



## Modified Document A: Sparks Letter to the Editor

*Many citizens wrote letters to Tennessee's newspapers in response to the Butler Act. Below is an excerpt from a letter written by a parent.*

Dear Editor:

When the bill against the teaching of evolution in public schools was passed, I could not see why more mothers were not thanking the lawmakers. They were protecting our children from one of the destructive forces which will destroy our civilization. I for one was grateful that they stood up for the right. And grateful, too, that we have a Christian man for governor who will defend the Word of God against this so-called science.

The Bible tells us that the gates of Hell shall not win against the church. We know there will always be standard-bearers for the cross of Christ. But in these times of materialism I thank God deep down in my heart for everyone whose voice is raised for humanity and the coming of God's kingdom.

Mrs. Jesse Sparks  
Pope, Tennessee

**Source:** Mrs. Jesse Sparks, letter to the editor, *Nashville Tennessean*, July 3, 1925.

*Some of the language and phrasing in this document has been modified from the original. The original document can be found on the HTM website, [www.historicalthinkingmatters.org](http://www.historicalthinkingmatters.org).*

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### Sourcing

1. Why does Mrs. Sparks care about what is taught in schools?

### Contextualizing

2. To what does Mrs. Sparks refer when she says "these times of materialism"?

### Close Reading

3. Find all of the words that suggest the presence of a great danger. Why might Mrs. Sparks believe that evolution is such a threat?



## Modified Document B: Textbook – A Civic Biology

*The excerpt below is from the biology textbook used by the State of Tennessee in 1925. The Butler Act made it illegal to teach from textbooks like this one. John Scopes could not remember if he actually taught the section on evolution from this textbook, but volunteered to say that he did in order to challenge the legality of the Butler Act. Pay attention to how the textbook explains the theory of evolution.*

### **The Doctrine of Evolution.**

We have now learned that animals may begin with very simple one-celled forms and end with a group which contains man himself. The great English scientist Charles Darwin explained the theory of evolution. This is the belief that simple forms of life on the earth slowly gave rise to more complex forms.

### **Man's Place in Nature.**

We see that man must be placed with the vertebrate animals because of his vertebral column. We place man with the apelike mammals because of structural likeness. The group of mammals which includes the monkeys, apes, and man we call the primates.

### **Evolution of Man.**

There once lived races of men who were much lower in their mental organization than present people. If we follow the early history of man, we find that at first he must have been little better than one of the lower animals. Gradually he must have learned to use weapons and kill his prey, first using rough stones for this purpose. Man then began to farm the fields, and to have permanent houses. Civilization began long ago, but even today the earth is not entirely civilized.

**Source:** Excerpt from widely-used biology textbook, *A Civic Biology*, written in 1914 by George W. Hunter, a biology teacher from New York City.

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## Close Reading

1. How does the textbook describe man's evolutionary relationship to other animals? Why might the supporters of the Butler Act oppose such a theory?

## Corroborating

2. What do you think Mrs. Sparks (Document A) would find offensive about this textbook passage?
3. Why did many people in Tennessee support the Butler Act, which forbade the teaching of evolution?



## Modified Document C: American Federation of Teachers Statement

*The American Federation of Teachers released a statement in support of John Scopes. As you read, think about their reasons for supporting him.*

The American Federation of Teachers is very concerned about the effect of the Tennessee anti-evolution law.

Teaching has been threatened by unwise lawmakers who fear to trust the intelligence, the public spirit, and the devotion of teachers.

As teachers, we especially fear the effect of the present wave of intolerance in education on the task of providing schools with open-minded and informed teachers. Without intellectual freedom, and without open discovery and discussion, there could be no scholarship, no schools at all, and no education.

**Source:** Excerpt from resolution adopted by the American Federation of Teachers on July 18, 1925.

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### Close Reading

1. How do the teachers present themselves in this resolution? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

### Contextualizing

2. What do you think the teachers mean by the phrase, “present wave of intolerance”? What does this phrase suggest about how these teachers view the Butler Act?



## Modified Document D: Reverend Straton Article

*John Roach Straton was a minister who preached across the country against the sins of modern life. Straton believed in the literal truth of the Bible and the literal truth of Biblical miracles. He was firmly opposed to the teaching of evolution. He also believed that parents and local communities should control their own schools.*

The real issue at Dayton and everywhere today is this: "Whether the religion of the Bible shall be ruled out of the schools and the religion of evolution, with its harmful results, shall be ruled into the schools by law."

John Scopes's lawyers left New York and Chicago, where real religion is ignored, where crime is most widespread, and they went to save a community where women are still honored, where men are still polite, where laws are still respected, where home life is still sweet, where the marriage vow is still sacred.

Think of the nerve of it! and the enormous vanity of it!

**Source:** Excerpt from Reverend John Roach Straton's article in *American Fundamentalist*, "The Most Sinister Movement in the United States." December 26, 1925.

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### Close Reading

1. What words does Straton use to show that he is complimentary of small towns?
2. According to Straton, what are signs of corruption in New York and Chicago?

### Contextualizing

3. According to Straton, how is the Scopes trial bigger than a simple debate between evolutionists and creationists?



## Modified Document E: Chicago Defender

*The Chicago Defender was one of the main African American newspapers in the country. In the decade before the Scopes trial, the newspaper played a major role in convincing blacks to leave the South and move North. The excerpt below is from an editorial about the Scopes trial.*

In Tennessee a schoolteacher is being tried for teaching evolution to his students. If convicted, a prison term awaits him; he will be a felon and thrown into a cell with robbers, gunmen, and murderers.

That is the South's way. She fights anything that does not support the South's idea of white superiority. If truths are introduced that southern grandfathers did not believe, then it must be kept down.

The Tennessee lawmakers probably never read the textbook themselves. All they know about the subject is that the entire human race is supposed to have started from a common origin. There is their difficulty. If they admit that idea, they will have to admit that there is no difference between themselves and the race they pretend to hate. This would, of course, threaten the existing standards of living in the South.

**Source:** Excerpt from *Chicago Defender* editorial, "If Monkeys Could Speak." May 23, 1925.

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## Close Reading

1. According to this editorial, why did the South oppose the theory of evolution?

## Corroborating

2. Both the *Chicago Defender* and the American Federation of Teachers (see Document C) oppose the Butler Act. What are the similarities and differences between their arguments?



## Modified Document F: Malone's Trial Speech

*Dudley Field Malone was a New York attorney who was on the defense team. He argued for the importance of teaching science. Though the local Tennesseans viewed Malone with suspicion, the force and passion of this speech surprisingly lifted the audience to its feet.*

What is the issue that has gained the attention, not only of the American people, but people everywhere? Is it whether Scopes taught the paragraph in the textbook? You think, your Honor, that reporters from London are here because the issue is whether John Scopes taught a couple of paragraphs out of his book? Oh, no.

The least that this generation can do, your Honor, is to give the next generation all the facts and theories that observation and learning have produced—give it to the children in the hope of heaven that they will make a better world than we have. We have just had a war with 20 million dead. Civilization is not so proud of the work of the adults. For God's sake let the children have their minds kept open—close no doors to their knowledge. Make the distinction between religion and science. Let them have both. Let them both be taught. Let them both live.

We feel we stand with progress. We feel we stand with science. We feel we stand with intelligence. We feel we stand with freedom in America. We are not afraid. Where is the fear? We meet it! Where is the fear? We defy it!

(Loud applause.)

(The bailiff raps for order.)

**Source:** Excerpt from Dudley Field Malone's speech on the fourth day of the Scopes trial, July 15, 1925. Dayton, Tennessee.

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### Close Reading

1. According to Malone, why is the Scopes trial bigger than a simple issue of teaching a few paragraphs about evolution?

### Sourcing

2. The audience in the courthouse mostly supported Bryan and the Butler Act. Why do you think they applauded Malone's speech?

### Contextualizing

3. Why does Malone say "civilization is not so proud of the work of the adults"? How does he use the disastrous events of his time to support his main point?



## Modified Document G: New York Times Article

*The New York Times covered the Scopes trial extensively. Its editorials condemned the Butler Act and sided with the defense. As you read, think about how a newspaper from New York City portrayed a small Tennessee town. Dayton's population in 1925 was 1,800.*

Cranks and Freaks Flock to Dayton:  
Strange Theories are Preached and Sung within Shadows of the Court House

Visitors for the Opening Day of the Scopes Trial are Mostly Tennessean Mountaineers.

Dayton, Tenn., July 10.

Tennessee came to Dayton today in overalls to attend the trial of John Scopes for the teaching of evolution. The Tennesseans came from mountain farms near Dayton, where work, usually begun at day light, had been deserted so that gaunt, tanned, toil-worn men and women and shy children might see William Jennings Bryan's "duel to the death" with "enemies of the Bible."

They overflowed the crowded courtroom, onto the great lawn of the court house shaded by maples and newly planted with strange pipes, where one pressed a button and bent to drink water for relief from the sun.

They stood in groups under the trees, listening to evangelists, moved by the occasion to speak for the "Word." They listened to blind minstrels, who sang mountain hymns and promises of reward for the faithful, to other minstrels who sang of more worldly songs, and to a string quartet of negroes. They walked up and down hot, dusty Market Street, with its buildings hung with banners, and lined with soda-water, sandwich, and book stalls, as for a carnival. Religion and business had become strangely mixed.

**Source:** Excerpt from a front page *New York Times* article, "Cranks and Freaks Flock to Dayton." July 11, 1925.

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### Close Reading

1. How does the *New York Times* regard the local Tennesseans?
2. What evidence can you find that the *New York Times* regards the events as bizarre and interesting?

### Contextualizing

3. What does this article suggest about why people came to Dayton to watch the trial?



## Document H: Dallas News Cartoon

Newspapers all over the country covered the Scopes trial in the tiny town of Dayton, giving the people of this small town a degree of publicity that would have otherwise been unimaginable.



[6] Playing It for All It's Worth. (Knott in the *Dallas News*)

**Source:** John Knott, "Playing It for All It's Worth," *Dallas News*, July 1925.

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### Sourcing

1. Why might a cartoonist from a big city newspaper in Dallas, Texas, be making fun of Dayton, Tennessee?

### Close Reading

2. Who is playing the music? What is the cartoonist saying about why Dayton is hosting the trial?



## Modified Document I: Larson – Summer for the Gods

*Edward J. Larson is a historian who wrote a Pulitzer Prize winning book on the Scopes trial called Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion. He traces the rise of fundamentalist Christianity in the 1920s. Fundamentalists opposed "modernism," which claimed that humans wrote the Bible and that its stories should be interpreted, rather than assumed to be literally true.*

Middle ground did exist between modernism and fundamentalism but gained little attention in the public debate surrounding the Scopes trial.

The popular press seemed intent on pitting fundamentalists against modernists or against agnostics, all of whom scorned the middle. Christians caught in the middle sat on the sidelines.

"The thing that we got from the Scopes trial," one editorial observed, was that the most "sincere believers in religion" simply wanted to avoid the origins dispute altogether. "Some have their religion, but they are afraid if they get involved in the debate, they will lose it. Some are in the position of believing, but fear they can not prove their belief."

**Source:** Excerpt from historian Edward J. Larson's book, *Summer for the Gods*, 1997.

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### Contextualizing

1. According to Larson, newspapers ignored the "middle ground." Why might newspapers have painted the trial as a debate between fundamentalists (people who believe that the Bible is literally true) and agnostics (people who doubt the existence of a god)?

### Close Reading

2. Who occupied the "middle ground," according to Larson? What did the "middle ground" believe?



## Modified Document J: Stereotypes – Monkey Business

*The passage below is from a book called *Monkey Business: The True Story of the Scopes Trial* by two journalists, Marvin Olasky and John Perry. Olasky and Perry argue that the Scopes trial gave rise to the common stereotype of creationists as backward and stupid. As you read the passage below, think about how Olasky and Perry would answer the main inquiry question.*

Journalists who came to Dayton in 1925 carried with them anger toward fundamentalist Christianity.

Reporters described the story as one of pro-evolution intelligence versus anti-evolution stupidity. For example, one journalist summarized his view of the debate by noting, “On the one side was bigotry, ignorance, hatred, superstition, every sort of blackness that the human mind is capable of. On the other side was sense.”

Newspapers ran humorous comments about Dayton similar to today’s ethnic jokes; the *New York Times*, though, worried that the situation was serious, and wrote of “Crank and Freaks” in a front-page headline. The *Times* portrayed the Tennesseans entering the courthouse as zombies.

The stereotypes the Scopes trial pinned on Christians 80 years ago show no signs of fading. It’s time to shake off the hurtful legacy of the Scopes trial and show the true face of evangelical Christianity to a world more desperate than ever for truth, assurance, and answers.

**Source:** Excerpt from Marvin Olasky and John Perry’s book, *Monkey Business: The True Story of the Scopes Trial*, 2005.

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### Close Reading

1. What facts do Olasky and Perry use to back their argument? What part of their argument is supported by opinion?

### Contextualizing

2. What are the connections Olasky and Perry make between 1925 and today? Do you agree with them?

### Corroborating

3. What other reasons might the press have had to paint a simple, two-sided picture of the debates? Consider the cartoon (Document H) and the Larson source (Document I).