

**Ohio Graduation Test for Reading Achievement– March 2008  
Annotated Item 29**

**Standard and Benchmark Assessed:**

Standard: Reading Applications: Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text  
Benchmark: D. Explain and analyze how an author appeals to an audience and develops an argument or viewpoint in text.

**Multiple Choice Question:**

29. The passage's argument is best described as
- A. encouraging more people to become interpreters.
  - B. supporting organizations that promote the use of sign language.
  - C. questioning the techniques used by hearing people to help people who are deaf.
  - D. praising the efforts of those who help the deaf and hard of hearing appreciate the theater.

**Commentary:**

This multiple-choice question asks students to read the passage carefully and think about the author's view on the subject of theater for the deaf. The correct answer choice is "D". Overall, the author thinks the hearing impaired should be given the same chance to enjoy the theater as hearing people. There are several comments from the author that illustrate this. In paragraph 9, the passage states that when the interpreters sign a play on Broadway it is "electric". In paragraph 22, the passage states, "It's exciting when a deaf audience comes to see a show and can laugh or cry and have the experience everybody else is,...". Answer choice "A" is incorrect. In paragraph 3, the author does state that a one –week summer course is "intended to increase the pool of qualified interpreters" but this is not actually encouraging more people to become interpreters. Although the passage talks about the interpreters and how their job helps deaf and hard of hearing people enjoy the theater, the author's argument in this passage is not to encourage more people to become interpreters. Answer choice "B" is incorrect. The passage does not state or imply that it supports organizations that promote the use of sign language. Answer choice "C" is also incorrect because the passage does not question the techniques used by hearing people to help people who are deaf but rather discusses the techniques and the work that hearing interpreters put into interpretations in a favorable way.

**Performance Data:**

The percent of public school students selecting answer choice D for question 29 on the March 2008 Ohio Graduation Test for Reading was 59%.

**Keywords:** author's argument

**Passage:**

**Interpreting the Theater Without Speaking a Word**

- 1 The Broadway musical "Fosse" usually opens with just one spotlight on a woman standing stage right singing "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries." The other night there was another spotlight stage left on a woman standing in the front row facing the audience, acting out the words with her hands and face, reaching up into the darkness, pinching at make-believe cherries and dropping them into her mouth.

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- 2 The sign language evocation was part of the 21<sup>st</sup> season of interpreted performances for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Since 1980, with the first sign-language-interpreted performance of “The Elephant Man,” the Theater Development Fund has presented hundreds of such performances of Broadway and Off-Broadway shows through its Theater Access Project. Four years ago the fund began to offer captioned performances in some theaters, with small digital screens at the front of one of the side sections of the orchestra seats.
- 3 In June, the fund held its third annual one-week summer course for interpreters from regional theaters throughout the country. The course is intended to increase the pool of qualified interpreters and to raise the standard of theater interpreting nationwide. This year’s course drew participants from 17 states, many of whom interpret Broadway shows on the road. As their final project, the students helped translate, rehearse and participate in the signing of “Jekyll and Hyde” on Broadway.
- 4 Candace Broecker Penn and Alan Champion, who handled the recent performance of “Fosse,” are among Broadway’s most experienced interpreters and often work as a team. They have handled about 15 productions together and also lead the summer institute.
- 5 Ms. Penn and Mr. Champion say their work involves much more than sign language: it is about explaining context, directing attention and conveying emotion. They try to strike a delicate balance, Ms. Penn said, telling an audience where to focus without drawing that focus to themselves.
- 6 “We’re trying to connect the deaf audience to the stage performance,” Ms. Penn said. “When they look at you, they should know exactly which actor is speaking onstage.”
- 7 “It’s a fine line,” she added, “because if it’s too showy, actors will feel it’s distracting, and a deaf audience will feel it’s distracting.”
- 8 Mr. Champion added: “It’s almost like you want the deaf people in the audience to tell you when they need you. There is plenty of stuff in a show that’s visual. You’re looking for those moments when you can invite people not to watch us.”
- 9 For audiences the interpretations can be electric. “It has opened the world of musicals for me,” said Frank L. Dattolo, a deaf actor who toured for three years with the National Theater of the Deaf and regularly attends signed performances. “I was able to identify with hearing people and to understand why people in general love musical plays. At that point I finally understood the meaning of escape, where people go see plays or musical plays to escape to a fantasy world for a few hours and then go back to reality.”
- 10 Lisa Carling, who runs the Theater Access Project, said she regularly drew from a pool of about a dozen interpreters. Communicating a Broadway show to the deaf demands not just a knowledge of sign language, Ms. Penn and Mr. Champion say, but a thorough familiarity with the production. So they spend considerable time preparing; they see a show several times in advance, noting not only the action

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onstage but its effect on the audience, too. They stand in the back of the theater during the show and rehearse together.

- 11 Ms. Penn said it was less about the words than conveying the intention. And the results are by no means formulaic; no two interpretations are the same.
- 12 “It’s like if Moliere (a famous French dramatist of the 17<sup>th</sup> century) gets translated into English,” Ms. Penn said. “Someone has to figure out what the original text was saying, and what was Moliere going for, what was he trying to evoke? If you don’t have a good translation, the show’s going to be lost and the audience won’t really be able to experience it in the way the playwright and the director meant.”
- 13 Just as a storyteller might adopt a character’s voice, so the interpreters adopt physical traits of the actors they are representing. When Ms. Penn does the hyenas in “The Lion King,” for example, “I hunch over a lot,” she said. “You don’t want to be a caricature, but you want to give the feeling.”
- 14 “A lot of information happens on your face,” she added. “Eye gaze is important. Where you’re looking directs the audience’s focus.
- 15 The interpreters say they also work off one another, trying to capture the essence of the relationships developing onstage. If one actor speaks to another in low tones, for example, an interpreter might lean slightly forward toward the other, indicating the body language of an aside.
- 16 There are interpretation challenges particular to Broadway shows: how to handle songs with repeated lines and choruses without the signs” seeming overly repetitive themselves, how to capture a moment of quiet onstage, how to indicate singing in unison.
- 17 “What is the sign language equivalent to unison?” Ms. Penn asked. “We had to practice and set our signs together.”
- 18 Mr. Champion said that several writers were consistently tough to interpret, including Neil Simon (because the jokes are not always funny in sign language), Stephen Sondheim (because of the rapidity of the lyrics) and Lanford Wilson (because of the multiple characters talking at the same time).
- 19 The interpreters always consult a deaf person in preparing for a show. “Sometimes our own hearing gets in our way,” Mr. Champion said. “We don’t know what it looks like.”
- 20 Because both her parents were deaf, Ms. Penn, born in Morganton, N.C., grew up bilingual, she said, knowing sign language as well as English. She put herself through college interpreting and then spent three-and-a-half years touring as the speaking actress for the National Theater of the Deaf. She came to New York in 1980, the year that “Children of a Lesser God,” a drama set in a school for the deaf, opened on Broadway.
- 21 “It raised everybody’s consciousness about deaf people and the possibility of inclusion into mainstream theatergoing audiences,” Ms. Penn said.

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- 22 That year the Theater Development Fund began its program, and Ms. Penn helped select interpreters. “It’s exciting when a deaf audience comes to see a show and can laugh or cry and have the experience everybody else is,” she said.
- 23 Mr. Champion, also the child of deaf parents, grew up interpreting in his hometown, Tulsa, Okla. He moved to New York in 1980 and was one of the interpreters on “Elephant Man.” He has worked on 40 shows since then.
- 24 The fund offers interpretations of about six productions a year, each of which attracts about 150 people per performance. Signed performances are scheduled for “Aida” in January and “Kiss Me, Kate” in February.