

To Buckle Up or Not?

Why are school buses not required to install seat belts for children?

1 **The Issue** In America, all car passengers must wear seat belts, and all
2 cars come with them installed. Yet, although 23 million children ride
3 school buses every weekday, the great majority of the buses transporting
4 them do not have seat belts. They aren't legally required to. Indeed,
5 those in favor of changing the law to make seat belts compulsory face a
6 tough sell. Why is this so?

7 It's not just because kids squirm too much and wouldn't use them
8 correctly. It comes down to two things: design and cost.

9 **Design** Our nation's large, yellow school buses have been designed to
10 be remarkably safe, the safest form of ground transportation we have.
11 For one thing, they are really heavy. In addition, the kids sit high
12 up, above where most collisions take place. Furthermore, all bus
13 seats have high, heavily cushioned backs. Their four inches of
14 thick foam padding absorb impact; they act like air bags. So, in
15 their tightly packed seats, kids are, in effect, sitting in protective
16 bubbles. It should surprise no one that according to statistics
17 compiled by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration,
18 riding on a large school bus is 40 times safer than riding in a car.

Forty
times
safer!

19 **Cost** Design issues aside, cost issues must be
20 considered, as well. Installing seat belts is very
21 expensive. Doing so would add thousands to the
22 cost of producing each bus, *with minimal, if any,*
23 *impact on safety.* Plus, putting in seat belts would
24 take up space and cause manufacturers to take
25 out seats. With fewer seats in a bus, more buses
26 would be needed.

More
buses =
more
money!

27 **Conclusion** Frankly, although the bus driver should (and does)
28 use one, kids riding a school bus have no need for seat belts. The risk
29 they take in riding them is nowhere near the risk they take each time
30 they approach or leave one. So I agree with what many organizations
31 dedicated to school transportation safety say. I oppose making it
32 mandatory that all school buses be equipped with seat belts.

To Buckle Up or Not?

▶ Answer each question. Give evidence from the essay.

1 Which is *not* a reason the writer gives for why school buses are so safe?

- A. The buses weigh a great deal. C. The seat backs are heavily padded.
 B. The seats are high above the road. D. The buses move slowly and stop often.

What evidence in the text helped you answer? _____

2 Which other word in this essay is a synonym for *mandatory* (line 32)?

- A. compulsory B. expensive C. majority D. protective

What evidence in the text helped you answer? _____

3 According to the writer, how does the safety of riding in a school bus compare with the safety of riding in a car?

4 What techniques does the writer use to emphasize key points? _____

5 List three examples of facts and three examples of opinions in this essay. _____

Informational Text: Persuasive Essay

► **Focus** Students must sort fact from opinion as they read and analyze a well-constructed persuasive essay on a controversial topic.

► **Teaching Tips**

Before Reading

- Review the features of a well-constructed persuasive essay, such as an engaging opening, point-by-point arguments supported with details, acknowledgement of opposing views, and a strong closing that summarizes the writer’s position.

During Reading

- Have students pause after reading each paragraph to identify its main idea and specific purpose in the overall argument presented. Encourage them to jot down key words or questions they have in the margins.

After Reading

- With students, generate a Fact versus Opinion chart, based on the examples they listed to answer question 5. Encourage debate and discussion.

Common Core Connections

RI.5.1, RI.5.2, RI.5.3, RI.5.4, RI.5.8, RI.5.10
 • RF.5.3, RF.5.4 • W.5.9, W.5.10 • L.5.1, L.5.2, L.5.3, L.5.4, L.5.5, L.5.6

Complexity Index

Quantitative:

Lexile 950

Qualitative	1	2	3	4	5
Purpose			*		
Structure			*		
Language			*		
Knowledge			*		

Reader & Task

- Students may be aware of this issue, but are unlikely to be familiar with the presentation of a logically organized argument.
- Have students evaluate the logic and effectiveness of the arguments presented, and whether they support the writer’s conclusion.

Answers

Passage 17: To Buckle Up or Not?

1. D; Sample answer: I chose D because it is the only choice that does not appear in the piece (lines 11–14).
 2. A; Sample answer: I wasn’t sure what *compulsory* meant when I first read it, but after I finished the piece and looked back over it, I figured it out. It means the same as *mandatory* (lines 4–6, 31–32).
 3. Sample answer: The writer gives information from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that says that it’s 40 times safer to ride in a school bus than in a car (lines 16–18).
 4. Sample answer: The writer puts some words in italics, uses bold-faced words to begin most paragraphs, and calls out short summaries along the side to reinforce ideas (lines 1, 9, 19, 22–23, 27, graphics).
 5. Sample answer: Three facts: 23 million children ride school buses every weekday (lines 2–3); seats have 4 inches of foam padding (lines 13–14); putting in seat belts takes up space (lines 23–25). Three opinions: Making seat belts compulsory is a tough sell (lines 5–6); cost issues must be considered (lines 19–20); adding seat belts would have minimal, if any, impact on safety (lines 21–23).