An **author’s purpose** is the main reason he or she creates a piece of writing. This reason may be to inform, persuade, entertain, or reflect. An author may write with a particular audience in mind, hoping to affect people’s feelings on a subject. Analyzing the author’s tone, language, and content choices can help readers infer what the author’s purpose is. Those same clues can also reveal the **author’s point of view**—what the author thinks, feels, or believes.

**Read the following excerpt from the essay “Civil Disobedience” by Henry David Thoreau, first published in 1849. What do you think Thoreau’s purpose was for writing this piece?**

Is a democracy the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly.

**Read the excerpt again. This time, underline phrases that contain the key points the author is making. Then read the chart below to see how the ideas Thoreau expresses can help you figure out his point of view about the importance of the individual.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Textual Evidence</th>
<th>Idea Expressed</th>
<th>Author’s Point of View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The nature of government</td>
<td>“take a step further toward recognizing and organizing the rights of man”</td>
<td>Our form of democracy can still be improved.</td>
<td>The individual is more important than the government, and our government must change to reflect that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“never be a really free and enlightened State”</td>
<td>True freedom is impossible under an oppressive government.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“recognize the individual as a higher and independent power”</td>
<td>People should be considered greater than government.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thoreau’s point of view seems to be that the individual is more important than the government. His purpose, or reason for writing, is to persuade people that our form of government could still be improved. Determining an author’s purpose and point of view will help you understand what feelings or ideas the author wants you to take away from the text.
Read the following editorial about Edith Wilson.

**The First Female President**  
*by John Grey*

History remembers Edith Wilson as far more than just a first lady. In fact, she’s been hailed as the “first female president of the United States.” Though most of her contributions to the presidency took place “behind the scenes,” they are a testament to this remarkable woman’s strength and intelligence. They demonstrate that her unofficial title is well deserved.

As wife to President Woodrow Wilson, Edith bravely assumed nearly all of the president’s routine daily activities when her husband suffered a debilitating stroke in October 1919. Rather than allow him to step down, she continued his presidency by acting in his place. She became the sole point of communication between Woodrow and his Cabinet. In fact, the American people believed their president only suffered from temporary exhaustion. Edith decided which issues to bring to her ailing husband’s attention and which ones she could deal with herself. Edith Wilson met these extraordinary challenges head-on and proved herself an admirable leader.

**Explore how to answer this question:** “What text evidence helps you infer the author’s point of view about Edith Wilson?”

To infer the author’s point of view, look for and underline any evidence in the text that suggests what he thinks of Edith Wilson and how she took control after her husband’s stroke.

**Use the text evidence you found to complete the chart and determine the author’s point of view.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Textual Evidence</th>
<th>IdeaExpressed</th>
<th>Author’s Point of View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edith Wilson</td>
<td>“a testament to this remarkable woman’s strength and intelligence”; “her unofficial title is well deserved”</td>
<td>The way Edith conducted herself was honorable and presidential.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Read the editorial about Edith Wilson below. Use the Close Reading and the Hint to help you answer the question.

**White House Deception**

by Jose Gonzales

History may remember Edith Wilson as the United States’ first female president, but what it fails to mention is the elaborate deception she orchestrated. When her husband, President Wilson, suffered a serious stroke, Edith swooped in to “help.” She purposefully misled Congress about the seriousness of his condition. Then she used the opportunity to exercise head-of-state powers, such as signing official orders and writing decrees in her own hand. History must not look favorably upon this hijacking of the government. To speak with the president’s voice is, at best, dishonest.

**Hint**

Which answer choice is consistent with the author’s feelings about Edith Wilson?

Circle the correct answer.

Which sentence best expresses the author’s point of view?

A Edith Wilson did the right thing in exercising her husband’s presidential powers.

B Edith Wilson is rightly remembered as the first female president of the United States.

C Edith Wilson deserves to be praised for serving her country.

D Edith Wilson should not be honored by history for her deception.

**Show Your Thinking**

Explain what words and phrases you used to infer the author’s point of view in the above text.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

How do the two authors’ points of view about Edith Wilson differ? With a partner, compare and contrast the two sides of the issue, using specific text evidence to support your inferences.
Read the essay about an important figure in the history of the United States. Use the Study Buddy and Close Reading to guide your reading.

Figuring out why an author wrote something can help me determine his or her point of view. While reading, I’ll think about whether this essay is meant to inform, entertain, or persuade readers.

Close Reading

Circle any words or phrases that help you understand the author’s opinion about Betsy Ross and her importance to the American people.

How does the author feel about the historians’ claims? Underline any words or phrases that convey her thoughts, feelings, or beliefs.

American Flag Heroine  by Sylvia Edmund

1. The tale of Betsy Ross sewing the first American flag is a cherished part of the lore of the American Revolution. According to both oral and written tradition, George Washington and members of the newly formed Continental Congress approached Ross with a rough sketch of a flag that would carry their armies into battle against the British. After some redesigning and a few contributions of her own, Ross sat in her rocking chair and sewed together the new American flag. It had alternating red and white stripes and 13 five-point stars for the original 13 colonies.

2. Recently, however, some modern flag historians have been trying to discredit this remarkable story. They would have us believe that it is nothing more than elaborate fiction. As “proof,” they point to the fact that William Canby, Ross’s grandson, didn’t begin telling the story until 1870. They suggest he did this as a way of venerating his lineage. The time frame makes sense, however, when you realize that at the time, the country was gathering stories for the upcoming 1876 Centennial. The flag historians also maintain that they’ve found no evidence that a meeting between Ross and Washington took place, or that they were even acquainted. Worse, they claim that there is no evidence to suggest that Ross designed, contributed to, or was even involved in the creation of the first American flag. However, they have failed to provide any evidence to the contrary.

3. Anyone who loves what our country stands for should ignore these pointless attacks on an inspiring bit of our history. What’s important is the weight this 200-year-old tale still carries. It’s a tale Americans have told for generations. Betsy Ross was a female role model at a time when men fought the wars and received all the glory. The story of her contributions to the birth of our country should not be challenged or even questioned.
Hints
Which answer choice is consistent with the author’s feelings about Betsy Ross?

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

1. Which sentence best expresses the author’s point of view toward the story of Betsy Ross?
   A. Modern flag historians choose to ignore important facts about Betsy Ross’s life.
   B. Betsy Ross was an inspirational woman and her story should not be questioned.
   C. It is a myth that the Continental Congress asked Betsy Ross to sew the first American flag.
   D. William Canby fabricated his grandmother’s story in 1870 for the Centennial celebration.

2. What text evidence best supports your inference about the author’s point of view?
   A. Flag historians believe that Ross and Washington never even met.
   B. Ross’s grandson told her story in order to celebrate his heritage.
   C. Betsy Ross made many contributions to the design of the flag.
   D. Americans still love to tell the Betsy Ross story 200 years later.

3. Explain the author’s purpose for writing this essay. Cite two details from the text to support your response.

   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

Look back at the words and phrases you underlined.

Think about how the author’s point of view about Betsy Ross might have inspired her to write this essay.
Read the speech. Then answer the questions that follow.

from “The Hypocrisy of American Slavery,
July 4, 1852”

by Frederick Douglass

As a former American slave, Frederick Douglass became an extremely influential African American leader and abolitionist during the 1800s. In 1852, he was asked by the citizens of Rochester, New York, to deliver a Fourth of July speech as part of the city’s Independence Day festivities. The following is an excerpt from Douglass’s famous oration. In it, he questions America’s celebration of freedom in light of the prevalence of slavery.

1 Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? That he is the rightful owner of his own body? You have already declared it. Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery? Is that a question for republicans? Is it to be settled by the rules of logic and argumentation, as a matter beset with great difficulty, involving a doubtful application of the principle of justice, hard to understand? How should I look today in the presence of Americans, dividing and subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom, speaking of it relatively and positively, negatively and affirmatively? To do so would be to make myself ridiculous, and to offer an insult to your understanding. There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven who does not know that slavery is wrong for him.

2 What! Am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to burn their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? Must I argue that a system thus marked with blood and stained with pollution is wrong? No—I will not. I have better employment for my time and strength than such arguments would imply.

3 What, then, remains to be argued? Is it that slavery is not divine; that God did not establish it; that our doctors of divinity are mistaken? There is blasphemy in the thought. That which is inhuman cannot be divine. Who can reason on such a proposition? They that can, may—I cannot. The time for such argument is past.

4 At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh! had I the ability, and could I reach the nation’s ear, I would today pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be denounced.

1 republicans: elected representatives
What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him more than all other days of the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity. Your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mock; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation of the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of these United States at this very hour.

Go search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.

Douglass believes Americans should be ashamed to celebrate the Fourth of July as long as they allow slavery to exist. Which sentence from the speech best supports this statement?

1. “Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty?”
2. “I have better employment for my time and strength than such arguments would imply.”
3. “To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity.”
4. “Go search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse.”

This speech was written to persuade

- enslaved African Americans
- free American citizens
- elected government officials
- monarchs of the Old World
Part 5: Common Core Practice

3. What does Douglass hope to accomplish in “The Hypocrisy of American Slavery”?
   A. He wants to convince his audience that it is wrong to celebrate independence while denying freedom to slaves.
   B. He would like to give his audience information about the terrible practices of South American and Old World nations.
   C. He intends to provoke his listeners by accusing them of immorality and their nation of inhumane crimes.
   D. He wishes to reflect on the historical significance of the United States declaring its independence and its principles of equality.

4. Which sentence from the speech best supports the inference that Douglass does not need to argue against slavery because it is clearly immoral?
   A. “At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed.”
   B. “There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven who does not know that slavery is wrong for him.”
   C. “I have better employment for my time and strength than such arguments would imply.”
   D. “There is not a nation of the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of these United States at this very hour.”

5. Describe how you determined the author’s purpose for “The Hypocrisy of American Slavery.” Cite at least two pieces of textual evidence that led to this inference.

Self Check
Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 93.