

In the summer of 2014, I taught a four-day writing workshop for my school's teachers. Everyone, myself included, had to write three documents that corresponded to what the Common Core, NY's official curriculum at the time, expected children to do: write to (1) persuade; (2) explain; (3) tell a narrative, either fiction or nonfiction. The document below is my persuasive piece.

Off With Their Heads!

I'm totally opposed to the death penalty. But if we're going to have it, let's use the guillotine. It's more efficient than current capital punishment methods. The spooky-creepy factor will probably deter more criminals than today's popular approach of "humanely" putting them to sleep. And the billowing ribbons of blood will make it clear to everybody that we are a barbaric people whom you better not mess with. It's totally American.

Let's bullet the reasons with a bit more bite:

- The guillotine kills quickly with little room for error. Brain death occurs within 2 to 3 seconds because there's no circulating blood. Hanging (still allowed in New Hampshire and the state of Washington) can take up to twenty minutes if the spinal cord fails to snap and the condemned person dies instead of asphyxiation. Execution by electric chair (which remains on the books in many Southern states) is sometimes botched, with flames shooting from the groaning inmate's head and the executioner needing to send additional jolts of electricity through the victim's body 15 or 20 minutes later. Current deaths by lethal injection have lasted more than an hour, in one case with the dying prisoner gasping and wheezing horrifically. And death by firing squad (most recently used in Utah in 2010) is indeed instantaneous, but in order to kill a single murderer you have to turn a team of five or six law enforcement officers with guns into murderers themselves. You're just multiplying the problem.

- The grotesque-Gothic-gruesome fear factor may deter potential criminals better than gently putting them to sleep. The guillotine comes packed with a violent, creepy backstory. In Hollywood movies the blade always falls with a *swish* and lands with a sickening *thunk*. Although it was first used during the French Revolution's Reign of Terror, the Nazis built about twenty guillotines and executed 16,500 victims with them between 1933 and 1945. Frankly speaking, I'm surprised that here in the United States with the current, supposedly gentle method of lethal injection, we don't simultaneously play a lullaby.
- The guillotine satisfies our blood thirst with actual blood. And it will gush out copiously, because the blade slices open arteries as well as veins. The lay and medical terms for this explosion of blood include **blood spray, blood jet, arterial spurting,** and **arterial gushing.**
- Added bonus: it's easy to harvest body parts. Eyeballs, hearts, kidneys – they can all be used right away, unlike what happens with other execution methods. In fact, in 1996, Georgia State Representative Doug Teper, a Democrat, sponsored a bill to replace the state's electric chair with a guillotine for this very reason.

We are one of the world's top five countries that executes criminals. (The other four are our humane, enlightened friends China, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.) So let's make a show of it. Let's broadcast the event on YouTube. Let's watch the blood leap out like banners and splash with a *splat* on the floorboards. Let's visually liken our state-condoned murder to the red stripes on the American flag. Let's kill, kill, kill.

– Bruce Ballard, August, 2014