Global Communities Final Essay

**As someone living in the US, what is one of the most important questions about our culture (about what it means to be an American) that resonates with you personally, and that America must face in the Twenty-first Century?**

Process:

1. Start by looking at the list of questions and topics that we brainstormed as a class. **Pick the question that you care about most** and what your personal position is on this issue.
2. **Write a one-page journal** entry on an experience that led you to define the question as you do.
3. Consider the books we’ve read this year and decide where they stand on this issue.  In what way do they **agree** with your point of view and in what way do they **differ**?
4. **Select the one (CP), two (ACP) or three (Hons) texts** that you can best **agree and/or disagree** with and incorporate them into your essay.  What positions does this book take on your question?
   1. *Song of Solomon*
   2. *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*
   3. *The Great Gatsby*
   4. *American Born Chinese*
   5. *The Things They Carry*
   6. *Passing*
   7. *Into the Wild*
   8. Quarter 4 Reading (honors) or any outside reading from this year
   9. HONORS: should include your outside reading—*Americanah, Angle of Repose, The Brief and Wonderous Life of Oscar Wao. Mama Day, Their Eyes Were Watching God* or *The Poisonwood Bible*
5. **Select another source** (or two) -- a song, a movie, a historical document, a book from outside class that also fits with or disproves your argument.  The text you select should help you build a more nuanced argument.  Texts that disagree subtly are better than those that obviously clash.

Your paper should be 3-4 pages (CP), 5-6 (ACP), 7-8 (Hons) in MLA format.

THERE WILL BE NO REWRITES ON THIS PAPER, so please get the help you need ahead of the due date.

Some tips…

* Write about Newton or Boston. Or at least something you actually experienced. Many of you probably know almost nothing about conservative Republicans. Don’t write about them.
* Write about “us” and “we” and not “they.” Talking about how “Americans are so materialistic; they need to rethink their values” makes you sound like you’re not an American—and it also sounds a wee bit condescending.
* Get the facts right. Go back and reread that scene you are talking about.
* Acknowledge and give space to the opposing argument.
* Avoid a thesis that is vague or that is not at all about culture
  + “Global warming is a real problem” (not about culture)
  + “Happiness takes many different forms in America” (vague)

**Some model questions: (but this works better if you have a question *you* care about)**

* **Are we really a nation that values equality for all, or do we think that people can earn more rights?**
* **What’s more essential to value, the individual or the community?**
* **Is money really the only way we value success in America?**
* **The constitution says human rights are “inalienable,” but do all Americans actually have the right to pursue happiness? What is happiness in America?**

**The 4 Essential Questions for Junior English at NSHS**

How have we as Americans navigated the tension between individual rights and the needs of society? Which has been more important in creating America?

What are some quintessential American life stories? What does this tell you about the changing or conflicted definition of what it means to be “American”?

What is the American dream? Who has access to it and why? What do the books you read have to say about this?

What is one essential characteristics or values that defines being American?

\*(How does it work here, now, in Newton?)

**OUTLINE SAMPLE: (How Ms. Leslie & I approached this essay)**

Americans love the idea of “picking yourself up by your bootstraps.” A little struggle is a good thing. But when we look at parents, this value gets a little muddy. What makes a good parent—letting your kid struggle or making sure your kid succeeds? More succinctly, should parents let kids fail?

* Personal reflection on a parenting moment.

Paragraph 1: Parents worry that if they let kids fail, they are being bad parents because they are ignoring their kids and not taking care of them.

* No one wants to ignore kids like Tom & Daisy
* But Alicia Florrick doesn’t ignore her kids--except when she feels she needs to focus on her job
  + Alicia’s “talk” with Zack about how to handle the press if they ask about his girlfriend’s abortion.  At a crucial moment she puts her own career before the wellbeing of her kids, and so fails by accident.  What she conveys to him is that she doesn’t love him.

Paragraph 2: On the other hand, Macon and Ruth fail as parents—and their kid nearly fails--because they never really think about Milkman as a person having needs of his own; they only think of him as he relates to them.

* Ruth uses him as “consolation” for the love, both emotional and sexual, that she does not get from Macon.
* Macon uses him to fulfill his own ambitions, which in turn come about because of his loss of his own father.

Paragraph 3:  Seeing kids who are ignored and then fail can lead to overprotective helicopter parents who, although they love their kids (they pay attention and have good intentions), send the message that they do not believe in their kid’s ability to succeed on their own.

* Outside source - an article?
* Story from school

Paragraph 4:  But it is possible to let kids fail the “right” way, as Junior’s parents do for him: they show that they both love and trust him.

* They struggle with alcohol and money (they have no choice but to shoot the dog), but they work to put Junior first (money on his birthday)
* Unlike Macon and Ruth, they don’t hold him too close, letting him go to Reardan, even though they know what a huge risk it is for him.

Paragraph 5:  Sonny’s Blues presents both failure through helicopter parenting, and a model of how to allow children exploration through failure, despite the risks.

* The mother explains to the narrator what he needs to know in order to “parent” Sonny, but
* The narrator misunderstands, and thinks that he has to prevent Sonny from living in order to prevent him from dying

Conclusion:  The most important things we can do for our children are to let them know that we love them, no matter what, and that we show them that we have confidence in their ability to become independent adults. If they know that, and we are there when they need us, we can step back and let them struggle and even fail.

Essay Rubric

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Exceeds | Meets | Approaches | JB |
| Intro | Compelling title and a hook (plus appr.) | Attempts a compelling title and a hook (plus appr.) | Has author, title, a thesis |  |
| Thesis | Clear, focused & insightful—most readers would not notice this | Clear and focused | Not quite clear OR not quite focused enough |  |
| Body paragraphs | Clear and focused topic sentences; concluding sentences that pull the paragraph together; deliberate organization | Clear and focused topic sentences; concluding sentences that pull the paragraph together; effective organization | Mostly clear topic sentences; many concluding sentences; somewhat effective organization |  |
| Evidence | Specific and on point; high quality choices; a wide variety of “sources”; integrated smoothly; persuasively explained | Specific and on point; some high quality choices; some variety of “sources”; integrated effectively; explained | Mostly on point; some variety of “sources”; usually integrated effectively; explained |  |
| Conclusion | Pulls the paper together and answers the so what question powerfully; provokes thought in the reader | Pulls the paper together and attempts to address the so what question | Pulls the paper together: restates thesis and key evidence |  |
| Language | Clear, correct, varied, deliberate use of sentences for rhetorical effect; virtually no mechanical errors | Almost all clear, correct, & varied; a few mechanical errors | Largely clear and correct; somewhat varied; occasional mechanical errors |  |

Initial proposal for the paper: (10 points)

Write the question you want to answer.

(You may take one from the assignment sheet, adapt on in some way, or make up your own.)

List three texts you might use & write 1-2 sentences explaining what specific part of the text fits your question.