Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. **Mark up the text with questions and comments.**
3. Write a **one-page reflection** on your own sheet of paper.

**Snark, Sarcasm, and Ill Will: Why We’ve Stopped Being Civil**

Boston Public Radio – Will Roseliep 12/9/14

Sixty-five percent of Americans polled in a new study said incivility has reached a ["crisis level"](http://www.webershandwick.com/news/article/civility-in-america-2014-forecast-bleak-but-with-hope-for-millennials) in 2014. Not only that, the younger the respondent's age, the more likely he or she was to anticipate an incivility in the next 24 hours.

What happened to the days when we were all so civil? What does it mean to be civil?

When we asked Harvard Business School historian [Nancy Koehn](http://nancykoehn.com/#/) about our civility deficit and to get to the bottom of what civility is, Koehn returned to one of her favorite observers of social mores: Jane Austen.

"In Austen --particularly in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*--the idea of civility is not just about good manners, it’s also about how  prepared we are  to comport ourselves with the responsibilities  that go with interacting with other people in a democratic society, a civic, a market society."

Koehn went on to contrast Jane Austen's understanding of civility to our contemporary one. "Civility has come to mean good manners. My own sense of public life is that we continue to snowball down this steep slope of rudeness and road rage and all the vitriol that one sees and one hears." Koehn said the internet has degraded some of our civility. "I think the internet enables it. Email does the same thing. It emboldens us."

Koehn said civility — in her view — has gotten increasingly worse. "I don't think the centrifugal forces of our moment want to push us to rudeness," Koehn added. "I think we have lost the grounding on how to do this at some level." She said little joys like an offer of a free espresso shot from our barista remind us why civility matters.

A dramatic example of the opposite tack happened during President Obama's 2009 State of the Union address. As the President outlined his ambitions for immigration reform, Congressman Joe Wilson interrupted him.

Koehn said that moment between Wilson and Obama was more our incivility generally, than about rude lawmakers in particular. "Do we know how to interact with people — in a productive way — that offers our respect for each other? That's important whether we're talking about Congress trying to do something," or driving on the highway, Koehn said.

*Boston Public Radio* co-host Jim Braude called it a [Pogo-esque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pogo_%28comic_strip%29#.22We_have_met_the_enemy_and_he_is_us..22) problem. "I think we like the way things are," Braude said. "Why are they giving us horrible television? Because we're watching horrible television."

Koehn said the choice to be civil had to be a conscious one.  "Lots of people we look to as figures of authority don't know how to do this too well."

Koehn quoted British mountaineer Edmund Hillary who said, "It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves." She said the drive to be civil has to be self-initiated. Koehn also said our tendency towards a hermetic life — alone watching Netflix, buried in our phones, off in the corner of a party — harms our ability to be better people. "There is a strange way in which we do retreat into our default, into our 'splendid isolation.'"

Koehn pointed to Oprah Winfrey as a model of civility. "She represents something that women — full stop — respect. (...) Oprah is who she says she is. A lot of that is about respect, regardless of zip code, regardless of which fork you use."

And if you can't garner Oprah-level respect? Maybe our collective incivility will course-correct. "Sometimes societies go off their rails, and then come back," Koehn said.

**Reflection Prompt:**

**Do you think we are as civil as we ought to be today? Why/why not?**

**Do you agree with Koehn that we are on a downhill slide when it comes to civility? In what ways might the internet be responsible for this? Is it problematic when our leaders are increasingly uncivil toward one another? What do you think of Braude’s argument that this is only a problem because we don’t insist on change? What about Koehn’s final comments about our individual responsibility with this issue?**

**How civil is Papillion South? What can we do to improve?**