

Article of the Week (AoW) Directions

1. Mark your confusion – either highlighting or underlining.
2. Mark up the text. Annotate the article with comments, questions, inferences, etc. You can use a variety of sentences, phrases, and symbols to show your thinking.
3. Write a developed paragraph response to one of the prompts below.

Mike Rowe Brings Back the Blue Collar Hero

Mike Rowe's new CNN show pays tribute to working class heroes and their jobs.

Source: Mike Rubin/Men's Journal/November 2014

Over the course of hosting *Dirty Jobs* for eight years on the Discovery Channel, Mike Rowe explored the filthy side of more than 300 gigs — from sewer inspector to guano collector to sheep castrator. Since the show ended in 2012, he's turned his attention to his foundation, which challenges "the absurd belief that a four-year degree is the only path to success." The fund has helped give \$2.5 million in scholarships for training in the skilled trades. While Rowe is just as well-known for being the guy in the baseball hat in Ford commercials, his commitment to creating opportunities for American workers is beyond dispute. "I'm talking about these things as a guy who depends on them," he says. "Halfway through *Dirty Jobs*, I realized, 'You know what? When we flip a switch and the light comes on, we're not suitably gobsmacked.'"

His new show on CNN, *Somebody's Gotta Do It*, takes an even wider look at how Americans earn a living, whether it is as a stagehand, an inventor, or a defender of whooping cranes. "I wanted to do a show about real people in small places doing odd shit that you would never otherwise know about," says Rowe. "It's a pretty broad look at humanity."

Tell me about the new show, *Somebody's Gotta Do It*.

It's TV, so visually we've got to find something that people will look at and go, "Oh, that's kind of interesting," so we're still going to places where there's heights, there's depths, there's tight places and there's occasionally dirt, but the biggest difference in the shows is that *Somebody's Gotta Do It* is really focused on anybody who's waking up kind of afflicted because the world's not the way they want it. So it can be a stagehand or the owner of a hair museum or a bloody do-gooder or an inventor, it doesn't really matter: It's a pretty broad look at humanity.

Where are most of the ideas drawn from for the new show?

Somebody writes on Facebook and says "Jesus, Mike, you're not going to believe it. There's a woman in Independence, Missouri, who runs a hair museum." At which point I say, "What the hell is a hair museum?" And they say, "Well once upon a time, 100 years ago, most families remembered their ancestors through hair-jewelry and art made out of their hair." And I say, "You've got to be [kidding] me," but of course they're not. Anybody with a dirty job knows somebody with a dirtier job. It's kind of the same thing here: Most people know somebody who has to do it.

How did the inspiration for mikeroweWORKS, your foundation, come about?

In 2008, not long after the economy completely tanked, I got a phone call from a guy at *The Wall Street Journal*. It was one of the weirder calls of my career. The employment numbers had just come out, and for whatever reason, this guy wanted my opinion. What I basically told the reporter was that we are promoting one form of education at the expense of all the others. Higher education is

good, alternative education sounds subordinate, and we're affirmatively disparaging most of the jobs that I portray here. And the result is the problem. The skills gap isn't the problem, the crumbling infrastructure isn't the problem, off-sourcing and outsourcing manufacturing, those aren't problems, those are symptoms of a larger relationship with work that's disconnected.

Everywhere I went I would always talk to the rancher or the plumber or the employer, whoever's in charge of these dirty jobs, and we'd sit down over beer and solve the problems of the world and the thing I heard most consistently from these people, even at the height of the recession, was how hard it was to find employees who were willing to learn a new skill, a skill that's actually in demand and show up early and stay late. Why is there a shortage of welders when 12 million people are out of work and a good one right now in North Dakota can make \$120,000 a year? So I launched mikeroweWORKS, and it was kind of a PR campaign to close the skill gap by shining a light on good jobs that people didn't want. And that led to a scholarship fund and so far we've given away somewhere between 3 and 4 million dollars of work-ethic scholarships to people who want to basically get trained for these types of jobs.

Have you found that the foundation has made in-roads in terms of getting more people to come to skilled trades?

Well it's beyond my pay grade and ability to close the skills gap. Right now you've got 4 million jobs that are still available. Look, it's controversial because it gets political and when you talk about 8 million people looking for work and 4 million available jobs that nobody wants, it immediately becomes a polemic. My friends on the right will say, well look the problem is all those people are lazy, and my friends on the left will say, those greedy business owners aren't paying enough, and so the whole conversation just gets politicized and it never gets fixed. I decided that mikeroweWORKS (originally spelled "micro" because I was trying to make it about small acts, individual things) — it's one person at a time.

So we've awarded I think 195 work-ethic scholarships. Those people would say, yeah the skills gap closed in my life. Some of them are working in the Gulf now, many of them are up in North Dakota. So I'm proud of what we've been able to do with individuals. I'm not a political person and I get overwhelmed and lost when I look at big giant numbers and big giant national problems. I know they're there and I do a lot of work with organizations that are big, big advocacy campaigns but I don't like to get too close to them because in the end, I don't feel connected to the result. I feel connected when somebody takes money from this foundation, gets trained, retrained for a new job and gets in the work.

You mentioned that this is inspired by the drive towards four year colleges being the only sort of acceptable route towards employment but I saw a story saying that folks with college degrees make 98 percent more an hour on average than people without a degree. So are you finding that's a problem in terms of what you're trying to do?

Here's the numbers nobody argues with: \$1.1 trillion dollars in student loans, currently outstanding, 3.5 million jobs currently available and 6 point whatever million people currently out of work. Those are the three things I try and look at. I hate to generalize but I personally feel comfortable in looking at those numbers and saying, I conclude, Mike Rowe concludes that we're lending money we don't have to kids who can't pay it back to educate them for jobs that no longer exist. And that's why I know two or three people with kids who graduated Georgetown with law degrees who are living back home. So in our efforts to give the most people the best shot at the best thing, we formed a

really big rut in the road, a really big groove, and a lot of people fall into that groove who shouldn't be there and that's kind of why it happens.

In all your work, what's the job that you come across that you have the most respect for?

Well, it's tough to beat a plumber. It's really tough to beat a great entrepreneurial plumber who has three or four employees and dedicates his life to cleaning up your [mess]. It's tough to beat a bridge builder. But you know what, when I think about jobs in general, I don't remember who asked me this originally, but if you walk them all back, they're really only two industries in the world. The first is agriculture and the second is mining. In fact, they're probably in the opposite order. That's it. If you look around right now, every single thing you see has either been pulled from the ground or grown from the ground. The plumber, electrician, those are good answers because everybody has a toilet and nobody wants to sit in the dark, but if you really want to talk about it in terms of polite society and civilization as we know it, there are two jobs that matter. Farmers and miners. Take them out of the mix, the party's over.

What in your estimation is the most useless job in America?

The big lesson from *Dirty Jobs* is that there's no such thing as a useless job. When I see people whistling while they work and the job is picking up road kill, you've gotta laugh. You just have to say, God, these guys have figure out a way to have a good time while picking up road kill, which by the way, I didn't know this, but if the people who pick up road kill all called in sick for two weeks anytime between the months of August and March, there would be a transcontinental highway gridlock. The amount of dead animals pulled off the road through about 25 or 30 states in the middle is breathtaking.

Respond to one of the following prompts. Use the space below or a separate sheet of paper.

1. What are your thoughts on Rowe's assertion that there are other ways to success than a four year college degree? Explain.
2. Discuss your plans for after high school. What type of education are you planning to persue? What types of job do you want to have. Explain with details and examples.
3. Select a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph and respond to it.