



Regents Practice #3

Use the following *New Youth Connections* story and practice lesson to help your students prepare for the New York State English Regents exam. (Not prepping for the Regents? This is a good story and the lesson will help your students become more careful readers or listeners.)

Long-Distance Patriot

An American in Germany, I stand up for my country,
but not all its actions

By **Miranda Neubauer**

I'm an American citizen who has spent most of my life in Bielefeld, Germany. My mother's from New York City and we visit relatives there twice a year. Even in Germany I grew up with American children's books like *The Little Engine That Could* and movies like *The Lion King* and loved American culture. I also thought of the U.S. as a land of freedom and equality.

George W. Bush became president in January 2001, when I was in the 8th grade. Until that time, I had a very positive view of America and don't think I would've understood any criticism of it. But I hadn't thought much about what patriotism or loyalty to a country meant.

Betrayed by Bush

Before Bush was president, Germans had a more positive, although not great,

Regents Practice is written for the bulk subscribers to *New Youth Connections* to help them use the magazine more effectively with teens in their classes and programs.

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view of America. The anti-American sentiment in Germany began in early 2001, when the United States would not approve an international treaty to reduce "greenhouse" gases that contribute to global warming. Germany and more than 100 other countries backed the treaty, called the Kyoto protocol, but Bush refused.

This made Germans angry because the U.S. is the largest producer of greenhouse gases and the treaty would only be valid if enough countries producing such gases approved it. I was mad when Bush didn't approve it and I couldn't understand why he wouldn't want to protect the environment.

This was the first time I became aware that the U.S. government could act against my interests. Since I believe in protecting the environment, I felt confused and hurt, and I didn't really know how to feel about America anymore.

When Bush canceled a treaty with Russia that was supposed to keep both countries from developing certain weapons, Germans were upset again. Like many Germans, I thought the treaty was a good way to minimize the chance of war.

I Wanted to Defend America

First I just read negative articles in the press, but soon my accordion teacher and the more politically interested kids at school would ask me questions or make remarks about Bush. Why had Americans elected this president? Were they stupid? Was Bush stupid?

I never knew what to say. Should I defend a government I didn't agree with? Say nothing? Say, "Well, my mom didn't vote for him?" These were my usual responses, but none seemed right.

I wanted to defend the America I knew and loved: a country where the laws guaranteeing freedom of expression and religion are taken very seriously, a country where people of all different nationalities are accepted, a country with a strong democracy.

I didn't want to argue with my friends, because I was afraid I'd ruin our friendship or the argument would get too heated. I explained that I didn't agree with the Bush policies, but that didn't help because some people just said, "Well, you're different," and continued criticizing America.

We're Not All Greedy Cowboys

I couldn't stand the broad generalizations many Germans made, such as all Americans supported Bush or that Americans were only interested in money and controlling the world. They didn't seem to care or want to know that not all Americans were cowboys from Texas, driving around with guns, eating fast food and killing the environment.

The anti-Americanism around me made examine my own views. There were so many aspects about America that I loved, yet I was also becoming aware of more disturbing parts of American history, such as the Vietnam war. We had invaded a country that hadn't hurt us. We

killed many innocent people and many Americans died. It was painful for me to realize that America could be so positive and so negative at the same time.

Teacher Started Hating

The questions and my own worries became even more common after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, which shocked and horrified me.

In the first few days, people in my German school were generally sympathetic, and our school placed a candle commemorating the victims at the entrance.

But shortly after the attacks, one of my teachers started making long speeches presenting the U.S. as all-powerful and almost evil, and implied that it had no culture or only a superficial one. He called the U.S. hypocritical, asking why they were upset about planes flying into the World Trade Center but accepted planes flying over Afghanistan and bombing that country.

While I knew by then that America wasn't perfect and had also made mistakes, I felt his generalizations were just plain wrong and unfair. Whenever he made his speeches, I couldn't stand to look at him and just stared at the floor or my watch, hoping the lesson would be over soon.

I felt like sticking him in a closed room with Fox News and "The Star-Spangled Banner" constantly playing, but I didn't say anything because I didn't want to get in trouble or harm my mark.

U.S. as Big Bully

Kids who loved the Internet, Coca-Cola, jeans and pop music—all parts of American culture—would also compare the U.S. to a big bully telling all the other countries what to do. "America is slowly taking over the world," said one class-

mate. They accused the U.S. of killing off cultural variety and making every place the same with McDonald's, Wal-Mart and Hollywood movies.

I found myself partly agreeing with them, partly disagreeing, and just feeling generally confused. I completely disagreed with the terrorists, but I had to wonder what it was about the U.S. that drove them to do such a horrible act of violence.

These thoughts also made me even more angry at Bush. Now whenever he did something that was unpopular in other countries, I felt like he was putting the country at risk.

Dumping Their Dislike on Me

I tried not to let the Anti-Americanism get to me, but one argument with an acquaintance almost brought me to tears. I felt like some of the kids at school were channeling their dislike of the U.S. at me, which made me angry.

I began to feel uncomfortable discussing America at all around other kids because I didn't want to bluntly criticize it nor did I feel comfortable praising it.

Bush's threats against Iraq, in late 2002, were very unpopular in the German population and the media. I was upset by the generalizations I heard about war-crazy Americans, especially since the Americans I knew, here and in New York, didn't think the U.S. should invade Iraq.

At the same time, I felt surprised and offended when, after 9/11, some Republicans said that criticizing the U.S. government was the same as being against the U.S. in general. If they wanted to experience anti-Americanism, they should have come to Germany.

Wrote a Letter

A few weeks before the war began, a

group of about 15 Americans in Bielefeld, including me and my mother, got together and wrote a statement for the local paper. We wanted to make it clear that we didn't agree with Bush and that not all Americans were for the war.

Soon after we sent the letter, a reporter from the paper interviewed us and wrote an article to accompany the letter. Writing the letter and being featured in the article was important to me. Even though kids in my class didn't comment much on the article, I felt that it did lift the stereotype of the typical American.

No Country Is Perfect

I'd never really thought much about patriotism before. But as an American in Germany after 9/11, I slowly came to the opinion that it's OK to be proud of the positive aspects of your country, as long as you're honest about the negative aspects. One can be honest by admitting that there is a problem and then trying to fix it.

It's difficult to define what loyalty to a country means. I think one should respect whoever is in office, but that doesn't mean blindly supporting them.

I am still proud that America is a diverse country, a strong democracy, and that it has an active press.

I also love American books, movies, TV and the generally more relaxed American culture. But I agree with my German classmates that the country still has far to go.

No country is perfect. Every country I can think of has done something regrettable. We should be honest about criticizing other countries, as well as our own. But being prejudiced and making simple generalizations can only make tense international situations worse. ☒

Practice Lesson for Regents Exam Reading Section

What the teacher needs to know: The Regents English exam has a reading section. One part of the test asks students to complete multiple choice questions based on two reading passages. (This lesson

uses only one passage.)

To Do: Have your group read the story. Then have them complete the questions on page 3.

Long Distance Patriot

Multiple Choice Questions

1) What adjective best describes the initial German reaction to the 9/11 attacks?

- a) indifferent
- b) sympathetic
- c) fearful
- d) puzzled

2) According to the author what event first prompted Germans to view America more negatively?

- a) American bombing of Afghanistan
- b) American rejection of an environmental treaty
- c) the invasion of Iraq
- d) the Vietnam War

3) How does the author react to her teacher's hostility toward the United States?

- a) agrees with him in class
- b) argues with him in class
- c) ignores him
- d) disagrees silently

4) Which statement would the author agree with?

- a) Governments always look after the best interests of its citizens.
- b) Americans deserve their bad reputation in Germany.
- c) A good citizen should be respectful of her government but also skeptical of its actions.
- d) German teens hate American culture.

5) What did the author do to counter the stereotypes exhibited by her German classmates?

- a) wrote a letter to a newspaper
- b) spoke out in class
- c) organized a demonstration
- d) nothing

6) According to the author what part of American culture did her classmates like?

- a) sports, especially baseball
- b) television
- c) comics
- d) music

7) The author mentions the Vietnam War to

- a) explain her opposition to invading Iraq
- b) demonstrate how she was becoming more skeptical about her government
- c) explain part of her German friends' anti-Americanism
- d) give an example of American global dominance

8) What best describes the author's attitudes toward America prior to 2001?

- a) proud but skeptical of its policies
- b) indifferent
- c) very upbeat
- d) confused

9) What statement would the author be least likely to agree with?

- a) Germans were unfair in their criticism of America.
- b) She was usually too timid to argue against anti-American comments.
- c) Every country has done something undesirable.
- d) Criticizing your country is unpatriotic.