi or manufacturers of potato chips, salted peanuts, cookies or some other form of junk food.

Nowadays, one of the most dangerous jobs in Mexico is driving a delivery truck down what Graham Greene called "lawless roads," where delivery men are robbed, extorted and even killed.

Starting with the presidency of Felipe Calderón, from 2006 to 2012, the government lost control over the war on drug cartels and failed to fulfill its part of the social contract. It has been unable to guarantee the safety of its citizens and to implement educational reforms, but it has given politicians carte blanche to earn money through illegal means and to benefit swimmingly from their tolerance of private monopolies. The government has been truly valiant, however, when it comes to assaulting its citizens with more taxes.

One of the most talked-about is a tax of one peso (about 8 cents) on every liter of sugary beverages, which our Congress approved on Thursday. The tax — part of a fiscal reform package that also includes an 8 percent tax on junk food — is aimed at obesity.

By various measures, Mexico is either the world's fattest country, or the second fattest, after the United States.
We Mexicans are among the most avid consumers of soft drinks. We swig a half-liter per person every day — thanks in part to the multinational beverage companies' distribution, advertising and pricing strategies, but also because soft drinks, while not exactly nutritious, are at least (usually) free of germs.

In Mexico it is never easy to find water that is safe for drinking, and this is true in both the city and the countryside. Summers are long and hot. And a plate of spicy food usually requires copious amounts of liquid.

That's why soft drinks are a part of the Mexican way of life (and also why Mexicans are among the world's top consumers of bottled water). To attack soda without offering healthy alternatives — like a safe, reliable supply of drinking water — amounts to saying, à la Marie Antoinette, "Let them drink wine."

So, sugar isn't so good for you. But it is part of that universe in which inertia dominates reason. We all know that we should read more, but we watch TV; we

should do more exercise, but we end up on the couch; we should contaminate the environment less, but we use the car to go everywhere.

Yes, we know we should disinfect water, filter and boil it, but it is easier to buy it in a bottle — maybe with some carbonation and sugar.

I'm reminded of the thirst I felt during a coast-to-coast bike trip across the desert of northern Mexico in 2006. "You're going to die," my fellow cyclists warned me.

Almost. There were moments when the water ran out that, at 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit), made one start to think about the great hereafter, but the here and now usually produced an oasis in the form of a little convenience store in the middle of nowhere.

The culinary offerings were never optimal — at most, a variety of soft drinks, potato chips and cookies — but they helped keep me hydrated and nourished enough to stay on the road.

In Cervantes's "Don Quixote," the hero comes across an innkeeper "who, being a very fat man, was a very peaceful one." If this were a universal truth, Mexicans would be a very peaceful lot. When it comes to economic matters, at least, we mostly are.

For most Mexicans, money is something you need, not something you cherish for its own sake. That's why the new taxes on sodas and junk food were mostly contested by the business community. The average Mexican just shrugged.

But while we may be peaceful people, we are also suspicious.

The government stands to collect $1 billion every year from the soft-drink tax. It isn't a huge fortune, but as we hear the hiss of a bottle being opened and we gaze down at our still broadening waistlines, we will wonder whether another politician is using our tax money to buy real estate in Florida, Texas or California.

So here's an idea: now that we've taxed soda, let's tax corruption. According to the Mexican employers' association, the cost of corruption is 9 percent of our economic output ($1.2 trillion). If you apply the standard value-added tax of 16 percent, you'll collect $17 billion. If you think a tax on soft drinks will make us healthier, just imagine what a tax on corruption could do.