Student Sample

This student’s citation style is occasionally weak—I edited one example—but that is a minor offense. Wearing pants too low is much worse.

What I really like is that this student followed the guidelines and the samples and came up with a creative, interesting, and carefully written work.

Her in-depth research, combined with her deep personal connection, is the combination that we look for in a documentary proposal.

This was a first draft. I have edited it to show the kind of simplicity, directness and logical order that is the hallmark of a carefully rewritten final draft.

She could actually produce this documentary, with a grant from the Rosen Fellowship. Here’s the link:

<https://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/about/offices/scholarships/rosen.php>

TV Writing Documentary Assignment

February 29, 2020

Saggy Pants: Taking Over Our Streets

**One-Liner:** The sagging pants phenomenon has become a popular, controversial and misunderstood fashion fad.

**Synopsis:** In any community, you can find men of all ages wearing their pants so low that their boxers are exposed. This documentary will touch on how, where, and when this trend started. Each segment will focus either on its origins or how people view this phenomenon . This story is important to me because I’d like to make sure that my 7 year-old son, who is beginning to dress himself, does not adopt this style as he grows older.

**The Big Idea:**  I would like my negative arguments about sagging pants to reach parents or guardians who are raising young men today, but I want to expand this documentary’s human interest potential to all who wonder where fashion trends come from, and what those trends mean to the people who observe them.

**Segment 1: A Jail Invitation**

This segment will present the theory that the sagging pants fad originated within the United States prison system. Many who are incarcerated are provided with clothing that is too large. I was able to speak briefly with a man who is recently on parole after spending two years in prison, who told me, “If you don’t have someone putting money in your commissary, you’re given whatever they have available for you to wear.” Also, belts are not permitted in correctional facilities because they can be used as a way for inmates to commit suicide, so this also led to many pants falling below the waist. This segment will then explore the rumor that sagging pants were either an invitation to homosexuality or a sign of ownership among inmates. According to this rumor, a prisoner would hold claim over another inmate by having them sag their pants down low for easier access. [Again, you need to footnote this, even if your source wants to remain anonymous.]

**Segment 2: Breaking the Buck**

This segment will look back to the era of slavery, where sagging pants is known to have a brutal history. During that time, there was a trend known as “breaking the buck.” This was a way for masters to punish slaves who disobeyed them, and were therefore called renegades. In front of other slaves, the renegade would be beaten and forced to stand on top of a tree stump naked. The slave was then sodomized by the master and his guests. After that, the slave would be forced to wear his trousers sagging to show that he was broken. [Again, citation needed.]

**Segment 3: The Zoot Suit**

This segment will go back to the 1930s when Black and Mexican American men in California were wearing zoot suits, oversized suit jackets and pants tapered down to their ankles. The fashion historian Tom Ford believes that since kids couldn’t afford tailors, the baggy look was born out of improvisation. [Citation needed. When you tell us someone said something, give us a footnote that links the quotation with the item in the bibliography.] Luis Alvarez, historian at University of California, San Diego said that this look was spread by black jazz musicians as they traveled around the country. During that time, the zoot suit style of dress was seen as the wardrobe of black and Mexican American delinquents and gang members. Young men were stripped of their clothes and badly beaten as policemen searched the streets for zoot-suited young men they blamed for petty crimes. [So you’re comparing the zoot suit fad to the saggy pants fad? As what? A signifier of gang or group membership? If that’s what you’re saying, spell it out. Also, Zoot suits were actually outlawed in parts of the U.S. You could use that factoid as a transition to your next segment.]

**Segment 4: Criminalized Fashion**

This segment will focus on the different attempts to ban saggy pants as a fashion statement. Unbeknownst to many, in 2005, the Virginia House of Delegates passed the droopy drawers bill. This would have imposed a $50 fine on people who wore their pants so that their underwear was visible in an indecent manner. Two days later, the Virginia senate killed that bill. In Louisiana, lawmakers passed House Bill1626, a law that would have made it a crime to publicly wear clothing that “intentionally exposes undergarments or intentionally exposes any portion of the pubic hair, cleft of the buttocks or genitals.” [citation needed.] The state’s senate also rejected this bill. There were other attempts to eliminate the wearing of sagging pants, but nothing seemed to stick long enough to prevent many people from continuing the style. When Los Angeles police officer Victor Vinson spoke to parents about the rise of street gangs in their neighborhood, he expressed to them that the biggest indicator that a person was part of a gang was sagging pants. “Kids today are dressing for death,” he said. [Citation needed.]

**Segment 5: A Hip-Hop Imitation**

Many young people like to follow the fashion trends they see in hip-hop culture and music videos. In the 1980s and 90s, artists such as Ice-T and Too Short were known to have glorified sagging pants in their style of dressing. Shortly after, American hip hop duo Kriss Kross picked it up and brought the style to a whole new level. However, it is said that the majority of today's hip hop artists no longer sag, which is why this fashion statement might be going out of style. Fashion writer Smith Strickland believes that “baggy streetwear no longer fits the aesthetics of the contemporary hip hop world, where rappers now team up with high end fashion brands.” Some also believe the change started in 2005 when NBA Commissioner David Stern instituted a mandatory dress code for players. This dress code required the players to wear suits. Men not only follow their favorite musicians but their favorite sports players as well.

**Segment 6: Role Model**

This segment mainly focuses on the countless arguments I have had with Terrance, my son’s father, to pull up his pants. My target audience was parents raising young men and for them to lead by example. I stress this fact because Terrance refuses to raise his pants above his behind and my son Jeremiah takes notice of this. As of now, Jeremiah likes to make fun of his father every time he can see his underwear. My fear is that as Jeremiah gets older and sees more young men, possibly his friends, sagging their pants, he might think it’s cool and something he should do as well. This is why as a parent I keep trying to instill in him that nobody should be seeing his underwear while he walks the streets. Throughout our many discussions on the issue, Terrance gave multiple reasons as to why he sags his pants. Some of these I understand but still do not completely agree with.

**Bibliography**

Demby, Gene. “Sagging Pants and The Long History of Dangerous Street Fashion”

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/09/11/347143588/sagging-pants-and-the-long-history-of-dangerous-street-fashion>

Snopes Staff. “Sagging Pants”

<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/sagging-pants/>

Blake, John. “The Fall of the Sagging Pants Era is Upon Us”

<https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/20/us/sagging-pants-era-over/index.html>

Ochieng, Victor. “Sagging Pants- Its Origin is Worse Than You Think”

<http://yourblackworld.net/2018/03/01/sagging-pants-origin-worse-think/>

This is minimal research, but the articles are well-chosen so it works.

Script

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| Segment 6: Role Model |
| VIDEO | AUDIO |
| Terrance, Nicole and Jeremiah are walking to the car.Jeremiah whispers in Nicole’s ear. Cut to:Driving in the carNicole looks back to see Jeremiah sleeping in his car seat.Nicole turns down the car radio. Terrance turns the radio back up.Nicole takes a deep breath and turns the radio back down.Silence in the carClose up of Terrance’s faceHe smiles.Nicole turns up the radio and looks out the window.Close up on Jeremiah sleepingScreen fades to black | Jeremiah: Look mommy, I can see daddy’s underwear.Nicole (VO): Ugh, I don’t know how many times I have to tell this man about his pants.Nicole: Terrance, can you pull up your pants please?Terrance: Can you just stop watching me and pay attention to something else?Nicole: Your son noticed and said something to me. That doesn’t concern you?Nicole (VO): If you don’t ask, it will bug you for the rest of the day. And now is a better time than any since Jeremiah is asleep, just in case this turns into an argument. Nicole: Must you wear your pants like that in front of Jeremiah? He might think it’s okay and want to follow you.Terrance: We’re talking about this again? He can choose how he wants to dress when he’s ready.Nicole: This is true but he might be inclined to follow you. Nicole (VO): This conversation won’t get anywhere if this continues as an argument.Nicole: In all seriousness, I don’t want to argue. Just talk. At least tell me why you wear your pants like that.Terrance: It’s just how I wear them. It’s more comfortable like this. I have more space. Pants nowadays are not cut the way they used to be. They fit tighter and snug.Nicole (VO): Yeah, I guess that makes sense. But hold up…Why not just buy your pants in a bigger size?Terrance: Because my butt is big and it would just look stupid.Terrance: Besides, that is not the only thing that’s big on me and I need space for that as well.Nicole (VO): That’s what I get for asking. Nicole: Just don’t do it in front of Jeremiah please. It is better to lead by example. Nicole (VO): This conversation went nowhere. |

I’m not crazy about re-enactments. I like more straightforward approaches. This one works pretty well, although the camera directions were over-written. You don’t have to direct facial expressions, for example.