

Test Assessing Secondary Completion

Writing

Name _____

Date _____

Osis # _____

The Worthwhile Investment in Free Public Libraries

According to the *Fiscal Year 2010 Report on Public Libraries in the United States*, public libraries are anchors in the community, serving a broad constituency with both traditional services and new ones that reflect the changing needs of populations. Free public libraries return a big bang for a small tax-dollar buck, providing services that many citizens would find cost-prohibitive if they had to pay a fee for them. Mindy Rice Withrow, writing in the blog *The Discarded Image*, gives three practical reasons public libraries should be supported by public funds.

1. Libraries fight brain drain: in many communities young people leave town for college, never to return because they find better opportunities in college towns and bigger cities. Libraries offer the opportunity for self-education, both to those who cannot afford college and to those who have made a commitment to their home communities. This helps combat brain-drain of a community and contributes to long-term survival and growth.
2. Libraries are repositories of local history: the more a community knows about its own story, the more likely people are to work together to keep it a great place to live and work and to raise the next generation. Participating in a bigger story inspires innovation, collaboration, and a desire to invest in those around you.
3. Libraries provide community services: many local libraries offer tax-filing help, provide meeting space for various support groups, teach SAT prep classes, hold cultural heritage clubs, lead CPR and babysitting classes, and more. At the library, one can learn how to look for a job, the proper way to fill out an application, and interview skills. Libraries are a hub of community activity and vitality.

Education, though, involves more than just reading books. Libraries provide access to cultural treasures in music and film, and they underscore the fact that we live in a global society by exposing people to languages and cultures they may not otherwise know exist. Eric Riley, of *Wordpress* blog, points out that public libraries are free and public for a reason. Our society believes that social mobility is gained by access to education, and barriers to access keep our population

impoverished. In a day and age when the average children's picture book costs \$12 to \$17, paying a fee for library service amounts to such a barrier.

Can We Afford "Free" Libraries?

In a period of economic recession, one way that municipal governments can lower the tax burden across the base is to charge fees for services used by specific groups, such as library services. Although about 85% of library funding comes from federal, state, and local taxes, the majority of taxpayers in a municipality do not use the public library. More frequently, the gathering of information is done at home over the Internet, and so some could argue that the public library is losing some of its relevance. That is not to say that such services should not be offered, only that government baseline funding should be offset by an operational revenue collected in fees. The model for today's nonprofit public library is well over 100 years old, but paying for these services has remained unchanged.

Calling public libraries "free" is a misnomer since they cost their communities (composed of taxpayers, tuition payers, and donors) a substantial amount of money in acquiring collections, facilities, personnel, and technology. And not to be overlooked is the fact that authors and publishers are deprived of potential income because they make less revenue from books that are borrowed than they do from books that are purchased. In order to be relevant to communities today, libraries must provide so much more than books to its patrons: they must amass large collections of newspapers, magazines, periodicals, films, music, and computer terminals and software—none of which are "free." And then, these items must be updated with each new technological advancement.

These tax dollars could be spent on projects and services that better serve the community. When governments are looking at major budget cuts to law enforcement, EMT and fire services, and cuts in public works employees, is it completely unfounded to ask users of the library to pay nominal fees when borrowing items? The collection of these monies could save valuable jobs and services in other areas of a community and allow the library to continue to operate without absorbing funds that could better serve other areas.

Essay Prompt

There is an ongoing debate in the public domain as to whether free public libraries are still practical in today's world. What are the implications for society of a "free" public library system? Has the time come for cities to consider requiring patrons to pay a fee to use library services?

Weigh the claims on both sides, and then write an argumentative essay supporting either side of the debate in which you argue for or against the free library system. Be sure to use information from both texts in your argumentative essay. **Before you begin planning and writing, read the two texts:**

1. The Worthwhile Investment in Free Public Libraries
2. Can We Afford "Free" Libraries?

As you read the texts, think about what details from the texts you might use in your argumentative essay. You may take notes or highlight the details as you read.

After reading the texts, create a plan for your argumentative essay. Think about ideas, facts, definitions, details, and other information and examples you want to use. Think about how you will introduce your topic and what the main topic will be for each paragraph.

Now write your argumentative essay. Be sure to:

- Introduce your claim.
 - Support your claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence from the passages.
-

Remember to...

- Acknowledge and address alternate or opposing claims.
- Organize the reasons and evidence logically.
- Use words, phrases, and clauses to connect your ideas and to clarify the relationships among claims, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- Establish and maintain a formal style.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.