

Seeds

An Anthology
of Auspicious Beginnings

Volume 1

2022-2023

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This issue of *Seeds* is dedicated to the memory of

Julie Cline

and

Joshua Fenton

They loved the power of stories.

Welcome to the Newest *Seeds: An Anthology of Auspicious Beginnings*

We on the editorial staff wish to thank everyone who contributed such a cornucopia of student essays for us to read. The selection process was difficult; in the end, we tried to choose those essays that showed themselves to be not only outstanding for the course level but that also struck each of us on a deeper level, either through language or the addressing of personal and social issues.

In terms of editing, the essays appear the way they were submitted with a minor caveat. Inconsistencies in both the text and the citations were addressed as much as possible. For example, if a student italicized a book title in the text but omitted that formatting in the Works Cited page, we amended it. Obvious typos were also corrected. Otherwise, what you read here comes from the writers themselves.

We also asked instructors to submit the prompts for each submission in the spirit of sharing our approaches to inspiring students to do their best work. Some prompts are long and detailed, some are short and concise. But they all have proven to encourage students to explore their experiences and thoughts about the world around them, in details sometimes painful but often ecstatic.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

In closing, we'd like to add that this issue is dedicated to two of our colleagues, Julie Cline and Joshua Fenton.

Julie was a contributing editor, and we will miss her keen eye and compassionate evaluation of the submissions. Julie's comments as we sifted through the pile helped guide us so much in choosing the final essays.

Joshua was a contributing lecturer, and “Essay 2” from his Basic Writing 3 student, Wenqin Ye, exemplifies Joshua’s incredible talent for teaching his students as they worked to grasp the fundamentals of writing

Julie and Joshua, your absence has left holes in not only the program but also our lives.

Kathleen Gurnett

Jennie Friedrich

Paige Goodwin

David Hinckley

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The background is a watercolor illustration of a field. It features several large yellow flowers with blue outlines, green grass, and a small blue butterfly in the upper left corner. The overall style is soft and artistic.

“Essay 2”

Wenqin Ye

Seeds

Instructor: Joshua Fenton

Please write a 2 (or more) page essay that responds to the following questions:

Why does Lovenheim want to have “sleepovers” and to “write about” his neighbors “from inside their own homes”? What other single main strategy or behavior would you suggest to achieve this goal? Be sure to support your argument with concrete and specific examples.

A successful essay should:

- Be at least 2 or more pages
- Directly address all of the prompt questions with a directed summary response, a thesis, and evidence
- Develop thoughtful and vivid illustrative examples as evidence that explicitly support the writer’s thesis
- Utilize a logical organization
- Be edited to show mastery of grammar and usage
- Follow MLA paper format

According to Peter Lovenheim in the article “In the Neighborhood,” there is a wall separating us from our neighbors. Lovenheim wants to host sleepovers and write about them to rebuild society and eventually get to know more about them. Getting to know people in a fresh environment may be difficult, especially if we are relocating to an unfamiliar location or starting a new job or school. But with the appropriate approach and a little effort, we may broaden our social circle in a new environment and create meaningful, long-lasting relationships. In my point of view, we can take advantage of joining school clubs to make new friends because it provides the potential for long-term friendship.

Joining clubs can help form long-term friendships because we can find people who share the same interests as us in clubs. This provides a natural starting point for conversations and can help us form connections with others. I have always had a passion for music and singing. However, I remembered when I first started high school, I stumbled upon a flier that was newly stuck on the school wall. As I took a closer look, I realized that it was for the school music club which was looking for new members. I quickly took a picture of the flier and decided to join. The first club meeting came soon after, and I was surprised to find all students just as passionate about music as I was. Through their speeches, I realized how they bonded over their love for different genres of music, and soon all of us became good friends. One day, the music club was tasked with putting on a school-wide concert. We were all assigned to different musical groups and I found myself paired with a girl named Mia. Despite our initial nervousness, we hit it off immediately and it was not long before I found out that she was a talented singer. “How about we sing ‘How far I’ll go’ from Moana?” I said to Mia. Surprisingly, it turned out that she had already been familiar with this song. “This is one of my favorite movie songs!” Mia said with excitement. The practicing process was unexpectedly easy because we found that our voices blended well. After practicing for weeks, the day of the concert finally arrived. Mia started the performance with a solo, her voice soaring as she sings the first verse of the song. Her voice was clear and powerful, and the audience was soon captivated by her performance which was full of emotion. After that, I joined in the performance to complement her voice. Weeks of practice

finally add to the richness and soulfulness of my tone. Our voices lifted higher and higher with each verse. The audience was so moved by their performance that I could see many were brought to tears by the beauty of the song. After this successful performance, I still kept in touch with Mia even after we already graduated. From time to time, she would send me the songs that she wrote. Our friendship lasted beyond the time in high school. Looking back on my experience in the music club, I was grateful for the friends that I made through it. Common interest of singing served as a natural icebreaker, making it easier for me to start a conversation and get to know someone new.

Besides that, joining clubs can help form long-term friendships also because it can provide us with a sense of community. Joining a club can also give us a sense of belonging, which can help us feel connected to others and reduce feelings of isolation. I could still recall that after covid-19 lockdown ended, I could finally go back to normal school life. However, after one year of lockdown, every one of my classmates felt isolated and disconnected from each other. One day, the school announced that to help some of the families in the community who lost their jobs during covid-19, they would be organizing a service club that would collect food and donate it at a local church to people in need every Saturday. Without hesitation, I decided to join the club. After I went home that day, I collected all the food and snacks that weren't usually eaten by my family and put them into a box. Saturday finally came, and to my surprise, there were a lot more school volunteers who arrived earlier than the expected time. "Thank you for coming! My name is Selena." A girl greeted me with a warm smile. After introducing ourselves to each other, I got to know that she had been participating in community volunteering work since the beginning of high school. "You will definitely have fun helping other people in the community!" Selena tapped on my shoulder and said. We helped each other put boxes and boxes of packed food such as bread, frozen meat, fruits, and beverages that the volunteers brought from their families. Posting announcements on district news went into effect, and it did not take long for us to see more and more people driving here to get food. For every car passed by, we would grab several packages of food into the back trunk of people's cars that they already lifted open before it was their turn. Almost every car would roll its windows down and people would show their thankfulness with big smiles. Even though it was my first time helping out in the school club volunteering, I could already feel like I was making the district a better place. Participating in the volunteer club helped me get through the loneliness at the beginning of returning to

school. By surrounding myself with all the volunteers in the school service club together who were showing their effort towards the same goal of helping others, I got a strong sense of community and belonging.

In conclusion, joining school clubs can be beneficial for getting to know people and forming long-lasting relationships, especially when we are in new environments. Clubs provide opportunities for us to meet more like-minded people with similar interests. Furthermore, we can receive a sense of community and belonging by engaging in club activities. By joining a club and getting to know more people through it, we can grow personally and professionally and ultimately lead a more fulfilling life.

The background features a soft, painterly illustration of a garden. In the upper half, there are several large, yellow, bell-shaped flowers with blue outlines. A small blue butterfly is perched on one of the flowers in the top left. The lower half of the image shows a field of green grass with some darker green leaves in the foreground. The overall style is delicate and artistic.

**“Language Proficiency and
Intelligence”**

Emily Wu

Seeds

Instructor: Benjamin Harder

For this essay, answer the following question. Your essay should be about 1,200 words long, or about four pages.

Why is Amy Tan so focused on her mother's language? Do you agree with Tan's reactions to America's views of her mother's English?

The paper should be turned in, typed and double-spaced, by midnight on Tuesday, May 2nd.

In Amy Tan's speech "Mother Tongue," she shares how her mother's language affects her in life. Tan's mother is a Chinese immigrant who speaks limited English. When Tan was a teenager, she was embarrassed by her mother's English. Later when she grew up and experienced more, Tan realized that her mother's intelligence was hidden behind her limited English. Tan noticed that her mother is very intelligent and has a vivid imagination. After the realization, Tan felt more confident about her identity and her background. Tan recognized that her mother language had shaped the way she was living and the way she wrote. Tan thinks that people shouldn't have prejudice towards others based on their language skills. Tan gives examples of the challenges her mother faced because of society's neglect and discrimination toward people who do not speak fluent English. She believes that people's intelligence should not be based on the level of their language ability. As someone who also has a Chinese mother that speaks imperfect English, I have similar experiences to what Tan experienced. Therefore, I agree with Tan's reaction to America's view of her mother's English.

Discrimination toward non-English speakers in the U.S. is prevalent in society. When people talk about discrimination, people might consider topics on race and gender. However, there's another factor that causes discrimination in society. My father is a first-generation immigrant to the States and he is not fluent in English even though he is well-educated and has a lot of experience in life. There was a time he went to the customer support center in a local market. He bought something from the store but the pieces were broken inside. As other people would do, he went to the store and tried to explain the reason why he wanted to return the item. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to explain the reason ideally in English. The staff member who works in customer service declined his request since he didn't understand the reason for returning. Ironically, the next day when my father drove me to the store and told me to return the item using the same reason and dealing with the same staff, I was able to return the item with full refunds without any further process. This example shows how people treat non-fluent English speakers differently. Although my dad had a valid reason to return the item, he was unable to get

the refund because he could not clearly state the reason for returning and the staff didn't want to waste time on understanding my father's broken English. There are so many injustices happening in our society while we all try to fight against them. Prejudice and discrimination toward non-native English speakers is something that not only me and my family, but millions of new immigrants have experienced. It is shameful to see people neglect other people's ideas because of their fluency in a new language they interpret. Tan shows in her speech that the discrimination toward her mother for her English is prevalent. Tan proved her point of view toward that discrimination and disagreed with society's idea of her mother.

A person's language proficiency should not be used to measure their worth or intelligence. Although the language is a majority subject the school uses it to test and evaluate their students, but this shouldn't apply in society. My mother can barely speak any English even though she can use two other languages to communicate with my family and people from China. When my friends come over to my house, she always acts the most polite way toward my friends. In contrast, the words that come out of her mouth do not match her thoughts. For example, when she wants to comfort my friends not to be shy and just do whatever makes them feel comfortable, she would say things like "Eat or sit!" To a native speaker, the tone sounds commanding and rushed, but that is different from what she thinks and what she tries to say. In Chinese culture, it is normal to just say one word but still sound polite. A perfect way to translate her thoughts into English would be like "Do you want something to eat?" The language barrier and cultural differences cannot be the reason to think my mother is not polite and low in emotional intelligence. Millions of ideas and considerations have come through her mind but she cannot fully express it in English. What I see in my mother is different from other people who only speak English. What I see in my mother is that she is smart in making life decisions and always treats people with respect. However, some people might see her as commanding and rude. My mom's experience shows how someone's thoughts don't match their language. It is possible for someone who speaks broken English but has high intelligence and a sufficient amount of knowledge. Similar to Tan's experience with her mother, the cultural differences make her mother look different from other people. Still, she believes that her mother has a vivid imagination and wide knowledge.

Language is only a way of communication; what counts most is the culture that surrounds it. Language proficiency might affect people's understanding of some topics, but there are

always connections between culture and language. When I started learning English, I was not able to use English to express myself, however, my friends were able to understand me. As the previous example states, people are smarter than what they express. I was also one of the people who was irritated that I can not show what I truly think. However, there are always exceptions. My friends were able to pick up my words and understand the meaning behind those broken words. Through my limited English, they were still able to understand my culture and learn new things from me. This example shows that language is just a method that people use to communicate and share their thoughts. Yet, when people have an open heart and patience to understand other words, there will be barely any barrier to understanding each other. There are more examples like how my mother made friends who are English speakers even though they can barely speak each other's language and how my dad made friends with people who are from Mexico even though they both struggled in English. Culture is what makes a good society. When there's a subtraction on the impression someone got, the culture and knowledge that person had can be an aid to the thing they missed in their English skills. Tan also mentioned in her speech how her mother's language and the culture behind it influenced her. Tan believes that what makes a person valuable is their ideas and their culture. A person who speaks a broken language might have a fantastic cultural background that makes them special.

I agree with Amy Tan's response to the perception of her mother's English in American society. People should not despise others because they can not speak fluent English as others can. This discrimination would lead to bigger social problems and segregation between different cultural groups. A person's English skills should not be used to determine someone's intelligence since sometimes words can not fully express someone's thoughts. Last but not least, culture is more important than the language since culture is what really shapes someone's beliefs and also influences people on their language. Tan provides examples of her mother and explains that she thinks that American society should not discriminate against people who are struggling with English. Tan also believes that people should see people as who they are instead of judging them based on the way they speak and their fluency in English. In the past, older generations faced many difficulties since they are not fluent English speakers. They depended on their children to translate their ideas and meanwhile, their children might need to go through the insecurities that their parents can not express themselves like other English speakers' parents can. To prevent

this, society should provide more resources to help people who need help in English and people need to have patience even when they have difficulties expressing themselves in English.

Work Cited

Tan, Amy. "Mother Tongue" *The Seagull Book of Essays, 4th ed.*, edited by Joseph Kelly, 2021,
pp 475-480.

The background of the page is a watercolor illustration. It features a field of yellow flowers with blue outlines, green grass, and a small blue butterfly in the upper left corner. The overall style is soft and artistic.

“November Eleventh”

Jayline Aguilar

Seeds

Instructor: George Cunningham

Engl 1A
George Cunningham

Prompt for Paper 1

Writing in first person, compose an essay about a significant experience or event in your life, such as a literacy event. Choose an experience that you feel comfortable writing about for this audience (your instructor and classmates). Consider how you can tell the story dramatically and convey its autobiographical significance – its meaning and importance in your life. Think about how you can lead readers to understand you better, to reflect on their own lives, to become aware of social and cultural influences, or to gain some other insights.

Write 3-4 pp., 3 complete pages minimum for full credit. Don't go much over 4 pp. total. Use MLA format on your paper. Citations and a Works Cited page are not required for this paper.

Growing up, I would often get referred to as the "mom sibling." The "mom sibling" is the one who is most concerned about their sibling's well-being and is constantly checking in to make sure they are okay and not in trouble. I was my parent's first daughter and have always exhibited characteristics that my mother has. Since I was a young child, I have consistently shown my older brother and younger sister patience, respect, and empathy. I come from a large family where children are constantly being born. My sister is just two years younger than me, so I could only teach my young cousins, whom I would only see at family gatherings, the colors of the rainbow and how to spell their names. Being with them led me to realize that every child's imagination varies in some way and that a child's behavior can be predicted by what they hear or see. Although I was merely their older cousin, I wanted to set the best possible example I could, even if this meant being direct and telling them no. It was not until 2017, when I was a pre-teenager in the 7th grade, that things fell into place.

It all began in the kitchen of my home as soon as my parents arrived. They handed us a box of a dozen donuts. They looked at us with their faces as red as a tomato as we were about to open it. When we opened it, we read "From Baby #4." I thought to myself over and over, could this be real? Is there a baby in my mom's stomach? My parents only had three children for 11 years: my older brother, younger sister, and I. I had always wanted a new baby sibling so that I could mentor them because it was something I enjoyed doing, and now I was finally going to have that. I went to checkups with my mother, and I made sure everything was put together and organized. Fast forward to when my mother was about 3 ½ months pregnant, and we were about to enter the hospital patient room. Here, we were to find out the gender of the baby. There were numerous butterflies in my stomach, too much I could not count. I was experiencing a wave of emotions at this time. Thinking about it now, I realize that experiencing all of these emotions at the same time is entirely normal. The ultrasound tech was finally done checking to see if the baby was healthy, and toward the end, she proceeded to ask, "Would you guys like to know the gender of the baby?" At first, we gasped in silence before responding "yes."

She giggled and said with joy, "Your mom is having a boy! Congratulations."

I had butterflies in my stomach again, but this time they fluttered too quickly, and I noticed I was not the only one, which helped calm me down. Over the course of nine months, I observed personal change in myself. Being aware that my mother was frequently exhausted from getting ready for the arrival of my baby brother helped me become more mature and responsible. Additionally, I was a lot better at comprehending any situation that would arise, and I still, to this day, apply those qualities to any problem now. My mother started having contractions on November 10th, so she went to the hospital late that evening. She has always given birth to her children naturally, so she anticipated this one would be the same. Thankfully, this did occur. My mother told me to spend one night at home with my younger sister and aunt until they were settled in the hospital, and then we could go first thing in the morning. When the big day arrived, we sat in the waiting room for what felt like days, even though it was only a few hours. I suddenly noticed my cousin running from afar. I had a feeling he would break some good news, and I was right. My mother was in labor. I was too young to go in, and although that broke my heart, I had my younger sister for comfort. It was around 11:20 a.m. when they announced he was here. There was excitement, happy tears, and tranquility all on this memorable day. We could not stop thinking about how much happiness he would bring to our family. He was so small and had little to no hair, but he was the most precious thing I had ever seen. I realized immediately after meeting him that I needed to be his role model, merely as I was for my younger cousins.

Dylan Aguilar is his name and believe me when I say it was challenging to come up with one since we knew we would be calling him that for the rest of his life. It has now been over a thousand days since November 11th, 2017, the day Dylan was born. To put it simply, it has been 5 years and 2 months. My parents were concerned that my brother would grow up alone, with no one his age to play with, but as his sibling, I believe I have done an excellent job of filling those shoes. From that date on, I have done nothing but teach him many educational skills as well as other skills like tying his shoes and riding a bike. I am blessed to be someone he can look up to, and I will forever cherish that. I am glad I had the experience with my younger cousins because it taught me how to act and what words to say and not say when children are nearby. As Dylan grew older, I realized that he had inspired me to be a better person not only for him but also for myself, which is why I value his existence every day.

It was time for me to leave high school and go to college, and I think leaving for college was the most difficult thing I have ever done. I repeatedly told Dylan how much I loved him and

to behave in school because when I moved to college, he would be starting TK. It has been incredibly hard for me to be this far away from him now that I am in college, and when I get calls from my parents, they will usually put him on the phone. I do make an effort to give him a call on my own time for about an hour every other day. I try my best not to express my sadness over the phone, reason being he will ask me why I am sad. Even now, despite our distance, I still strive to be the greatest example I can be for him. I sometimes catch myself not realizing it, but I should always be aware that people are looking up to me, like my younger brother.



“Chill Vibes”

Federico López Iturburu

Seeds

Instructor: Stephanie Fousek

Assignment: Write an essay that narrates a specific time in your life that centers on a conflict and reveals ambivalent feelings in a way that helps your audience to understand the significance of the event. It will be evident in strong papers that numerous purposeful choices with structure and word choice were made. This essay must be **3-4 pages** and will be graded according to the “Basic Features” described and modeled in Chapter 2 of *SMG* and discussed in class.

- 1) **Provide a Well-Told Story** that presents a **specific** event (one that takes place in a day or less) in a way that uses the personal “I” to more strongly engage the reader, sets a scene well (clearly introducing an environment and relevant “cast”), and arouses suspense (potentially through a dramatic arc and action verbs).

- 2) **Use Vivid Description of People and Places** by including memorable details of the people and places in your story, utilizing adjectives and specific nouns, comparing through simile and metaphor, describing what you experienced through your five senses, and quoting/paraphrasing/summarizing effectively.

- 3) **Communicate Autobiographical Significance** by including remembered feelings and thoughts and various speaker tags from the event that add up to a **dominant impression** and possibly also by reflecting on the past from the present perspective using time cues. It is important to highlight a **contrast** between your opening and closing perspective, so that the reader understands how the event impacted you. Your perspective may be conveyed either implicitly or explicitly.

- 4) **Use Correct Grammar and MLA Format:** Use Times New Roman 12, including the title and your last name + page number in the heading. You can use the end of the red MLA section in your *St. Martin’s Guide* for specific grammatical problems that you are encountering.

Relief comes in the strangest ways. I still remember the color of dry blood, a shade of dull crimson, splattered on my shoes. It matched the burning logs feeding the radiant flames of the campfire. The warmth that they produced embraced me, giving me time to relax and ignore my wounded dirty hands for a minute. I was glad that the campfire produced so much smoke. It helped me hide from the people next to me the smell of burnt flesh and diesel that permeated my clothes. But none of that mattered; what was important was that everyone else was oblivious to what had happened.

“It’s over,” I whispered. I just had to smile, and everything would be alright. I was safe; everyone was safe now. The peace that I felt was immeasurable. It was 2019, and I had again returned as a counselor for a camp called Aguazul just like every summer. It was located in the middle of the jungles of southern Mexico. Its name, which means “blue water,” comes from the fact that all the cabins, dining halls, and important locations were mixed with verdant natural environments surrounding a seventy-meter-wide, sky-blue sinkhole.

The camp director assigned a cabin of five-to-ten-year-old boys to me. They were seven little kids filled with excitement and joy. It was obvious that this was their first time camping, except for one. His name is Gregorio, but everyone at the camp called him “Oreo.” He had been a camper for the last two summers and was thrilled to have me as his counselor again.

“I missed you, Fedel!” he screamed while hanging on to me. It was great to see an old face again - I had known him since I was a camper myself - but that didn't change the fact that he was hard to handle. Despite him being eight years my junior, the freckled blond had a natural assertiveness and initiative about him, something I felt I lacked and had always kind of envied.

My mentor and friend Pepe, a counselor for the big kids, gave me advice about how to manage Oreo. Pepe was four years older than me and had much more experience at the camp. I felt admiration for him. Every piece of advice that came out of him was pure gold. “Always wear a fanny pack,” he said while pointing to his own, which was neon-purple. “Because it can carry all kinds of useful items, it will free up your hands.” This was important since we were responsible for the safety of the children in the dangerous terrain on which we were camping.

Recess began, so I told Oreo to show the camp facilities to the rest of the kids so that Pepe and I could prepare the kayaks that would be used by the campers after free time was over. To reach the kayaks, we would need to venture deeply into the sky-blue sinkhole. At its entrance was a dark, smooth cave. We had to follow the sunbeams from the other side of it down the slippery rock to the storage room, which was in a deep pocket in the middle of the cavern. As we approached, we found that having our eyes wide open was not any different from having them closed. Total darkness.

From his trusty fanny pack, Pepe pulled out a tiny Gatorade-orange flashlight and illuminated our way.

After a few meters, the temperature dropped drastically. When we reached the kayaks, he put the flashlight in his mouth and asked me to help him move the first one. The two of us picked up the kayak, but just before we could start carrying it, he suddenly dropped it and backed off. The weight of the whole kayak was too much for me to handle, crushing my hands against the rock. I was about to yell at him, but after looking at his face drenched in terror from what was suddenly lit up by the lantern, both of us ran away as quickly as possible. My heart was pounding.

Though I had only gotten a glimpse of what was hiding behind the kayak, it was impossible to not recognize the pattern of red, yellow, black, and yellow again.

Those colors, in that particular order, represented the greatest threat that the camp could ever have: a seventy-centimeter coral snake, the most venomous snake in the entire region. One bite alone could lead to euphoria, drowsiness, difficulty in breathing, paralysis, and eventually, death.

I was terrified. We continued running until we found the camp director. After we told her, she looked at us with an “I-am-sorry” look. The camp director asked for discretion; no one else needed to know that death lay at the entrance of the sinkhole.

That was the moment when my world shook. We were the staff. We were the ones who were supposed to take care of situations like this. We were the ones who would have to kill it.

The camp director promptly postponed the swimming activities, to give Pepe and me more time to complete our harrowing quest. Pepe had experiences with other snakes, but never the kind that could actually kill him.

Fortunately, both of us received special training and knew the steps to follow. We went to the gardening closet and grabbed a machete, gasoline, and a lighter. We also picked a couple of dry palms off the ground on our way back to the cave.

There we were, standing at the gates of hell. Willing to go down into the darkness, knowing that it could be our last day on Earth. Coral snakes are extremely dangerous for two main reasons: their venom and their nesting habits. If there was one around, its mate couldn't be very far away. Our two-vs-two match was about to begin.

We slowly descended into the cave, staring intently at the area illuminated by the bright narrow beam of Pepe's flashlight. With each step an invisible rope pulled at my neck, preventing me from breathing normally.

When we reached the snakes' lair, we burned the dry palm leaves and gasoline to produce smoke. The smell of gasoline was strong. However, it was necessary for placating the snakes.

We left the cave and returned after half an hour with a pair of thick gloves. As expected, there were two snakes, but no one would have imagined that the second one was two meters long. Both of them were still alive, but the lack of oxygen deprived them of their killing instincts. And they weren't the only ones.

I grabbed the first snake by the neck with my safety gloves, held it tight on the floor, and gave the signal to Pepe. The next thing I knew, a headless snake was in front of me. He had chopped off its head with the machete, which was now painted a bright scarlet.

Unlike the first one, the second one was heavy. I had to use both hands to hold it down. I was shaking. The snake made a slight movement. "Hurry up!" I screamed.

Blood splashed all over my face and shoes. It was cold, very cold, but it felt safe. I washed my face with water from the sinkhole, then proceeded to wash the floor of the cave and inform the camp director via walkie-talkie that the danger had passed.

Next, we needed to get the snakes out, but we couldn't risk any campers noticing. Therefore, the camp director made it "swim time." Everyone went into the water so we could work outside. Campers usually took this route - the cave - but there was a less orthodox way to get in the water: my personal favorite, a seven-meter-tall zipline that ended at the middle of the sinkhole.

The camp director asked all the campers to get into the water via the zipline, excusing it as an "initiation" tradition. Needless to say, they were more than happy to comply. Meanwhile,

we buried the snakes and prepared the campfire for the night. When swimming time was over, the hideous smell had dissipated so they could exit through the cave.

The night sky looked like a resplendent tapestry, a window to the cosmos. Underneath, a campfire and one hundred smiles around it. Everyone was talking to each other, embracing the heat waves from the campfire. They were at peace, united, and careless of the dangers of the jungle.

This was what I was trying to protect. It was worth it: the blood in my shoes, the putrid smell, and the pain in my hands. Pepe and I had halted a catastrophe, and I would go through it all over again. All to know that everyone at camp was having a good time and protected within the lovely space that we had created. Life dared me, and despite my fear, I accepted and emerged victorious.

I spent the rest of the night holding Oreo's hand. It looked tiny to me in the crackling light of the campfire, but it brought immense comfort to my soul. He was there for me, and I was grateful for that. In the end, Aguazul continued being magical, for me and for everyone around the remaining ashes of the campfire.

The background is a hand-drawn illustration of a field. It features several large yellow flowers with blue outlines, green grass, and a small blue butterfly in the upper left corner. The overall style is sketchy and artistic.

“Indie Film, Indie Music, and Indie Games”

Niko D. Udria

Seeds

Instructor: Matthew Bond

“Concepts include principles and ideals, theories, ideas, conditions, phenomena, and processes. To communicate effectively and efficiently about a particular subject, you need to be able to use and explain concepts clearly and compellingly” (SMG 106).

This project asks you to identify an individual topic and look at it through a specific lens, from a particular angle. You will want to give the necessary historical background and context—but avoid simply crafting an “encyclopedia entry” about your topic. Instead, talk about the status of the idea in question, the assumptions made about it and the various attitudes towards it. You will want to touch on what causes this concept to be culturally relevant and the cultural effects of its discussion. Use the explanatory strategies the chapter teaches to clearly, skillfully explain your concept: definitions, classification, examples, comparison & contrast, and cause-and-effect, while weaving authoritative research into your paper and unpacking and illuminating the information from these incorporated sources.

Write a 4 page essay, using at least 4 credible, professional outside sources, to teach your reader a lesson.

Style, grammar, and mechanics: are you communicating clearly sentence-by-sentence?

Inadequate [.5]— Your sentences have frequent disruptive errors in punctuation and grammar. We should review your writing together in office hours.

Satisfactory [1]—Yes, you communicate fine, even if your writing might have some smaller issues to continue to work through.

Strong [1.5]—Your writing is strong, and you generally appear in control of how you voice your thoughts.

Excellent [2]—Your writing shows a nearly professional ability to control structure, style, mechanics, word choice, and tone.

A focused, meaningful explanation: do you effectively name, frame, and outline how you will teach your reader a concept? Do you suggest the concept’s significance? Does your essay help shape the reader’s perspective on the subject?

Inadequate [.5]—Your explanation could use revision. Maybe it’s too broad, vague, or maybe your explanation is too mechanical.

Satisfactory [1]— Your explanation is pretty solid overall.

Strong [1.5]—More than simply loading a paper with facts, dates, and definitions, your work introduces and makes relevant the cultural conversation around this subject.

Excellent [2]—Your explanation is focused, effective, and interesting. It adduces its significance and effectively shapes your reader’s reception of this explanation.

Evidence and explanatory strategies: do you support your explanation with at least four academic/professional sources, and do you explain your concept with effective rhetorical moves?

Inadequate [.5]—No, this essay is missing outside evidence and/or effective methods of explanation

Satisfactory [1]— You have at least four outside sources and for the most part, you demonstrate ability to teach an idea formally.

Strong [1.5]—Your paper demonstrates moments of smart research use and clever explanation.

Excellent [2]—You incorporate at least four well-chosen, well-integrated outside sources and skillfully teach your concept with strategies such as cause-and-effect, definition, classification, comparison, etc.

Organization: is your explanation structured in an effective way?

Inadequate [.5]—No, your structure is a little bit of a mess.

Satisfactory [1]— Your explanation is organized well enough to follow, though it may lack “oomph.”

Strong [1.5]— Your explanation is clearly and logically organized and easy to follow. It helps generate reader interest.

Excellent [2]—You craft your explanation in the best manner possible to stoke interest and guide your reader through the information and its discussion fluidly.

Does your essay adhere to **MLA guidelines**, including a properly formatted works cited page?

0/.5/ 1

Did you post a rough draft on time and complete the **peer review workshop**?

0/1

When a person asks me what my dream job is, I confidently reply, “indie game developer!” I take pride and joy in the distinction that the term indie provides. In my mind, any creative work deemed indie is immediately worth a magnitude more than those that aren’t. How did I come to reach this reverence for the term indie, and what does the term truly mean and represent to people?

Indie is simply a shortening of the word independent. The word independent originally signified one’s ties to an independent congregational church around 1600, but its meaning has evolved with time. Its connotation of unbiasedness and ability to live without aid has existed from the 1790s onward (Harper). The word indie, however, is not an exact substitution for the word independent. In politics, a person would not say “I’m an indie” instead of “I’m an independent” when describing their relationship to the political parties. This scenario points towards an important distinction between the word independent and its child indie. Independent tends to be a much broader term with many usages such as independent thinker, independent nation, or independent adolescent. Indie, on the other hand, often has a much narrower focus on media and creative works as seen in its popular usages: indie film, indie music, and indie games.

The usage of indie has become adopted rather recently. In an article from *The Guardian*, Wendy Fonarow remarks, “In the 90s, when I told people I was studying indie music culture, I was either asked if I was talking about music from India or told it didn't exist.” Fonarow even mentions that indie was not recognized as an official music category during the 80s and 90s. With this in mind, it is clear that indie is an emerging discussion. Why is it then that during these recent years, indie media has entered the public conscience? The shift of technology and adoption of the internet definitely have something to do with it. Music artists are far less reliant on studios and music labels for promoting their work. Now, artists are able to use social media to essentially “cut the middleman”, reach audiences directly, and be automatically recommended to people who would have otherwise not discovered them (“Social Media's Critical Role in the Music Industry: Musician's Institute”). Videogames have had a similar experience alongside music. While games

have not been under the thumb of corporations for nearly as long, online retailers like Steam or Itch.io now provide nearly equal opportunity to both indie and established creators to promote their work. The leverage over the competition of these markets is shifting towards a more fair and opportunistic model.

The term indie also has far more implications than not belonging to an established company. Many die-hard fans of any indie medium, myself included, will claim that those works are more heartfelt and personal as they are not limited by corporate restraints and requirements, but just how true is this? During a highschool career fair, we had a game developer who worked on the AAA game, *God of War*, describe his experiences of working for the company; AAA being a term that signifies games produced by wealthy, respected, and established publishers. This developer stated that much of his job surprisingly took place in meetings. The company had a very clear direction they wanted the game to head in that the developers were required to follow. The company did market research and decided a game with themes of a complex father-son relationship would sell the best, and it clearly worked with the game now having a 94% score on Metacritic, 94% score on OpenCritic, and a 10/10 on IGN. Meanwhile, indie titles such as *Hollow Knight*, *Celeste*, *Enter the Gungeon*, or *Undertale* were not bound by such restrictions, yet they still managed to create charming, unexpected stories that resonated with the public. They may have otherwise not existed had they been bound to the rules of a company and market expectations. In this sense, indie media is a rejection of formulaic, cultivated content. It is more willing to take risks and express itself. Indie projects risk being undiscovered in their rejections of the norm, yet some manage to be so compelling and genuine that they rise to even greater heights than corporate games.

The differences between the indie and AAA are often the expected and perceived quality, length, and price of the games. Indie games usually range from \$1 to \$30. AAA games, on the other hand, sell for \$40 all the way to \$100 depending on the edition you buy. Knowing this, prices can be one of the most fascinating parts of the battle between indie and corporate work. A price does not exactly correlate to the media's true value. Some of the most meaningful games, songs, and films I've experienced cost the absolute minimum. Often the true value in a creative work is determined by how much it resonates with us personally. Corporate work is capable of doing this in the *God of War* case, and it is completely valid for anyone to enjoy it, however, it is important to recognize that price and profit incentives can obscure meaningful messages in some cases. Any

project, indie or corporate, cedes to it to some degree. When we as a society place prices upon creative work that someone's livelihood is attached to, there will be consequences. We will judge it more harshly than something free, and demands will be placed upon the creator.

The question of authenticity in any media is growing. This might cause a bit of controversy, but especially after Disney purchased Marvel, haven't the films felt a bit formulaic and rushed? Disney currently has a pattern that works with their Marvel movies. Their movies have no good reason to take risks and deviate from what is currently making them massive amounts of money. This is where the indie genre becomes so exciting to me. They have every reason to deviate as their work needs to stand out and copying something like Disney would be pointless with an inferior budget. Under these circumstances, exciting indie films like *Whiplash*, *Reservoir Dogs*, and *Ex Machina* are spawned. They made the most of what little they had. Unlike corporate producers, the directors of these films did not need to follow market research or follow an established pattern. Directors in indie media have far more freedom to paint the story they want in the way they want. While they are built on a much smaller budget and scale, indie media often provides a level of authenticity that the other is unable to provide.

I believe that the concept of indie can be applied to many things besides just film, games, and music. It is no secret that the United States was founded upon strong capitalist ideals. Nearly every industry has its top players and subsequent underdogs. Consider Apple and its domination of the smartphone market. Do you own an iPhone? Would you be interested in deviating from the 48.7% of smartphone users (Laricchia) who have one? I believe indie reflects a sentiment that we want to deviate from the popular decision and just see something new. I got a BeReal notification while writing this, and it got a laugh out of me. In a way, this new social media platform is indie through their decision to reject almost everything that made other social media platforms succeed. Its photos are intended not to be glamorized but instead catch you in the middle of your day. My decision to download this app was as much social as it was personal. I got it because it made a loud statement that it was different, small, and therefore more authentic. That did not necessarily make it better, but it certainly made it more interesting to me.

There is sometimes intense discourse about what even qualifies as indie. Are Tarantino's films still indie as his budgets and personal wealth grow? Is indie music still truly indie when it becomes the mainstream? Does the 32 billion dollar company, Epic Games, purchase of *Rocket League* mean that the game itself and its unique ideas and mechanics are no longer deemed indie?

These are the types of debates fought out on online forums like Reddit or Quora. The term indie signifies something different to everyone. Its definition is nowhere near concrete. People can even debate the level of capital needed to discern an indie publisher from a major one. Indie discourse is an interesting byproduct of capitalist society where work is necessary to survive, competition is vicious, and conglomerates can form. It is a subsection of a larger argument that all relates back to money and authenticity. Think about what the term indie means to you. It could mean nothing, everything, or something in between. Your perspective on it, regardless, is valuable to consider as you become more aware of the media you engage with.

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The background of the slide is a stylized, hand-drawn illustration. It features a field of yellow flowers with blue outlines, green grass, and a small blue butterfly in the upper left corner. The overall style is soft and artistic, with a light, airy feel.

“The Contestation of LatinX”

Valerie Valencia Castillo

Seeds

Instructor: Liza Wemakor

❖ Essay 2: Explanatory Essay (1,500 words / 5 pages) — 20%

Drawing upon lessons from SMG “Chapter 4 | Explaining a Concept,” write an explanatory essay that expands upon one or more of the terms you described in the glossary assignment. Provide examples in media (academic articles, the news, books, pop culture, music, art, etc.) that would contextualize your subject for an unfamiliar audience. If you include personal stories or anecdotes, they should be substantiated by credible, external sources you’ve gathered via research. Write as if you’re an informed expert who wants to deepen your audience’s understanding.

Oh, the Xs and Os. Who knew that these simple letters could have such a significant impact on creating a heavy discourse on gender inclusivity?

Latinx is a gender-inclusive term for individuals of Latin American descent. The heaviness of the term's discourse is understood when considering the history of gendered terms in the Spanish language and how it has influenced Latin cultural norms. The use of the term Latinx can be traced back to 2004 in online discussions and forums, and while no exact date was found, its use became more common overtime after 2004. The word is more of a neologism, as it was created relatively recently and communally. Latinx is used as a gender-neutral alternative for Latino and Latina, the masculine and feminine forms of the word.

The term Latinx has experienced advocacy for its use as a substitution for Latino and Latina but has also experienced pushback against its use from Hispanic communities. The factors that encourage the use of the word Latinx are goals of inclusivity and building communities, while the pushback against the term is due to seeing the change as an Anglo-American influence on the Spanish language. Cultural influences also give reasons why these terms are resisted.

The implementation of an X at the end of 'Latin' provides a symbol of anonymity/or something unknown. For example, in mathematics, the letter x is commonly used as a variable to symbolize an unknown number, however, in this context relating more to identity, identity is unknown so with the use of X, it goes unassumed. The X also completely eliminates the masculine and feminine connotations adding more fluidity to the word, and allowing it to be used in a general context. Many of those who use the term frequently are able to connect with one another on the grounds of gender fluidity and/or connection to the LGBTQ+ community, but the term can also encompass cisgender people as well. The creation of connections on these grounds further encourages its usage both within and outside of queer communities. This is further explained by Christine Garcia, a professor at Eastern Connecticut State University, who states in her article, In Defense of LatinX, "The 'x' adaptation contains within it the movement towards intersectionality and the acknowledgment that ethnicity and gender are interlocked identity constructs,"(Garcia 210). The extension of intersectionality that Latinx provides allows for

community building. This offers more inclusive and fluid statuses to be identified within the X, as the masculine and feminine connotations of Latino and Latina limit its usage for others outside the masculine and feminine identity. Therefore, those who do not identify themselves within the binary of Latino/a feel disconnected from the Latin identity when their gender identity is excluded or disregarded with the limited selection. Latinx is a solution to that issue.

With its connections to the LGBTQ community, Latinx further familiarizes the Hispanic community with the LGBT community as a whole, as they inquire about the reasons for the x and at times can relate to its context. When the community is familiarized with terms such as Latinx, it can be met with understanding and recognition of different identities, and when intertwined with cultural ideologies it can result in community building. This can be explained in a study conducted by graduate students, Karina A. Gattamorta, John Salerno and Narciso Quidley-Rodriguez. They investigated the experiences of Latinx parents whose children are a part of sexual and gender minorities in the *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*. Their studies found that parents were more likely to accept their LGBT+ children when certain cultural influences were stronger than others, along with the familiarity with the LGBT+ community that led to a better understanding of different sexual and gender identities. “Cultural factors common among Hispanics such as familismo, which underscores a strong connection to, and support received from, extended family, may help explain the process of acceptance of the LGB child demonstrating that parents will become more accepting or more tolerant over time and that acceptance is often facilitated when parents maintain contact with their children, listen to them and are exposed to other sexual minority individuals.”(A. Gattamora, Salerno, & Quidley-Rodriguez 158) When the strength of familismo is greater than other cultural influences parents are more likely to be open to such terms. The openness to these terms further familiarizes the community with whom the term is used and can lead to more understanding of these identities, along with the further adaptation of the word Latinx.

On the other hand, this also means that if other cultural ideologies are stronger than families, such as machismo, it can interfere with the process of familiarizing the community with the term Latinx and adapting it into language, as it's met with pushback and creates further divide between the community. This is demonstrated by referring back to the research done by Karina A. Gattamorta, John Salerno & Narciso Quidley-Rodriguez, who explain, “Having a gay son/daughter may not bode well for families who have a traditional machista/marianista

mentality and may be less capable of understanding more complex gender roles... Having a traditional machista/marianista mentality may mean that a family holds stricter and more conservative views of gender roles for their children.” Following this explanation, communal resistance to sexual and gender minorities leads to a lack of consideration and openness to understanding other gender identities and results in the overall rejection of gender-inclusive language.

Another communal perspective that impedes the use and adaptation of Latinx into general use is seeing the change as an infringement on the language they have grown accustomed to. With the majority of Latinx communities speaking the common language of Spanish as a result of colonization, the use of the letter x in the Spanish language is very distinct. The pronunciation of the individual letter x in Spanish is Equis (ehk~ees) but when placed within a word, its pronunciation can vary. From being pronounced silently or as a “ha” such as in the word Mexico, pronounced as (meh-hee-co) in Spanish, to then being pronounced similarly to the English version of x(ehks) but only after a vowel, such as the Spanish word, exactamente, (ehks-ack-ta-men-teh). With the term Latinx, the x comes right after a consonant, complicating its pronunciation in the Spanish language.

The placement of x in Latinx disrupts the phonic rules in the Spanish language, as even with the consonant being before the x (which doesn’t allow it to be pronounced as x(ehks)), it still is pronounced as x(ehks) regardless. Due to this change, a substantial portion of the community feels as if they must adopt American ideals to meet the demands of the term. Salvador Vidal-Ortiz & his co-author Juliana Martínez discuss the different perspectives of Hispanics on the term Latinx through the article, Latinx Thoughts; Latinidad with an X, explaining that “X is an imposition of the English language that breaks with Spanish grammar and phonology. Hence, instead of being an inclusive move, it is an imperialist one that reaffirms the preponderance of the United States and its more dominant language on a global scale.”(Vidal Ortiz, Martinez p.15) As an effect, some interpret the breaking of Spanish in order to fit the pronunciations of the English language as an act of domination and appropriation, ultimately rejecting the term once again.

While there is no exact form of mediation to the cultural influences that reject Latinx, there is a solution to the second objection. To find a compromise with the protests against the word for its interpretation as an appropriation of the Spanish language, there is also the

alternative variation of the word, which is Latine. Rather than an ending of x, there is the use of an e, which is frequently used in the Spanish language in nouns that are gender neutral, for example, “student” in Spanish is “estudiante”. The ease of pronunciation of the word Latine over Latinx further allows the community to adapt it as a general term in the Spanish language and presents fewer issues with its usage. This is displayed through first-hand experiences of Latine youth who express their sentiments by using one term over the other. A Teen Vogue article by journalist, Jess Garcia, *Latine vs Latinx? What Young People of Latin American Descent Think of*

These Terms, describes the perspectives of latine youth such as Acosta. The article states that “Andrés Acosta, a nonbinary content educator of Puerto Rican and Honduran descent, identifies as Latine. ‘The most simple reason is that for my parents, it’s easier to say ‘Latine’ than ‘Latinx,’”(Garcia 8). The ease of pronunciation of the term Latine allows for it to be used more commonly, and its general use being caught more frequently is presented in the academic article by Idalis Villanueva Alarcón, *Latiné, Latinx, Latina, Latino, or Hispanic: Problematizing Terms Often Used in Engineering Education*, stating, “While Latinx has mostly been embraced in the United States by LGBTQIA+, ally communities, and several scholars, Spanish-speaking Latin American countries have adopted Latiné as their gender-inclusive term” (Villanueva Alarcon 737).

Latine offers a middle ground and is viewed as a more adaptable term, however, it is important to note the first portion of the quote from Alarcon emphasizes how Latinx is more embraced by LGBTQ+ communities and that the significance of the X in Latinx presents a higher degree of inclusion and impact that demands recognition of minoritized gender identities. As Latine is found to be more adaptable, it is an alternative and shouldn’t erase the impact of the meaning of X in Latinx. Returning to Christina Garcia’s article, who highlights this point by describing how the use of Latine can erase the term Latinx, explaining, “yet this erasure is counter to the semantic goal of acknowledgment and inclusion that the ‘x’ represents,”(Garcia 210). The X is further a symbol of the movement towards inclusion, as the assumed general term used to be “Latinos”, that presents a male domination with the use of the O, therefore the replacement of X as the neutral term breaks down the androcentric implications of “Latinos.”

Whether it be Latine or Latinx, one has the freedom to choose which they connect to

most, which also applies to the terms Latino and Latina, as the presence of gender-neutral terms does not mean that one can't use the gendered forms for themselves, a common misconception. It is important to consider the implications of each term and identify when it'd be appropriate to use certain terms. Perhaps one term can be used to further implement the use of another, such as using the ease of Latine to then adapt into a more common use of LatinX, especially with growing recognition of intersectional identities and sexualities.

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“Weathered Hands”

Valerie Valencia Castillo

Seeds

Instructor: Liza Wemakor

❖ **Essay 1: Personal Essay (1,000 words / 3 pages) – 15%**

Drawing upon lessons from *SMG* “Chapter 2: Autobiography and Literacy Narrative,” write a personal essay that describes a period of transformation in your life. Please choose subject matter you feel comfortable discussing with classmates, since there will be a peer review session for essay drafts.

June. The month of summer, vacation, and relaxation. All the students babbled on about their exciting summer plans, pool parties, beach trips, and vacations to Disneyland. June wasn't this to me. June was a reminder that I wasn't like my peers. Summers filled my parents with worry. My mother paced on the tiles of the kitchen as she made calls to every relative in the area to find someone to care for my sister and me. "*Lo siento, pero voy a trabajar,*" sorry, but we're working, was the common response. My mother also looked up ads for babysitters but decided the cost would be too much for the long hours she and my father worked. After weighing all the options, my mother said "*Esta mas peligroso en tu trabajo mijo, entonces yo me las llevo, va estar bien.*" She stated that it was far too dangerous for my father to take us to his job given his work conditions as an electrician. My mom resorted to sneaking us into her day job as a personal housekeeper.

My mom's rough but kind hands caressed our faces and woke my sister and I up before sunrise. Summers never changed, I still woke up just as early as I did during the school year. It was time for us to accompany her to work, and she didn't want us to make her late. "*Ya es hora de levantar mis amores,*" it's time to wake up my loves, she softly demanded. That was one of the few perks I did enjoy during summer. Rather than waking up to an obnoxious and loud alarm, I woke up to my mother's kind embrace.

I inhaled the musky aroma of the thick, 6 am air as I left my home and entered my mom's 2003 red Dodge SUV. The trunk was packed with cleaning products, a broom, a mop, and endless amounts of towels. "*Niñas, we're lucky that la Mrs. no esta, se fue a Santa Barbara for the summer, but I want you, girls, to be very careful when you enter this house, this is not like casita, don't touch anything that you think looks fragile or expensive, but I will need your help sometimes so ponganse listas!*" *La Mrs.* was my mother's boss, and the rules my mom set for the day emphasized the seriousness of our situation.

As we continued out of our neighborhood and onto the road I witnessed the transition of our arid desert town to a very green, grassy landscape and neighborhoods filled with non-native plants through the car window. Keep in mind we are still in the same desert. The other side of

town, filled with gated communities and country clubs near desert mountains, was our destination. This was a drastic change compared to my side of town filled with deserted lots and freeways. Yet the distance between the towns was a mere 15-minute drive.

Our old red SUV approached the large iron gates blocking our entrance to the mountainous country clubs of Palm Desert. The security looked suspiciously at our car.

“*Agachanse!*” says my mother. Following my sister, I began to sink my body into the old carpeted seats of the car, away from the windows. After he looked into the windscreen of the car, the security at the gate raised his eyebrows recognizing my mother and motioned with his hand that my mother was clear for her to enter. We passed the gates, and I heard my mother’s quiet sigh of relief. “Why did we have to do that *ama?*” asked my sister. My mother responded, “*Por que si*, and we’re going to do that every day now okay.” Even my mother herself didn’t question why we had to do this, but the constant scrutiny faced from other experiences encouraged her to take any precautions even if it turned out to be unnecessary. The response, ‘*por que si*’, indicated that it was a truth we had to expect and no longer question.

As we drove down the brick roads of the country club, I witnessed landscaped hills with a variety of plants and trees that pleased the eye but also acted as borders to the giant homes. I began to wonder, “wow, these people must have very large families to fill up these homes.” I believed that there was no other purpose to having such a large home than to fill it with a family. This thought was disrupted when we arrived at the house my mom housekeeps. We passed through another set of 10-foot iron gates that acted as reinforcement for the home itself. I asked myself why these homes have so many gates, and why don’t I have the same? We finally entered the home through its 7-foot glass double doors, and instantly I began to compare my casita to the tall ceilings, marbled floor, and abnormally large furnishings. The size of the living room was the whole square footage of my *casita*, which was a tiny mobile home.

My mother set down the supplies for the day. “*Es hora de limpiar, andale,*” it’s time to clean, let’s do this, she said. She began to give my sister and I easy tasks to do together. We took out the trash, organized the recycling, and watered the indoor plants. Meanwhile, my mother did all the tough work. She scrubbed the surfaces with harsh cleaning agents that added to the roughness of her hands, then consistently broomed and mopped the large area of the home. The smell of bleach with lemons flooded the home. This consistent work unraveled into more tasks for the day, my mom made calls for maintenance as requested by her boss. She had to

communicate herself through language barriers and asked for translations from my sister and I to understand what was being said. As my mother had more to do, she had us wait for her for the rest of the day, but I took this as an opportunity to explore this home as my sister sat on the leather stool by my mom.

I entered the large doorways into inordinate rooms. I imagined a new life and pretended to be her, *la Mrs.*, as I wore her soft robe, and danced in front of the large mirrors in her enormous bathroom. I took a moment and looked around. I took off the robe and put it back exactly where it was. I went to my mother and gave her the biggest hug. She laughed, “*Que tienes,*” she asked. She cupped my face with her weathered hands and the scent of bleach lingered on my face. I said nothing and just smiled. I began to reflect. My mother is the root of the majesty of this place. It is through her scrubbing, mopping and long hours put into it that made me admire it so significantly. My father’s labor is also the reason the lights within this house turned on.

When I first entered this house I felt shame in my tiny *casita* and hometown. I instantly made comparisons from a material perspective, but as I left the place, I felt pride knowing that my parents are responsible for the dignity of such places. This was manifested in their rough hands, it expressed their endless love for one another, my sister and me, and this enormity of love was infinitely better than the enormity of that house. After the 15-minute ride back to my *casita*, I returned with a smile on my face. I came home with a new perspective and acknowledgment of these disparities to further recognize the hard work of my immigrant parents, and many others in the same position. This molded me into the person I am today, valuing their sacrifices and labor. Their work is reflected in the work I pursue and accomplish.

The background is a stylized illustration of a field. It features several large yellow flowers with blue outlines, green grass, and a small blue butterfly in the upper left corner. The overall style is soft and artistic, with a light color palette.

“Drought in the Context of the Syrian War”

Mohammad Thaaer Alrajab

Seeds

Instructor: Jennie Friedrich

ESSAY 2: PROPOSING A SOLUTION

This essay will give you the opportunity to test your problem-solving abilities. Your first task is to establish that the problem needs to be solved. You will then consider the possible courses of action carefully and decide which one is the best, given the circumstances. This kind of essay features prominently in the social sciences, but builds skills that are essential to a wide variety of career fields. The important thing to remember is that the goal of this essay isn't really to definitively solve the problem, but to contribute to a practical understanding of the problem so that it can be solved. Your enemy in this process is oversimplification. Whatever angle you choose to explore in your essay, you'll need a thesis (your proposal), points to support your argument, and outside sources to back you up. To persuade your audience you will need to anticipate the opposition's points and show why your approach is still valid.

The Assignment

Given our conversations about the potential threats that climate change poses to human existence, how might we ensure that one of the most vulnerable sectors of our population are protected in the face of a particular natural disaster?

Tools and Sources:

You will have read several texts on topics relating to disability and the unique challenges it poses to environmental adaptation and survival. Here are some themes that will have come up in our conversations and readings: selfhood, toughness, prosthesis, competition, etc. You will use examples from these to develop your thinking. Your essay will also need to adhere to the Basic Features of a "Proposing a Solution" essay explained in Chapter 7 of the *Saint Martin's Guide*.

Basic Features I will look for:

- A Focused, Well-Defined Problem
- A Well-Argued Solution
- An Effective Response to Objections and Alternative Solutions
- A Clear, Logical Organization

(see *The Saint Martin's Guide* for descriptions of these concepts in the chapter)

Your essay will also need to have real-world cultural implications (and they need to be explicitly stated in your essay). This means that although the novel you are using to explore this cultural issue is a work of fiction, the issue itself is present in some form in modern culture.

Your essay must use at least one assigned text, an example from *Parable*, and at least three outside texts for support, contrast, or to challenge your thinking on the topic of disability or the logistics of disaster preparedness.

Format & Length:

Your essay should be 1250 to 1500 words in length, double-spaced, 12-point font (Times New Roman), and in MLA format (See the "Handbook" in the back of the *Guide*).

Due Dates:

See schedule

The evening approaches as the sun sets, and with it, your hope for your crops and vegetation. Imagine you are a Syrian farmer, living day-to-day attempting to grow agriculture in the harsh environment of war-torn Syria. The place is known for having periodic droughts ranging in severity. Considering the relative increase in temperatures within the last ten years, along with the war that has ravaged Syria's infrastructure, life has become extremely difficult for you as a farmer and the average Syrian. The periodic booms you hear in the distance have become a common occurrence as bombs are dropped by the Syrian government and other fighting forces. Their impact on the climate is obviously not a favorable one. With a failing economy, you cannot afford improvements for your farm and the average Syrian struggles to afford basic necessities. This life is all too common for the Syrian people, who have been ravaged by both war and the environment. In such a drought situation like this, the military conflict must be confronted head on by intergovernmental organizations and water access must be amplified through the use of wide scale irrigation canals and viable infrastructure. As a Syrian who became a US citizen nearly six years ago, I can say that family friends and relatives who were not given such an opportunity continue to struggle as the Syrian conflict approaches its twelfth year.

The conflict began around eleven years ago in 2011, when protests for freedom against Syrian dictator Bashar Al-Assad resulted in shots fired into the crowd by the military. An article by *The Guardian* claimed that there were at least 88 killed in the ordeal that started it all. Afterwards, a rebel group formed and began to fight back in the name of freedom (Marsh and Tisdall 2011). However, Bashar Al-Assad later released known terrorists from prison to join these rebels and tarnish their reputation to prevent foreign powers from aiding them. This caused a multitude of problems and for the following years, Syrian land became a battleground for multiple proxy wars from Russia, the newly formed ISIS, Iran, and multiple other groups. Their battles would often end up destroying hundreds of homes and killing countless civilians, with barrel bombs and snipers being a frequent occurrence. Although there was brief intervention after the dictator Al-Assad used chemical weapons against civilians, the conflict still rages on.

The UN Human Rights Office estimates that more than 306,000 civilians were killed in the twelve year conflict, with hundreds of thousands more displaced from their homes (UNHRO 2022).

After taking a deeper look, we find that this war has caused all sorts of direct and indirect implications. To mention them all would necessitate a multitude of pages. However, one of the most dire implications is that on the agricultural side of Syria, which provides both resources and a source of income for many. Coupling this with the recent droughts in Syria creates an even more dire situation as some farmlands dry up and crop yields take a hit. Although the land of Syria is infamous for its periodic droughts across history, the recent droughts have been among the most severe. This is because of the relative increase in temperature, lack of water access, massive war crisis, and failing economy. According to Alcis Storymaps, the conflict has disrupted the basic infrastructure needed to grow, sell, and transport crops as a proper resource for the country's citizens (Storymaps 2022). This lack of infrastructure means that the drought will hit the Syrian people even harder. Furthermore, the source explains that the conflict has caused many farmers to lose their confidence in growing crops because of both the risk of being bombed at some point or simply not having enough water to maintain basic agricultural needs. In another section, the source explains that some controlling factions in the war such as ISIS have been known to periodically seize important areas for water access. These can also affect farmers' access to water and agricultural quality, yielding a negative impact on the agricultural industry. From these factors, two things become clear: the war must be addressed immediately and effective water access must be established.

The first and ultimate step to addressing this problem is to directly address the human rights violations committed by dictator Bashar Al-Assad and other intergovernmental forces like Russia and Iran that have indirectly been involved. When natural disasters like droughts strike, it is known that the most vulnerable of people will take the hardest of hits. According to Environmental Health News, those with disabilities have "greater vulnerability during storms, floods, and extreme heat" (Ghenis 2018). In this scenario, Syrians living in the harsh environment of war, political instability, human rights violations, and a drought are extremely vulnerable. The United Nations has created multiple resolutions in the past regarding Syria from cease-fires to condemnations. Despite these resolutions, Syria is still war-torn and the economy has been failing for years. The peak of the war has since passed and violence has somewhat

lessened, but deaths and bombings still continue. In some portions of the country, terrorism continues as well. All this signifies is that what has been done is not enough. The UN must now look at possible removals of power or completely reworking the political system of Syria away from dictatorship. Such human rights violations committed by the regime cannot go unnoticed and warrant such severe consequences that have not yet been taken. The removal of the dictator from power and even the reworking of the system opens the door for a new start and removes someone who is clearly unqualified to lead. By first addressing the military conflict, a large roadblock in the mitigation of the Syrian droughts is reduced.

Once the initial problems of war and political instability are addressed, then the drought problem can be properly tackled. Although seemingly obvious, an effective way to manage a drought is to increase the access of water. In the case of Syria, this would mean increased irrigation canals that would bring essential water to farmers. A video by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN showcased the benefits of irrigation and canals to various farmers in Syria that were previously struggling to grow crops like wheat and barley. The farmers in the video explained how the canals were able to bring them water and drastically improve their crop management. With more wide scale canals and irrigation systems, these benefits can be spread to other farmers across Syria. By using wide scale irrigation and canals, the difficulties of the drought that come for both farmers and civilians alike can be mitigated. In this scenario, water access becomes widespread, helping mitigate the negative effects of drought and rain shortage.

Some may claim that irrigation canals alone cannot solve the drought problem and that there should be changes made to mitigate emissions regarding climate change instead. To an extent, this is true. One or two proposed solutions will not completely solve the drought problem for war-ravaged Syria and its people. In fact, the problem will almost definitely warrant further action after my proposed solutions. However, I proposed the solution of tending to the war crisis and then establishing canals afterwards because I believed that they take the most priority. From a logical standpoint, being directly caught in a military conflict or lacking resources necessary for life will kill you much faster than the warming climate or drought. Of course, this is not to say that the latter is unimportant, but rather the first must be addressed in order for the second to be properly addressed. The Sci-Fi book *Parable of the Sower* offers an effective comparison of these themes despite its fictional nature. The book follows the main character, Lauren, in a

dystopian world, emphasizing the theme of lacking basic necessities in the face of disaster. In Chapter 3, the Lauren describes the situation by saying, “The cost of water has gone up again. And I heard on the news today that more water peddlers are being killed,” (Butler 20). With water being a basic necessity, the shortage causes turmoil and violence as people have to fight or steal in order to access water. Like the world of *Parable of the Sower*, Syria lacks the needed infrastructure to appropriately deal with its droughts and provide a livelihood for the people. Thus, the military conflict in Syria must be directly addressed and wide scale irrigation must be built in order to provide a solid foundation for mitigating the droughts in Syria.

As the Syrian conflict approaches its twelfth year, it becomes more and more apparent that the presence of military conflict and lack of basic infrastructure makes the Syrian people vulnerable to natural disasters. Syria has a history of droughts with the most recent being very debilitating. This is because of the increasing temperatures, military conflicts, human rights violations, severe civilian displacement, failing economy, and lack of basic infrastructure for livelihood. It becomes apparent that to build a solid foundation for the future, the military conflict must be directly confronted by intergovernmental organizations and wide scale irrigation canals must be built to mitigate drought effects. Only then can other aspects of the drought like climate change and water conservation be addressed. In doing so, the basic infrastructure required for livelihood can slowly return, and with it the livelihoods of millions of Syrians.

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The background of the slide is a watercolor illustration. It features a field of yellow flowers with blue outlines, green grass, and a small blue butterfly in the upper left corner. The overall style is soft and artistic.

“Why So Many People Protested After George Floyd”

Angelina Nguyen

Seeds

Instructor: Carrie Jean Schroeder

English 1B

Winter 2023—Carrie Jean Schroeder

Essay #2 Assignment (250 points + 25 points for rough draft, peer review, and self-evaluation)

For your second essay, you will be writing an essay in which you will **speculate about the causes of a particular phenomenon OR trend**, essentially following the general guidelines established in Chapter 9 of the *St. Martin's Guide*. Per usual, this assignment is more specific than the one described in the *SMG*, so be sure to follow this set of assignment guidelines *and* what we discuss in class when choosing and writing about your paper topic, and **note that the term “trend” as used here doesn’t have the common meaning (popular, trendy) you may associate it with normally**; a trend is a substantial increase or decrease over time. Again, it may be helpful to review the invention strategies, methods of cueing your reader, and the ideas of dominant impression and significance, as explained in the *SMG*.

You may choose one of the following topics:

- ✓ Speculate about the causes of the popularity of **one** of the following streaming/television series (or one similar); when discussing the show’s popularity, you will not only establish how it is indeed popular, but you are asked to delve into the **deeper** reasons people want to read/see/think about the ideas presented in these shows (Think: How big and who is its audience? What needs or desires does it fulfill for its audience?):
 - *The Boys, The Watchmen, Daredevil, The Flash, Agents of Shield, Luke Cage, Smallville*, or any one other **superhero** series
 - *RuPaul’s Drag Race, The Great British Baking Show, Project Runway, Forged in Fire, Chopped, The Masked Singer, Survivor*, or any one American “reality show” with a title **competition** theme (where participants fight for some kind of “title,” money, and/or even a career opportunity in their chosen field)
 - *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia, Rick and Morty, Three Busy Debras, 30 Rock, Brooklyn 99, Veep, South Park, American Dad*, or any other one American show that **satirizes** another television phenomenon/style/show
 - Any one American **law-and-order/crime-themed** series, like *COPS, Sherlock, Bones, Law & Order*, or *CSI*
 - *Stranger Things, iZombie, Black Mirror, American Horror Story, Supernatural*, or any one similarly **spooky/horror** series
 - *The Office, Parks and Recreation, American Vandal*, or any one other **“docu-comedy” or mockumentary**
- ✓ Speculate about why home schooling has become **increasingly** popular in America (rising **trend**) over the past decades (not simply remote learning in the pandemic)
- ✓ Speculate about the causes of the general public’s apathy about the problems in the prison system or with mass incarceration in a broader sense (This **could** help with essay #3!)
- ✓ Speculate about why such a significant number of people prefer texting (over phone calls or video chat) as their method of communication with family and friends
- ✓ Speculate about why K-Pop or Korean dramas are so popular in the US right now
- ✓ Speculate about the causes of the popularity of one specific *YouTube* channel (or a Youtuber), *Instagram, TikTok*, or other social media influencer (This topic is only an option if you **didn’t** write about a similar topic for essay #1)
- ✓ Speculate about the causes of a politician’s (like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez or Donald Trump) popularity
- ✓ Speculate about why so many people protested in the streets and supported BLM following the

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- ✓ killing of George Floyd by a police officer, Derek Chauvin, in Minneapolis
- ✓ Speculate about the causes of the popularity of eSports and professional gaming
- ✓ Speculate about the causes of another phenomenon or trend of interest to you; **get approval of your topic before beginning to write** by e-mailing or visiting during office hours. Make sure that you get the official “Okay” in time to research, write, and revise. You *may* want to pick a “problem” topic that you can also write about for your third paper, which is a problem-solution essay focused on an issue related to topics discussed by Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow*, so keep that in mind.

Whichever option you select for this essay, you are required to make use of **at minimum four credible, current sources** to support your argument. When choosing research sources, be sure to consider their biases and reliability very carefully.

Write about your topic so that your explanation of the phenomenon/trend is both informative and engaging and so that the **layered** causes you assign to the phenomenon/trend are plausible, logical, and well-supported with evidence. **Be especially careful to avoid easy, obvious, or simplistic answers, and look for the hidden, deeper, underlying causes.** As always, the Guide to Writing in the *SMG* at the end of the chapter will help you immensely, so I recommend you follow the guidelines outlined there quite carefully.

Focus on providing careful, thoughtful, and analytical explanations for your reader. Make the reader understand the phenomenon/trend and its causes the same way you do by grabbing the reader's attention with an interesting opening and unique title, selecting and relating important details or anecdotes, paraphrasing other sources to support your ideas (not replacing your own ideas, and not plagiarized!), and using descriptive language, metaphors, and similes. Depending on the sentence or source, either build your citations into your sentences (adding parenthetical page numbers as needed), or cite your sources parenthetically in your essay using the MLA style guidelines as outlined in the *SMG*.

Be sure to address (acknowledge and concede/refute) the primary counterarguments which could reasonably be used to refute your causal argument—that is, what causes are not plausible enough, not logical, or not demonstrable with evidence? Organize your essay in a way that is understandable to another reader and presents a focused main point.

Your essay should be *at least* 1,750 words, which is just over 4.5 double-spaced, MLA formatted pages; no longer than 9-10 full pages, please. **Your essay is due Thursday, February 16th, before class to eLearn for plagiarism scanning AND in print, in person.** Be sure to include an MLA style works cited page (see Purdue's *OWL* or *SMG* Chapter 20 for an example of its formatting). **Any essay which does not adequately attempt to follow MLA style for the in-text citations and the works cited page will likely fail the assignment.** The final draft must be typed and double-spaced in a standard 12-point font (such as Times New Roman or Garamond), have a revealing and unique title, and use MLA formatting for borders, headers, etc. (as it is shown in the *SMG* or in Purdue's *OWL* resources).

It only took an eight-minute and forty-six second video to reignite one of the most prominent social movements in U.S. history. It only took an eight-minute and forty-six second video to inspire millions to take to the streets of their city to call for action and engage in various protests. It only took an eight-minute and forty-six second video to push lawmakers and organizations to create change in their communities. Ultimately, it was those crucial eight minutes and forty-six seconds that captured George Floyd's death at the hands of police brutality.

The Black Lives Matter movement gained large amounts of attention and support after news spread of Floyd's death, caused by officer Derek Chauvin's violent and unnecessary force. The reaction to this act of injustice would surpass the degree of social involvement seen in the United States since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, evidenced by upwards of twenty-six million people participating in the protests against police brutality in the weeks following the incident (Buchanan et al.). This increased activism was no accident. With the rapid spread of information through social media networks during a period of change and uncertainty, citizens were prepared to utilize their First Amendment rights to fight for change. Despite claims that societal pressure led to the new wave of advocacy, the rise in protest and the growing support for the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd may be most credited to the presence of graphic and undeniable video footage, the timing of the pandemic and election, and the growing morals of the American public to fight against the violence towards Black Americans.

Many acts of injustice occur daily, but a low percentage of them are captured vividly on camera. The murder of George Floyd affirms that it only takes one video to fuel a whole revolution. Witness Darnella Fraizer posted a video recording she took of the incident on Facebook and Instagram, prompting a wave of uproar and the trending of the #Black Lives Matter campaign (Herandez). Within the hour, the videos were shared through different social media outlets and news sources. According to dot.LA, videos of George Floyd's murder and Black Lives Matter content were watched over 1.4 billion times in the one-week aftermath

(Blake). While social media played a major role in rapidly taking over people's screens and sourcing new information, the actual content of the video was the driving force for the increase of awareness and activism. Not only was the video graphic and raw, but it was also clear and undeniable. Audiences were able to view an obvious act of police brutality, as a white officer kneels on an unarmed Black man's neck for a fatal amount of time while he is repeating the words "I can't breathe." In the article, "1 year later, The Video of George Floyd Has Lasting Impacts," published by NPR, University of Washington professor Mary Fan states the impressionable effects of video evidence. She explains that visuals often strike a core in the audience and allow them to see an "objective window into what actually happened" (Corley). Instead of just hearing about injustices occurring around them, which can often be debatable, Americans now have a clear understanding and undeniable proof of police brutality.

Visual evidence has had a historic track record of prompting protests. In 1955, the unlawful death of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was put on display when his mother deliberately decided to hold an open-casket funeral. Pictures of Till's disfigured body rattled communities across the nation and helped fuel passions for the civil rights movement (Nodjimbadem). Floyd's case mirrored Till's and became a modern-day example of the imperative impact of visual evidence in the face of injustice. On the other hand, other incidents of violence in the Black community, such as in the case of Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old shot by police, did not gain as much traction and protest compared to the murders of Floyd and Till possibly because of lacking video coverage. A study from *Science Advances* suggests that emotional stimuli are highly connected to the human visual system (Kragel et al.). Consequently, the presence of a triggering and graphic video on virtually every online platform was the emotional turning point and proof that many Americans needed to take to the streets.

Along with the massive spread of an emotionally evoking video, the combination of current events was also a key factor in the powerful wave of activism. The Covid-19 pandemic left many individuals unemployed and stuck in their homes. Instead of being distracted by other elements of their lives, many people were forced to confront the difficult scene and take the time to reflect on the injustices of America. According to Pew Research, the unemployment rate in the first three months of Covid peaked at around 14.6%, surpassing the highest rate of unemployment during the Great Recession (Kochhar). In a practical sense, Americans now had more time to focus on researching the Black Lives Matter movement, educating themselves

about institutional racism in law enforcement, and rallying their friends and family to participate in protests around their city. The frustration over the long-stretching pandemic could also contribute to the rising desire of many to engage in their community and join social movements. Unlike popular belief that the pandemic would encourage people to stay home, Helier Cheung from BBC News explains that the pandemic disrupted people's lifestyles and urged them to reprioritize their life to find a new normal. This turnaround in attitude prepared individuals for change and made them question which "parts of normal are no longer acceptable" (Cheung). The timing of the pandemic also fueled discussions over the systematic injustice surrounding African American communities. According to the National Academies, Covid-19 affected Black Americans disproportionately, with the mortality rate being 2.4% higher than that of whites (Frueh). The pandemic highlighted the growing disparity of health equity tied to race and poverty, which are deeply rooted in the consequences of a long-standing structure of inequality. This reflection further prompted individuals to support the Black Lives Matter movement and bring light to the list of injustices endured by African Americans. Just like the timing of the pandemic affected the turnout of protestors, the timing of the election may have also played a role in facilitating the increase of activism. Historically, social movements have pressured political candidates to address the issues within their campaigns. For example, following the Parkland School shooting in 2018, students organized the March for Our Lives campaign, which emphasized the need for gun control. A wave of new, young voters was encouraged to join the demonstrations and reignite a national conversation on gun violence, especially in the months leading up to the 2018 midterm elections that saw new gun reform laws proposed (Lopez). In 2017, at the start of Trump's presidency, America also saw the largest social protest in the #Me Too movement. Events of high emotion like these laid the foundation for a mass outcry in America and helped people realize that large protests can and often do lead to change in politics. As in the case of George Floyd, the 2020 presidential campaign around the corner made many individuals feel that the time to create change in policies was now. Educating themselves on the system of oppression in the United States, many citizens felt that protesting and creating a mass uproar would finally urge lawmakers to take action. Similarly, it would place the conversation of racial injustice at the forefront of political debates. Democrats also wished to highlight former President Trump's inadequate address of the situation to turn political battles in the coming months. Instead of strategizing to unite the nation and properly honor George Floyd after the

video gained large attention, Trump added fuel to the fire when he labeled protestors “thugs” and expressed gratitude towards the National Guard for dismantling protests (Rogers). Not only did these divisive comments raise concerns over Trump’s policies towards police brutality, but they also turned a lot of public opinion against Trump and inspired many to join the protest. Hoping to advance political agendas and create a demonstration large enough to be a main topic of debate in elections, people turned to the streets to do their part in reforming policies.

Lastly, George Floyd’s death appealed to the moral compass of Americans by invoking empathy and humanizing a statistic of police brutality. The growth of protest and rallying cry for solutions can be credited to the increased morale to create change within society after many people realized the prevalence of the issue. Floyd’s murder prompted many Americans to dive deep into other incidents of Black violence, which continued to fuel the empathetic emotions that drove them to join the protests. For example, the stories of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, two individuals unlawfully killed by police that same year, were brought to light. Americans have had enough. People began to recognize the lack of change between each case and understand that, unless they take action, the cycle will continue, and Floyd would be lost in a sea of statistics. According to the National Library of Medicine, Americans gained a sense of empathy after being aware of the ongoing issue of police brutality. Especially with the prevalent media coverage, attitudes shifted to more positive sentiments surrounding the Black community as “members of the ingroup are able to empathize with outgroups” (Nguyen et al.). Having a newfound moral responsibility to speak up for others and educate their community on systemic racism, Americans of various ethnic backgrounds turned to the streets to share Floyd’s life story and express the dire need to ensure that he is the last of a long list of victims.

Many people assume that the rise of protest and the support of the Black Lives Matter movement are attributed to societal pressure. People are simply taking to the streets and sharing informational posts online because their friends are doing it and because they feel obligated to join a movement, even when they do not necessarily care about it. Following the murder, it was common to see companies and prominent figures addressing the situation on social media, leading many to believe that the rise of activism can be credited to the bandwagon effect pressuring people to take action. While there may have been some who felt compelled to join the movement because of a herd mentality, it isn’t a main reason for the rise in protests as the vast majority of people genuinely reflected on the issue. Individuals were motivated by the urgency

of addressing the racial injustice of law enforcement, not by the prospect of being seen as an activist by their friends and family. According to the article, “The Monumental Impact of George Floyd’s Death on Black America” by NBC, individuals took more time educating themselves and their communities on the issues of police brutality, with 65% of adults stating that they did something to educate themselves in the weeks following Floyd’s murder (Garcia). Schools and organizations also took more time to have open discussions about racism, allowing people to become more aware of the injustice and what they can do to combat it. Similarly, people were genuinely interested in displaying their discontent over policing and recognized that their voice and presence at protests can extensively advance the movement. Even though societal pressure and the bandwagon effect are usual suspects when it comes to large-scale social movements, their influence did not go far following the murder of George Floyd.

Police brutality and injustices have been widely protested since the 1960s civil rights movement. Sixty years later, America is still finding itself amid a battle for racial justice. Still, it is evident that communities are capable of taking large measures to combat racism, as George Floyd’s unlawful death became a pivotal moment that urged people to use their First Amendment rights and protest for change. Coupled with the widely circulated video, the timing of the pandemic and election, and the growing morale to create change, many Americans were simply fed up over the recurrence of violence in Black communities. The mass protest and involvement were one of the largest turnouts in American history, and it inspired a global movement that encouraged police reform laws to be passed. Additionally, the emergence of social media as a catalyst for spreading valuable information and rallying new supporters became critical in advancing the social movement. George Floyd’s case showed that progress in fighting police brutality and systemic racism is achievable. Hopefully, it doesn’t take another video of blatant police brutality to bring about change again.

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“The Beauty of Elliot Smith’s
Either/Or”

Adamandia Pegadiotes

Seeds

Instructor: Matthew Bond

ESSAY 2—Writing a Review

You can choose to write a film, album, book, restaurant, or company review. The point is to make an argument about the subject's qualities, its merits and shortcomings. Avoiding simply declaring that our subject is "good" or "bad," or that you "like" or "don't like" it, you instead will make an argument about what the subject *does* or *offers* to the viewer, listener, reader, or consumer.

For a book or film review, you should focus on the argument and the narrative structure. You might want to look at rhetorical features like how the book/film evokes logos, ethos, and pathos. You will want to give enough summary to make your review understandable to a reader who hasn't read the book or seen the film, but don't prioritize developing an overlong synopsis. For an album, you might look at things like production value, lyrics, song structure, and how the album contributes to a genre and develops the artist's own career. For a restaurant review, you can choose to discuss metrics such as quality of food, quality of service, cost/value, ambiance/décor. For a company, aside from assessing the quality and value of its product, you might think about how well it announces and lives up to its mission statement and vision considering its social, cultural, and environmental impact.

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1—You adequately entertain some of the most obvious counterarguments and objections.

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No [0] Kind of [.5] Perfectly [1]

Did you post a full-length rough draft **on time** and complete the **peer review workshop**? Did you give useful feedback to three peers per my directions?

No [0] You posted your work but did not review others [.5] You completed both aspects of peer review [1]

Before I lay on my bed to listen to an album a friend recommended, I turn off all the lights in the room, put my headphones on, and press the play button on my phone. I close my eyes, and I instantly hear the first beat make its way into my ears. The emotions that were once stagnant and deep are released. In just those thirty-six minutes and fifty-eight seconds, I felt all the feelings an album could possibly reveal. That was my introduction to Elliott Smith and his album *Either/Or*. This album transcends the “commercial” sounds of the 90s and brings listeners a raw and emotional gift. The stringy acoustic guitar, combined with the silky and raw vocals, creates an intimate sound throughout the album. The most significant part of Elliott Smith’s album is in his lyrics, which can move anybody who listens to them. His music, overall, has inspired and influenced many people, including the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Phoebe Bridgers, and Frank Ocean, to name a few.

To start, let’s look at Elliott Smith's journey to becoming the artist we know today. Elliott Smith began his music career at just fourteen when he moved to Portland, Oregon. His main instrument was the guitar, but he also played the piano, bass, drums, and harmonica. When he graduated college in 1991, he formed the indie rock band, Heatmiser. The music from the band features a more aggressive style that is fused with grunge and “Smith’s melancholy-pop sensibilities” (Donelson). During the band, he worked on his own music and released multiple solo demos to the label Cavity Search Records, which his girlfriend at the time convinced him to send. After he signed to the label, he released his first full solo album, *Roman Candle*, in 1994. As Marcy Donelson states in her article “Elliott Smith Biography,” “It stood in sharp contrast to the scene’s alternative rock that was popular upon its release in 1994.” The attention this record got, including some of his other demos, received much more popularity than the band, so eventually, Heatmiser disbanded in 1996. However, Smith continued to develop as a songwriter and released his transitional “entirely self-recorded third solo LP, *Either/Or*, arriv[ing] in early 1997.” This record features an original signature sound with traces of his former band's influence. Although there were more albums to come from Elliott Smith, this was widely

regarded as his best work. The lyrics are so personal and vulnerable to Elliott Smith that it feels like he is speaking to you directly from his diary.

Trying to dissect the exact meaning of Elliott Smith's work is challenging as many of them are still up for interpretation. Some people misunderstand that several experiences are a character Smith has in mind and are not entirely nonfiction. Still, most songs are about the struggles of drugs, alcoholism, relationships, and depression. In particular, *Either/Or*, with "its title [being] taken from a Søren Kierkegaard book of the same name," sharply crafts words in a brutally honest manner (Donelson). The title's meaning refers to the contrast between one's subjective experience and an objective or ethicality of a being. The album's sound can be described as folk, with the main instrument being the acoustic guitar, but it touches on other genres as well, such as indie rock and lo-fi. The first song, "Speed Trials," sets off a lo-fi sound to flawlessly begin the album with a jarring noise: a thump followed by a gentle hiss. The chorus, "It's just a brief smile crossing your face/ Running speed trials all over the place," refers to drugs and how they make you happy for a moment, but the same problems still reoccur shortly after becoming sober. He is desperately running away from his responsibilities and distracting himself from his loneliness. One of the more confusing songs written by Smith, "Between the Bars," has many wondering about the exact meaning. Some interpret the song as a love song, but as Matt LeMay, a Pitchfork reviewer, says, "It's not a love song, exactly, and it's not about addiction, exactly." It is about how "protecting somebody you love turns into the need to control the person." Smith's songwriting ability shines through as he shows his emotional complexity and negativity towards an experience. The verse, "Drink up one more time, and I'll make you mine/ Keep you apart, deep in my heart/ Separate from the rest, where I like you the best," appears towards the end of the song and follows the pessimistic view of love and how intoxicating it can be.

The album also features some of Smith's electric riff abilities with the song "Cupid's Trick" before it is all ended with a solo acoustically fingerpicked song, "Say Yes." This last song, which happens to be my favorite, is arguably his most perfect. The start, "I'm in love with the world/ Through the eyes of a girl/ Who's still around the morning after," is an excellent opener for the song as his voice slowly breaks when he sings it. "Say Yes" happens to be Elliott Smith's more optimistic song about breaking up with someone and realizing how much you love them. Even though it is labeled as a more "optimistic" song, it still makes listeners emotional as

he yearns for his lover back. *Either/Or* might not be for everyone, as the main focus of each song is its songwriting, but it is an overall sublime listen. The songs come together pleasantly with topics that ache, but are generally universal and relatable to all. As a whole, the album marked a proper beginning to Elliott Smith's legendary career.

After the release of *Either/Or*, Smith got many opportunities to showcase his magical talent to the public. Most notably, "Portland filmmaker Gus Van Sant had asked to use Elliott Smith's songs in the film *Good Will Hunting*" (Stewart). Additionally, Smith performed his song "Miss Misery" on the Late Night Show with Conan O'Brien in 1998, his television debut. The song was nominated for an "Academy Award for best original song in 1997" but would eventually lose to "Celine Dion's 'Titanic' theme" (Stewart). More recently, artists such as Frank Ocean have shown respect towards the artist, like on the album *Blonde* by sampling his song "A Fond Farewell" on "Seigfried." Another new artist on the rise, with over eight million listeners currently on Spotify, Phoebe Bridgers, has previously said, "He's like the Beatles to me." She has even covered "Elliott live on several occasions" including the songs "Whatever" and "Say Yes" (Gonzalez). Many influential people have praised Elliott Smith as a superb songwriter and a brilliant guitarist. He paved the way for indie folk artists and lyricists alike. Be that as it may, Smith's fame was not healthy for him from the start.

As a result of the music released by Elliott Smith, the public's perception of him became skewed. He had come to hate the image of being seen as the "sad guy" for his music by people and has told the publication, Los Angeles Times, "I don't feel any sadder than anybody else I know" and "I'm happy some of the time, and some of the time I'm not" (Smith). He has released many songs about how he did not like the fame he had gotten, including one on *Either/Or*, titled "Pictures of Me." Smith details how our lives are defined by the image created for us by others, and it shouldn't, so he refused to be seen as a sad guy with sad music. The predisposed interpretation of Smith might have been right, though, as his friends "were so worried about Smith's drinking and talk of obliteration they arranged a substance-abuse intervention" (Smith). Although Smith did not like the image being put forth of him, the majority of his songs sound melancholic and deal with topics of depression. So the public, in the end, might have been right about him all along.

Unfortunately, Elliott Smith passed away on October 21, 2003, in a controversial and inconclusive way that has still not been determined. Though he no longer makes music, his

music continues to touch many people's hearts. The album *Either/Or*, specifically, carries so much depth in his life, and hopefully, people have come to understand him more after listening. The album has laid out the many struggles of relationships, drugs, and depression in just thirty-six minutes and fifty-eight seconds. The beauty it holds is exceptional and can not be recreated. Even if we can never get an album like this again, we can still play it repeatedly, with each listen different than the one before.

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“Solutions for Ending Homelessness”

Breanna Pham

Seeds

Instructor: Liza Wemakor

❖ **Essay 2: Proposing A Solution (1,500 words / 5 pages) – 25%**

Drawing upon lessons from *SMG* “Chapter 7 | Proposing a Solution,” write an essay that identifies a problem or issue in the world and proposes possible solutions to it. Why is this issue a cause for concern, and what steps can individuals and/or collectives take to resolve it?

Finding solutions for ending the homeless crisis has been a conversation for years, yet as of 2023 the United States still has about 582,462 unhoused individuals living on the streets, according to Security.org, a data research company. Some people who have the privilege of sleeping in a warm bed in the comfort of their own home make up false assumptions about these individuals. Those struggling with homelessness are often ridiculed with names like “bum” or “hobo”. A question I always hear being asked ignorantly is, “why don’t they just find a job?” The reality is, people dealing with this misfortune are unlikely to be accepted to job positions that they are more than qualified for due to their limited access to basic necessities. Since they face various issues like having no permanent home address, no phone number to be contacted with, or no bathroom to help them maintain their hygiene, it can be difficult for these individuals to secure a job. Without any sources of income, it is very hard to live in the U.S. without suffering the consequences.

According to a non profit-organization called Lifebridge Northshore, the top reasons for homelessness are substance abuse, domestic abuse, and expensive living costs. Many people who are presently homeless are burdened by their past trauma. However, tackling the original problem that caused this suffering can improve their living situation for good. In order to fix the homelessness crisis, there needs to be more affordable housing, fair employment opportunities, therapy programs, and a government and community that is willing to improve the situations of those in need.

Recently, homes have become so expensive that a person living in the U.S. would need to earn around “...\$76,000 to consider comfortably purchasing a home”, according to data conducted by Home Sweet Home, an organization that focuses on U.S. housing prices. This threshold is even higher in cities like my hometown of San Jose, California, the most expensive city in the country. As claimed by Fox News, a salary of \$330.76K is needed to comfortably buy a home there. This is insane knowing the minimum wage in that area is only \$17.00 an hour. I never understood how an individual dealing with homelessness could possibly buy a house, let alone one full meal for themselves without a job. As I grew up, my curiosity went beyond my

own city and I started to worry about the rest of the cities whose people had to deal with the same problem.

If employers continue to hire people based on whether or not they have a home, the least the government could do is provide one of the “16 million housing units” that are available in the U.S. to those who need it. From research and data by Self, a financial company that also provides housing information, there are “33 empty properties for each homeless person in the U.S.” I will never understand why those empty houses couldn’t be occupied over the streets where millions of people are suffering every day.

Although the United States does provide a small amount of housing for people dealing with homelessness, it’s simply not enough. An article by Street Sense Media claimed that a man waited 15 years on D.C.’s housing waitlist which had “58,000 people ahead of him” during that time. Some governments use the ‘housing first’ approach which is the act of putting homeless people in unconditional housing. But, this seems a bit contradictory if there aren’t even enough homes to begin with.

Shelters that allow people to stay for as little as 3-5 days is an alternative that is assumed to be enough to advance and benefit a person’s life permanently. These temporary shelters can be helpful but can also be “dangerous and crowded and just all around not healthy places to be”, says Belle Ren, a woman who wrote an article about previously dealing with homelessness for months. Nothing will compare to a home where someone can sleep peacefully without the fear and horror of living in the streets.

Unfortunately, those who are willing to obtain a job to work for a home, or even something to eat, are being neglected. An article by Human Impact explains some reasons why homeless people “can’t just go get a job”: limited access to showers and clothing (most employers require their workers to be presentable and groomed), no reliable transportation or contact information, and addiction to substances. Individuals dealing with homelessness don’t have the privilege to shower when they want, call or pick up the phone at their own convenience, have their own vehicle to drive, or get therapy for their traumatic cycle of substance abuse. I could not imagine the hopeless and dispirited feeling someone would experience when they realize employers of big corporations or even small businesses are discriminating against them for circumstances out of their control.

To stop homelessness as a whole, changes need to be made. Fair employment opportunities need to be implemented and practiced. Kylyssa Shay, an author who formerly faced homelessness says that employers need to stop overshadowing the "...applicant's education, skills and years of experience" because of their living conditions. She also reminds the audience that a big part of unfair employment is the perception that "all homeless people are drug-addicted criminals" which is not true. This perception is a greater barrier to these individuals' chances of employment than the actual drug is.

With that being said, providing more therapy and rehabilitation programs will decrease the stigma that employers have against homeless people as well as benefit those who are actually dealing with substance abuse. In the academic article, "Homelessness and Substance Abuse: Which Comes First?", the author claims that "involvement with drugs stems from their initiation or socialization into the homeless subculture". He also includes that "drug use emerges as a means of coping with the uncertainty, instability, and chaotic conditions that characterize their [homeless people's] day-to-day lives". So, whether the substance abuse started before or after homelessness, drug use plays a big part in the prevalence of this crisis.

Increasing the number of therapy programs to assist homeless people who are dealing with substance abuse will motivate them to stop using. In the article, "Counseling and Substance Use Disorders", the author writes that counseling "helps you escape cravings and learn to manage what life throws at you without drugs or alcohol". But, therapy is not limited to people only dealing with substance abuse. Those who are victims of domestic abuse, one of the top reasons for homelessness, also benefit from it. The academic journal, "Counselling Skills for Working with Trauma" says that this type of trauma causes a range of symptoms such as "dissociation" or an "alteration in [one's] sense of self".

From personally dealing with dissociation before, when I have these episodes, I feel very unmotivated and the life around me seems unreal. I am privileged enough to get therapy and it has motivated me to achieve my goals and live in the present. It hurts me knowing those who are less fortunate don't get the same opportunity. Once access to affordable housing and therapy becomes easily obtainable, the homeless population should start to decrease and more people will start to see their self-worth.

But, this can't happen without the help of our communities and governments. Unfortunately, many communities neglect the idea of housing the homeless because they fear

that there will be an increase in litter, crime, or violence. This happens so often that the acronym 'NIMBY' (Not In My Backyard) was created to express residents' unwillingness to accept housing units for homeless people or even small shelters in their local area.

There are many incidents where residents fight back against the new changes that are meant to aid people dealing with homelessness. For example, a church in Riverside, California wanted to open "...housing for low-income or homeless residents on their property", but the residents nearby "pushed back hard" according to the article, "Why haven't we solved homelessness in California?". They even went as far as creating signs that said "no homeless shelters in our neighborhood". How could homeless communities even have a chance at living a better life if privileged homeowners won't give them a chance to?

Our communities aren't the only barriers that homeless people have to face. Although governments can be helpful, sometimes they are the biggest reason why people experiencing misfortune encounter situations that feed into their suffering. An example would be the implementation of anti-homeless architecture, also known as hostile architecture. In the academic journal, "Regulating Government Agencies & Contractors: Banning the Use of 'Hostile Architecture' Through A City-Wide Ordinance", when cities have benches with spikes on them, or "...boulders being placed under city overpasses", it is a way to "...eliminate use of public spaces by those who are unhoused". Governments are so worried about their parks and city streets being occupied by homeless people but refuse to allow more places where these individuals can actually live.

In order to make a difference within the homeless community, people who have the privilege of never worrying about their next meal, or where they're sleeping next should have an open mind and heart for those who need it most. Increasing the number of housing or therapy programs isn't going to solve homelessness by itself. Giving hope that one day people dealing with homelessness will be seen as equals to those who are not is the key. With the help of our communities and governments, creating spaces and opportunities to heal the mental and physical health of those who are suffering is possible. The issue isn't about solving the homeless crisis, it is about wanting to.

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“Anakin’s Arch”

Jacob Smith

Seeds

Instructor: Matthew Bond

ESSAY 2—Writing a Review

You can choose to write a film, album, book, restaurant, or company review. The point is to make an argument about the subject's qualities, its merits and shortcomings. Avoiding simply declaring that our subject is "good" or "bad," or that you "like" or "don't like" it, you instead will make an argument about what the subject *does* or *offers* to the viewer, listener, reader, or consumer.

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No [0] Kind of [.5] Perfectly [1]

Did you post a full-length rough draft **on time** and complete the **peer review workshop**? Did you give useful feedback to three peers per my directions?

No [0] You posted your work but did not review others [.5] You completed both aspects of peer review [1]

Anakin Skywalker's journey to the dark side is a seminal moment in the Star Wars franchise. The prequel trilogy of *The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, and *Revenge of the Sith*, released between 1999 and 2005, showcases this journey in detail, illuminating the complex and nuanced motivations that drive Anakin to embrace the power of the dark side. While many elements of this story contribute to its success, one of the most critical components is the portrayal of Anakin Skywalker by the actor Hayden Christensen. Through his performance, Christensen elevates the character of Anakin, bringing depth and nuance to the story that would not have been possible otherwise. Some viewers and critics believe Christensen portrayed an upcoming Darth Vader poorly, and others believe it was just a poor script. I never felt that the script in *Attack of the Clones* was terrible, but in this essay, I will focus on proving why Hayden Christensen made a great Anakin Skywalker.

Star Wars is a multimedia franchise that starts "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away." The franchise starts with a farm boy Luke Skywalker who is thrust into a galaxy when he answers the distress call from Princess Leia. This launches Luke into a daring mission to rescue Princess Leia from Darth Vader and the Empire. Darth Vader is the ultimate villain, a master Jedi who also learned the way of the dark side. You may ask, what is a Jedi? The Jedi knights have been the guardians of peace and justice for the galactic republic for one thousand generations. Once Darth Vader became a master Jedi, he mastered the dark side. This made him the most powerful being in the galaxy. Nevertheless, before he became Darth Vader, he was once Anakin Skywalker. Anakin Skywalker was thought to be the chosen one. The Jedi take Anakin as their Padawan, and he quickly becomes a key player in the battles against the Trade Federation. Through his journey, the audience is introduced to a character who is compassionate, kind, and has a strong sense of justice. He was the padawan or—mentee—of Obi-wan Kenobi. Obi-wan taught Anakin everything he could about the force and the ways of the Jedi. Unfortunately, Anakin became close friends with Senator Palpatine, who was secretly the head of the evil sith. Palpatine taught Anakin to think for himself and the ways of the force. Anakin became powerful and disagreed with the ways of the Jedi and their political beliefs, ultimately

wanting to have power of his own where he could rule. He took the role of Darth Vader and became the villain we all know today.

Hayden Christensen nailed the role of Anakin Skywalker. He gave us an unpredictable padawan, where we never knew his next move. A Star Wars fan from Quora stated, "Hayden Christensen is not a great actor. But he is a competent one, the Prequels notwithstanding. He just wasn't up to the task of playing that heavy of a role. But even if he had been, there's no guarantee that his performance would have been any better." I'm afraid I have to disagree with this statement because Christensen perfectly portrays Anakin as an immature, unpredictable, disobeying padawan and honest lover. When Anakin was sent on a mission to watch senator Padmé, he confessed his love for her. They reminisce about the old times they had. Anakin flirts with Padmé by saying he does not like sand because it is "coarse, rough and irritating," and then proceeds to say, "Here everything is soft and smooth." He tells her this as he rubs her hand and bites his lip. He told Padmé he had thought about her every day for the last ten years. The way Anakin stared into Padmé's eyes showed a passionate lover, and I believe Christensen did a great job demonstrating that. Not only was Hayden Christensen prepared for the role, but he was also the perfect fit.

Namarati Joshi, a Tomatometer-critic, who is also the 2004 winner of Best Film Critic, states, "The problem is not entirely Christensen's fault, however; Lucas has written Anakin so that he isn't likable in the least. He's a terrible student; he whines incessantly; he's impatient, disobedient, sarcastic, and prone to emotional outbursts. He holds an unjustified animosity toward Obi-Wan for holding him back." I disagree with the idea that Christensen is even part of the problem. The script of Anakin being a terrible student, constantly whining, impatient, disobedient, sarcastic, and emotional is the perfect concoction to create a villain. Watching Anakin in *Attack of the Clones*, he is very unpredictable. Christensen did a great job portraying Anakin as a ticking time bomb filled with emotion that would randomly erupt. Anakin is all over the place with emotion, whether he is showering Padmé with love, expressing his frustration to Obi-Wan, killing Jedi students, or killing a village of Tusken Raiders. Through these events, Christensen gave us an excellent backstory and eventual uprising for a great villain. The portrayal of this journey by Hayden Christensen is one of the most significant strengths of the prequel trilogy. Christensen brings a sense of nuance to the character of Anakin that is essential to the story's success. Unlike other villains in the Star Wars franchise, Darth Vader is not simply

a one-dimensional evil character. Instead, he is a complex and nuanced character, driven by fear, anger, and a sense of loss. Christensen's performance captures this complexity, making the character of Darth Vader a relatable and memorable one. Through his performance, Christensen humanizes the character, making the audience understand and even sympathize with Anakin's motivations, even as his actions repel them.

Matt Hudson, a movie critic, states, "Anakin's wooing of Padmé is incredible, if you like it creepy—he looks at her as if he is cooking up the perfect murder, uses corny dialogue to get the girl and constantly whines in front of her. I believe the script showed the immaturity and rugged individualism in Anakin Skywalker." I agree with Hudson because Anakin's wooing of Padmé is a central aspect of the prequel trilogy's plot, and it is portrayed in a way that can be seen as both intriguing and unsettling. Anakin's infatuation with Padmé is depicted as intense and obsessive, which can appear creepy to some viewers. In the films, Anakin is shown looking at Padmé with a longing gaze, using cheesy and overly romantic dialogue, and engaging in behaviors that can be seen as possessive or controlling. These aspects of Anakin's behavior can be unsettling and may give the impression that he is not mentally stable. Christensen took a personal role in his play as Anakin. Anakin's behavior towards Padmé is a reflection of his thunderous inner turmoil, which stems from his traumatic childhood, his struggle with the dark side of the force, and his desire to be with Padmé despite the Jedi Order's rules against attachment.

Rob Gonzalves, a Tomatometer-approved movie critic, challenged the idea of Hayden Christensen being a good Anakin Skywalker. Gonzalves states, "to put it bluntly, terrible — with his flat, uncomprehending delivery, he comes across like the worst actor in a high-school play, whom everyone indulges because he's also the star quarterback." Despite this pressure, Christensen was able to bring depth and nuance to his portrayal of Anakin, conveying the character's true pain and conflicting emotions in a convincing and engaging way. Christensen's performance was integral to the storytelling of the prequels. Anakin's transformation from a young Jedi apprentice to the ruthless Darth Vader is a central theme of the prequel trilogy, and Christensen's portrayal of the character played a key role in bringing this transformation to life on screen. Christensen was far from "flat" in his performance as Anakin. Christensen did an amazing job displaying Anakin's pain during his fight with Obi-Wan Kenobi. At the end of *Attack of the Clones*, Obi-Wan tries to stop Anakin from joining the dark side. Obi-Wan went to

speak to Anakin, and when he got there, the ship they were on started to fall apart from the surrounding lava. They leap from on top of droids to rocks and other parts of the falling debris as the ship falls during a battle of words and lightsabers. Anakin and Obi-Wan are face to face with lava surrounding them as Anakin says, "I should've known the Jedi were plotting to take over." Obi-Wan responded, "Anakin, Chancellor Palpatine is evil!" Anakin responds, "From my point of view, the Jedi are evil." Obi-Wan then says, "Well then you are lost!" From this point, we can see the emptiness and evilness in Anakin's eyes. Christensen did a great job showing Anakin's emotions during this altercation. There is emotion in every word being said. Anakin finally says, "This is the end for you master." That scene gives me chills as you can see the seriousness and built-up emotion for this fight. Christensen was able to convey the character's gradual descent into darkness, capturing both the tragedy and the horror of Anakin's fall from grace.

In conclusion, the portrayal of Anakin Skywalker by Hayden Christensen in the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy was a critical component of the character's journey to becoming Darth Vader. Christensen's performance elevated the character, bringing depth and nuance to the story that would not have been possible otherwise. While some viewers and critics may attribute the character's unlikability to Christensen's acting, the script portrayed Anakin as a terrible student, whiny, impatient, disobedient, and sarcastic student. Nevertheless, Christensen's portrayal of an unpredictable and emotional padawan created a relatable and memorable villain in the Star Wars franchise. The performance humanizes the character, making the audience understand and even sympathize with Anakin's motivations while still repelling them with his actions. In short, Hayden Christensen's portrayal of Anakin Skywalker in the prequel trilogy played a significant role in the story's success and the creation of one of the most iconic villains in cinematic history.

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[trilogy](https://www.quora.com/Why-was-Hayden-Christensen-so-awful-in-the-Star-Wars-prequel-trilogy)



**“Celebrities as the
Reinforcing Arm of
Capitalism”**

Elani Carmona

Seeds

Instructor: Theresa Lee

Essay 1: Class

Essay must be handed in via eLearn as a Word attachment **before 6pm Feb 7th, 2023**. (If an error or malfunction occurs during eLearn upload, then email the essay as a Word attachment to theresa.lee@ucr.edu before the deadline.)

Essay should be:

- 1500-1700 words (excluding the Works Cited page)
- MLA style with at least **two sources** in the Works Cited page
- Times New Roman 12pt font, 1" margins, double-spaced
- Saved in the following file format: LastnameFirstname_Essay1.doc

*Directions: Write an argumentative essay in which you defend a thesis statement that responds to **one** of the following:*

1. Michael Parenti writes, "The entertainment media present working people not only as unlettered and uncouth but also as less desirable and less moral than other people. Conversely, virtue is more likely to be ascribed to those characters whose speech and appearance are soundly middle- or upper-middle class" (507). Do you think this is true? In entertainment, do the working classes represent vice while the upper classes represent virtue?
2. Is George Packer correct in his assessment of celebrities in his essay, "Celebrating Inequality"? Do celebrities symbolize decadence, mindlessness, and impossible dreams? Or are celebrities a symbol that the American dream and social mobility are real and achievable?
3. Consider Henry Barnes' article, "Being working class makes you happy – according to Disney." What messages do you think Disney sends to its viewers through its depictions of poverty and wealth?
4. Free topic: Choose an aspect from at least one of the following to discuss in an argumentative essay:
 - a. Michael Parenti's "Class and Virtue"
 - b. George Packer's "Celebrating Inequality"
 - c. Henry Barnes' "Being working class makes you happy – according to Disney"

Throughout history, the specifications under which celebrity status is granted have shifted—from celebrities in the early 1900’s being almost exclusively actors and musicians, to the modern celebrity including virtually anyone regardless of field or profession. With the definition of celebrityhood constantly evolving, so too has their reach. Historically, the cultural centrality of celebrities has ebbed and flowed, but since the late 20th century, their wealth and status have become increasingly influential in our lives and institutions. The timeline of this growth in power is no mere coincidence and is, instead, a reflection of the material conditions of modern society. As class inequality wanes and economic prosperity becomes more widespread, the centrality of celebrities lessens; conversely, “when the gap between the rich and the poor yawns ever wider, celebrities loom larger on the social horizon” (Packer 86). Thus, capitalism and its dogma—the tenets of which include individualism, meritocratic values, and economic expansionism¹—continue to remain relevant to these conversations. Such involvement proves contemporary celebrity culture goes beyond the superficial—their egregious amounts of wealth and power function as a means of maintaining class stratifications and reinforcing capitalist ideology.

The ideological reinforcement provided by celebrities propagates the paragon of Western meritocratic individualism—the American dream. The core foundations of this concept include the *laissez faire* attitude that one’s financial wellbeing is almost entirely a result of individual choices and personal failings, rather than any social problems. As these individualistic beliefs popularized, so too did the “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentality—a key component of the American dream. As capitalism lays waste to nearly every aspect of our lives, every choice we make (be it personal or otherwise) must be calculated “in terms of [how our] human capital value [is] being enhanced or depreciated” (Abdelfatah and Arablouei). The unhealthy economization of our personal lives that is an inherent necessity of capitalism threatens to be its own undoing by intensifying class tensions and riling up members of the exploited working

¹ Economic expansionism can be defined as an unstoppable form of economic conquest, relentlessly pursuing more capital.

class. It is in this context that celebrities function as the saving grace of capitalist interests—providing an unattainable end goal of wealth and success that “dangles before us the myth that in America, anything is possible” (Packer 88).

By presenting their own economic prosperity as motivation for a burned-out working class, celebrities aid in kickstarting the labor market and by doing so, protect the profits of the bourgeoisie and power elites³. Intentional or not, celebrities masquerade themselves as false proof that the American dream is achievable— “[pulling] people in with the promise that...[they] too can climb [their] way up to the top, except there is no top...[they] never get off this wheel” (Abdelfatah and Arablouei). The harmful promotion of the American dream denies the myth of meritocracy, when the reality for most Americans is a near non-existence of social class mobility, with Millennials only having a projected 45% chance of out earning their parents (Lu). With a Gini coefficient⁴ of 0.434 and proof of a deepening of wealth inequality⁵, there can be no doubt that the American dream is dead—another “victim of the calcification of a class system that is nearly hereditary”—and yet, affluent celebrities continue to mock the working class, touting the American dream’s corpse around like a Black Mirror parody of Weekend at Bernie’s (Packer 88).

Though celebrity influence on cultural attitudes towards the uniquely American ideologies of meritocracy and individualism is quite significant, their economic reach is, arguably, far greater. Their assertion of their wealth advances their status as capitalists, and in doing so, they epitomize the concept of economic expansionism that is key to the preservation of capitalism. While celebrities of old had a tendency to remain within the familiar bounds of their profession, the expectations for the modern-day celebrity have evolved to include the “commodification of reputation” (Kurzman). In utilizing their fame to extend their economic reach, they reduce themselves to mascots of consumerism—glorified salesmen hoping to commercialize their own likeness and personhood. The very nature of being a celebrity has become a process of “[evolving] into a persona, then a brand, then an empire” fueled by the

³ A term coined by sociologist C. Wright Mills that describes a small group of people who possess a disproportionately large amount of control or influence over such things as society, politics, wealth, etc.

⁴ “The Gini coefficient is a statistical measure of economic inequality. It ranges between 0 and 1, with 0 representing perfect equality and 1 representing perfect inequality” (Lu).

⁵ “The most recent study...finds that in contemporary market economies, the rate of return on investment frequently outstrips overall growth. If that discrepancy persists, the wealth held by owners of capital will increase far more rapidly than other kinds of earnings” (Jahan and Mahmud).

“business imperative of grow or die”—a morbid but accurate reflection of the shift in focus to what products celebrities represent as opposed to their individuality (Packer 87).

The successful expansion of their economic portfolio and accumulation of capital relies on the “influence that the celebrity has on their audience” as well as their ability to effectively manipulate their target demographics (Mostashari). Their undeniably significant presence in the markets is due, in part, to the subconscious belief held by consumers that purchasing from celebrity backed/owned brands “will allow them to emulate the celebrity’s desired traits” (Okoli). Not only does the active encouragement of and participation in consumerist culture reinforce profit-driven ideals, but it also solidifies their status as wealthy capitalists should their pop culture relevancy fade or diminish altogether. In placing emphasis on creating an enduringly profitable “empire”, the modern celebrity perpetuates the longstanding and ever insatiable greed of capitalism.

Similar to their involvement in consumerism, celebrities wield their wealth as a weapon, unrelenting in the efforts to commodify our institutions for their socioeconomic benefit. The increasingly normalized domination of these high-ranking socialites “transgresses boundaries by substituting celebrity for institutions”—an encroachment which functions solely as a means of maintaining existing class stratification via the protection of ruling class interests (Packer 87). Acting as agents of capitalism, celebrities use their status to “generate enormous economic benefits and lay claim to certain legal privileges” whether through overt methods of influence or discreet involvement in political affairs (Kurzman).

In fundamental institutions such as public education, celebrity meddling is not uncommon, with famous individuals such as George Clooney, LeBron James, and Kanye West even starting their own schools. Other celebrities settle for simply donating to educational programs, as is the case with Mark Zuckerberg’s \$100 million grant gifted to the school district of Newark, NJ—a majority of which was later revealed to have been allocated for contracts, charter schools, and consultants (“Why Billionaires Won’t Save Us”). Celebrity contributions to public education do not occur within a vacuum; these acts of “charity” can act as reputation cleansers for celebrities with a besmirched name or as a means of controlling curriculum with little to no oversight (i.e., Donda Academy⁶). Such actions are made without the consideration of

⁶ Kanye West’s unaccredited private Christian school whose academic program is shrouded in mystery and rife with NDAs.

any other opinions save for that of the elites subsidizing these programs—an abuse of power that only benefits members of the ruling class.

The protection of these interests extends to the realm of politics, where celebrity involvement is not an unfamiliar phenomenon—with the presidency of Donald Trump and Caitlyn Jenner’s gubernatorial bid serving as more recent examples. As infamously hectic as the mixture of fame and politics have proven to be in the past, a significant number of Americans continue to believe that celebrities have the potential to be efficient politicians⁷, often citing the reason that political outsiders are more qualified and less “tainted” than incumbent bureaucrats. The popularity of celebrities in politics is an unsurprising result of growing dissatisfaction with the overall quality of life in conjunction with a “larger trend of distrust in American government”—the very same conditions many political scientists attribute to the rise of populist Trumpian rhetoric (Pandey). The usurpation of our most precious institutions poses a threat to the preservation of democratic ideals and the mitigation of harm caused by the innate inequality of capitalism.

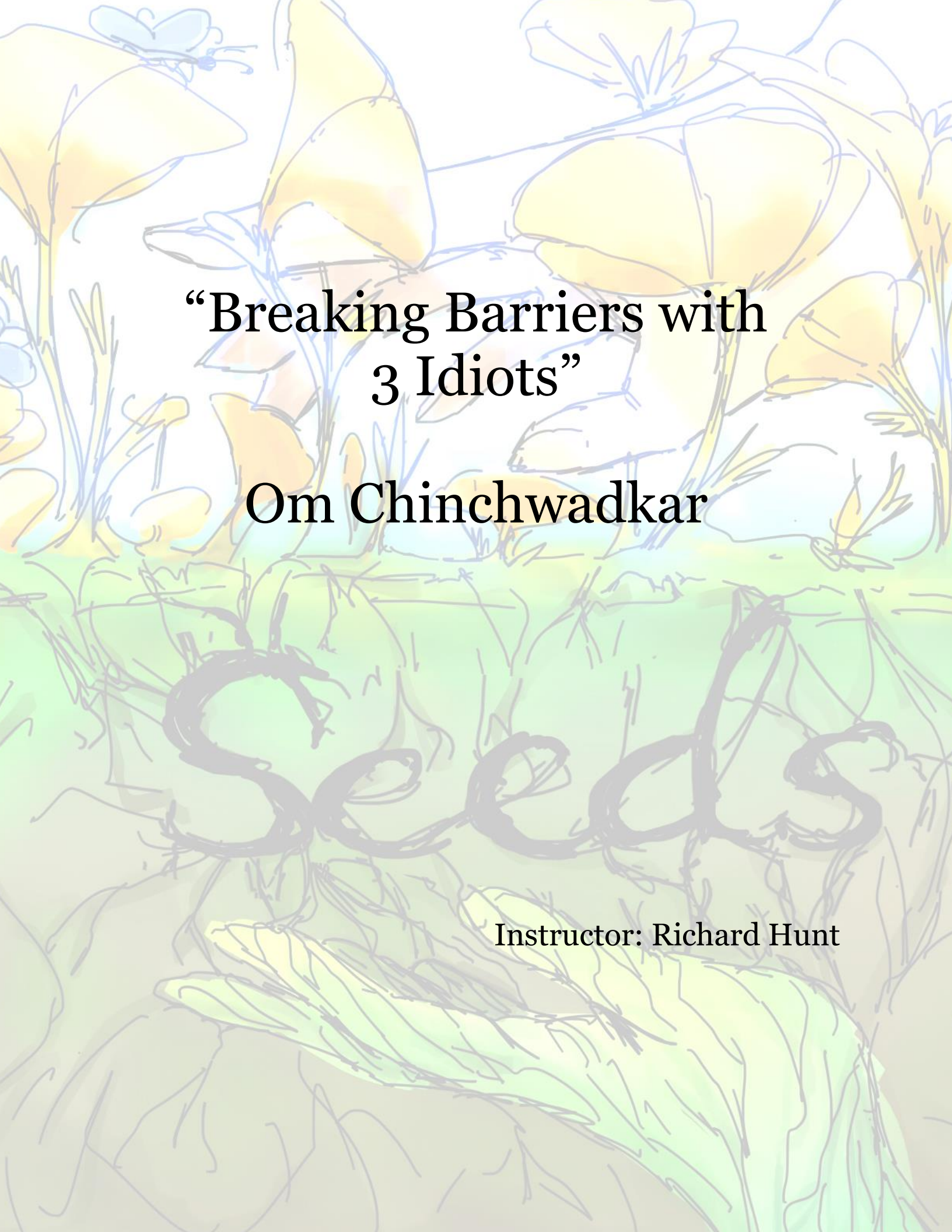
As revered and idolized as celebrities may be, the platforms their wealth affords as well as the monumentalized status we award them with deserve to be criticized and even discouraged. In times, like now, that are rife with a growing wealth disparity, it becomes progressively clearer that they are both active contributors to and beneficiaries of the immobility of our class system—their status maintained only “through the exploitation of economic benefits” (Kurzman). By propelling their interests forward by means of accumulated capital and of the seized power of institutions, celebrities uphold class stratifications at the expense of the socioeconomic status of the working class. In the wake of the American dream’s death, celebrities stand, smoking gun in hand, confounded by whoever could have done such a thing—a cruel reminder of their role as the reinforcing arm of capitalism.

⁷ A 2021 Piplsay survey reported that 63% of Americans believe celebrities can make good politicians “with the right attitude and support staff” (Pandey).

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**“Breaking Barriers with
3 Idiots”**

Om Chinchwadkar

Seeds

Instructor: Richard Hunt

Essay #3 Prompt: Reading Film

In this essay, our aim remains to craft a compelling argument about the ways that pop cultural texts generate meaning within and through specific systems of cultural values.

Your primary task in this essay is as follows:

- Choose a film that you find engaging and that you're willing to get to know really well
- Advance an argument about *what* and *how* the film means to you; strong analysis will include discussion of how those meanings are situated within broader systems of cultural values
- Your argument must be *thesis driven*. In other words, make a strong, focused, debatable claim about the film, and then provide compelling evidence designed to persuade your reader to see it your way
- You don't need to have "right answers." You just need to craft compelling arguments

Questions and ideas for constructing your analysis:

- What seems to be the film's *dominant* (not "intended") message, and which specific images, actions, lines of dialogue, or technical elements (e.g. lighting, costumes, setting, etc.) most clearly convey that message?
- Remember, we're not necessarily aiming to uncover some hidden *authorial intention* here—as we discussed in class, every text reflects something of the time and culture in which it was created. Think of your chosen film as a mirror and investigate how it might help us see something of ourselves reflected within it.
- How do various visual, auditory, and narrative elements of the film work together to construct meaning?
- What systems of meaning and cultural mythologies circulate within the film? How do you know? Where is the evidence within the film?
- Are race, gender, sexuality, class, and/or other elements of identity portrayed in fair-minded, well-informed ways, or does the film rely on stereotypes and misconceptions? What might be the effects of this text if we uncritically accept its message? Who might be asked to bear those costs?
- Regarding research:
 - Rather than simply looking for something to quote, look first and foremost to engage with readings that will help *shape your thinking about your text* in fundamental, substantive ways
 - Consider writings about your chosen film as well as research that could inform your discussion of any cultural mythologies or social issues your essay will discuss
- See *Signs of Life* pages 26-29 for useful brainstorming frameworks and analytical questions
- See this OWL at Purdue page for some useful starting points for writing about film:
 - https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/writing_about_film/terminology_and_starting_prompts.html

Peer Review Draft Requirements:

- 3-4 full pages of solid, well-organized argument that relies on strong, well-explained evidence
- MLA format (double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, etc. Re: MLA, see the links on Canvas)
- By the beginning of class on Thursday, 2/23, submit your draft via the "Essay #3 Peer-Review Draft" link
 - Attach/upload one copy as a pdf or docx file
 - Be sure to **bring two printed copies** for your peers to read

Final Draft Requirements:

- 4-5 full pages of cleanly written, well-organized, lucid, insightful prose
- Support your argument with 3-6 secondary sources; half of your sources can be from course materials
- MLA format (double-spaced, 12 pt Times New Roman font, etc.)
- Be sure to include in-text citations, in MLA format, for **all** borrowed words and ideas. A works cited page is also required
- Be sure to include a works cited entry for every research source and for your film
- By the beginning of class on Tuesday, 2/28, submit a pdf or docx through the "Essay #3 Final Draft" link

In Indian society, education is very restrictive. There is widespread belief that there are only two respectable professions—becoming an engineer or a doctor—and the only way to become either is acing exams. As such, most students ditch their dreams for their grades and become either doctors or engineers. Many times, the pressure for academic excellence carries over generationally within Indian families who have immigrated leaving 1st and 2nd generation Indians with a similar burden. The 2009 Bollywood blockbuster movie *3 Idiots*, based on Chetan Bhagat’s novel *5 Point Someone*, is a coming-of-age story enriched with friendship and love that serves to break down the Indian societal perceptions that grades are the most important part of an education and that every student must become either a doctor or an engineer. The film features multiple crucial characters all of which undergo a massive transformation of attitude because of the main character, Rancho, who helps them realize that the way to success is to follow their passion.

3 Idiots begins in “present day” where two college friends, Farhan Qureshi and Raju Rastogi have united with their college peer, Chatur Ramalingam. The three set out on their journey to meet Rancho, Farhan and Raju’s best friend from college. Thereafter, Farhan takes over as the narrator to tell the story of the “three idiots” (Farhan, Raju, and Rancho) during their time at the prestigious Imperial College of Engineering (ICE).

From the beginning, it is clear that Rancho’s character embodies the typical trickster archetype as he “often plays tricks or otherwise disobeys normal rules and conventional behavior” (The Trickster). When Rancho first arrives at his dorm building, every other freshman is being hazed by the seniors in the common room. The ringleader of the seniors approaches Rancho and demands he take his pants off like the rest of the freshman students, but rather than obeying, Rancho locks himself in his dorm room. Outraged, the senior student begins urinating on his door, but Rancho builds a contraption using a metal spoon, ruler, and the electrical switchboard which he slips underneath his door, electrocuting the senior who is urinating on his door. At that point Farhan remarks, “Salt water is a great conductor... Everyone had studied that, but [Rancho] applied it” (Hirani). With that scene, it is clear that Rancho is mischievous, smart,

and different from every other student in the college. Rancho is unafraid to stand up against authority even if it means resorting to unconventional tricks, but with his antics comes “new knowledge [and] wisdom,” typical of a trickster (The Trickster). In Rancho’s case the novelty isn’t the actual knowledge that salt water is a good conductor, but rather the ability to practically apply that knowledge on a moment's notice. His affinity for practical engineering is representative of his love and curiosity for the field which through the course of the movie makes him a better engineer than the rest of his peers who are grade obsessed. Overall, making Rancho’s character a trickster becomes a crucial way through which filmmakers are able to deliver a message endorsing chasing passion over success, as being the trickster enables Rancho to stand up to authority for what he believes in and stand out from the crowd.

As the movie progresses from Rancho’s introductory scene, the antagonist of the story is introduced—Virus Sahastrabuddhe (or Virus as the students call him) who is the dean of the university. Virus’s character is the opposite of Rancho’s as it represents the familial societal pressure Indian students are under to become successful engineers and doctors. He has an extreme ideology that “life is a race” and everything is a competition, but the ideology is a reality present among Indian society (Hirani). The college application process in India is entirely based on grades. Extracurriculars have zero weightage, and even though some Universities have begun to implement changes on a smaller scale there is a long way to go as so far, “[grade performance] in Grade 12 and entrance exam scores [have been] the only deciding factors in college admission” (Mashetty). As such, students are encouraged and forced to chase grades and success on exams rather than following their dreams, and Virus’s family is an accurate representation of these pressures. Virus, being a typical patriarch as “a tough family male elder” has set the standard that in his family, the girls will become doctors and boys will become engineers (The Patriarch). Though his two daughters have succeeded, his son, who dreamed of being a writer, has committed suicide unable to cope with the expectation of being an engineer as the film later reveals. The filmmakers are purposeful in developing Virus’s character as a stubborn patriarch because it is a personality type that is immensely difficult to change, just as societal values often are. Virus literally “oozes authority wherever he goes,” believing he always knows best (The Patriarch). Thus, the difficulty in changing Virus’s attitude about education being a competition is reflective of the difficulty in changing the over emphasis on grades in Indian society. By developing Virus as a hard-headed traditionalist and Rancho as the “troublemaking” modernist,

the filmmakers set the stage for an entertaining showdown between the two characters throughout the rest of the movie.

Following Virus's introduction, the film shifts to focus on Joy Lobo, a senior at ICE. Joy, much like Rancho, is fascinated by engineering. However, when Virus informs Joy, he won't be graduating on time as Joy's project is not ready, Joy commits suicide. Joy's graduation project is of making a drone with a very unique design. However, Joy is late on his project as he fell behind when his father had a stroke, but Virus shows no mercy as he finds Joy's project to be impractical. As Joy's character, like Rancho's, represents a love for engineering, the entire film sequence is an allusion to how the education system is killing passion in students. Joy's design is not impractical, it is innovative and brilliant as an engineer should be, yet Virus, who is hell-bent on sticking to the rules and teaching textbook engineering, hates the idea. Virus prizes grades and timeliness over everything, ignoring Joy's special gift and affinity for engineering, and with his suicide, the film clearly depicts how Indian society and education prizes grades over passion.

At Joy's funeral, Rancho tells Virus how luckily "everyone thinks [Joy's death] is a suicide," as no one is considering the mental pressure he has been under in the past four years (Hirani). Rancho then goes on to cite multiple concerning suicide statistics of students in India and he claims that Joy's death is in fact a murder the education system is responsible for. In 2009, 5.5 percent of the 127,151 suicides were committed by students and the highest overall suicide rate was in the 15-29 age group (Accidental 169, 179). Though not every suicide's cause can be attributed to academic pressure, evidently, the college student age group is having the most suicides and reduced academic pressure would be an obvious benefit. In the movie, the filmmakers use Rancho to make the bold claim that every year the pressure-cooking education system is taking thousands of lives. Of course, even the filmmakers are aware that the system and those upholding it aren't murderers in the traditional sense, but the point they are making is that the educational system has the power to make a positive impact and decrease the suicide numbers. The murder allegation is thus an effective way to draw the audience's attention to the filmmakers call for action to make changes in Indian education as the extreme connotation of murder appropriately emphasizes the drastic negative impact academic pressure has on mental health.

By the end of the movie, Virus has experienced many eye-opening events, including an unsuccessful suicide attempt by Raju and learning that his own son's death was not an accident

but a suicide. However, the most transformative moment occurs towards the end of the flashback when Rancho has been expelled from the college. As Rancho prepares to leave in the midst of a torrential rainstorm, Virus's daughter goes into labor. Ambulances are unable to get to the college in time, so Rancho has to perform the delivery. Against all odds, Rancho successfully delivers the baby, and in the scenes, the filmmakers make it clear that Rancho is the only student brilliant enough to engineer all the necessary tools in a moment's notice. While everyone else watches, including Virus, Rancho orders everyone to gather "wires, car batteries and a vacuum gauge" which he uses to create an alternate power source as the electricity has gone out and a birthing vacuum which is needed due to birthing complications (Hirani). Just like Rancho's introductory scene, he engineers something out of nothing, but this time it saves two lives. Virus holds his grandson and tells him to, "follow [your] heart"—the child is no longer confined to becoming an engineer (Hirani). Virus is mesmerized by what Rancho has done and finally sees that passion is the key. Rancho loves engineering which is why he is the only student able to create the necessary machines for the birth, and by making Rancho the hero in that moment, the filmmakers are able to clearly deliver the idea that excellence and success come naturally if you follow your interests rather than studying a subject for the sake of a grade or societal pressures.

After the birth, Rancho is preparing to leave ICE, but Virus stops him. In the background as the rain clears up and sun rises, Virus reverses the expulsion and gives Rancho his prized possession, the first prototype of a space pen which was given to Virus by the former dean at ICE who had instructed Virus to pass it on to the next extraordinary student. The rising day in the background of the scene is symbolic of Virus's new attitude. It is a cinematic effect intended to symbolize a new beginning as Rancho has finally got through to Virus. The trickster has managed to change the hard-headed, stubborn antagonists view and by doing so the filmmakers are successful in championing for a change in attitude towards education in India.

Overall, *3 Idiots* is a heartwarming film with heavy character development. Most notably, the film features an antagonist who undergoes a radical shift in ideology, realizing that chasing success is less important than chasing a person's dream. The radical shift is an effective representation of the film's dominant message emphasizing that Indian societal values and the education system need to start encouraging students to follow their passion.

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The background is a soft watercolor illustration of a field. It features several large, yellow, bell-shaped flowers with blue outlines and centers. The ground is a mix of light green and yellow, suggesting grass and soil. A small blue butterfly is perched on one of the flowers in the upper left. The overall style is gentle and artistic.

“We Will Not Forget”

Amy Nguyen

Seeds

Instructor: Aran Park

ESSAY #3: MYSTORY AND FAIRY TALE

DEFINITION OF MYSTORY*: "'Mystory' is Gregory Ulmer's coinage for an emerging, hybrid genre. It dramatizes the shift that occurs when writers foreground invention (heuretics) instead of interpretation (hermeneutics). . . . A complete mystory (a play on the words 'history,' 'mystery,' and of course, 'my story') is at once a review of our knowledge of literary devices, a critique, and avant-garde literature, for it requires us to use our knowledge of narrative, metaphor, intertextuality, and interpretation. A mystory blurs the boundary between critical and creative writing, between autobiography and cultural history, between one text and another, for all are woven together, each strand or thread crossing and laying across other threads" (A. Jarrett).

For your Essay #3, write a paper utilizing the experimental epistemology Mystory. The purpose of this kind of essay is not only to help you understand a specific text but also to help you understand the culture to which you belong and the identity that has been constructed for/by you. Thus, Mystory blurs the lines between "academic" writing and "personal" writing. You can find one of the best example of this type of writing in our first reading material, Leduc's "The Child Whose Head Was Bathed in Darkness." Consequently, your Mystory project must include the following elements:

- Three to Four Elements which have constructed your identity. In Ulmer's theory, he suggests to explore oneself in the following four categories: Family, Career, Entertainment, and Community. For this essay, you can choose your three to four elements or fields that are important to you but one of those elements should be a fairy tale. Example: Family, Popular Culture, Fairy Tale, and Discipline. In Leduc's chapter, you can find how she utilizes three main elements, surgery and her disability, disability studies, and fairy tale (tales themselves and scholarly works on them).
- A research component: As Leduc did, you need to actively research on one or more academic discipline, which should be closely related to or represent at least one of Three to Four Elements. For example, if you decide to work on Aladdin, romance, translation, and immigration, you can research on Thousand and One Night, post-colonial studies on translation, or diaspora studies.
- Narrative component: There should be a type of personal narratives. It can be a fairy tale, an episode, or a fragmented memories depending on your project's direction. This narrative should reflect at least one of Three to Four Elements.

Even more specifically, your Mystory needs to draw together the following:

- An examination of a fairy tale/folktale that has "affected [your] thinking about emotion, the self, gender, and [/or] culture." (Keep in mind that your "favorite" tales remembered from childhood may have affected you in ways that you have not thought about; also keep in mind that you may use a "modern" fairy tale that has affected you in some way.)
- Insight into the political/cultural significance of the tale and your relationship with the tale (allegory is almost always present at this stage).
- Creativity - this project offers a lot of latitude. If you have an idea, but don't know if it will work, come talk to me about it.

Writing Options: (If you have an idea other than these three, discuss the topic with me.)

1. After you find a fairy tale that has affected you in some way, rewrite the tale with yourself as a character. (Leduc did with her childhood memory.) As you rewrite your tale, explore the level(s) of allegory. You may also use parody, symbols, archetypes, and metaphors in your revision. Try to make your tale meaningful to yourself AND your modern audience. After you finish your tale, discuss how your version engages issues such as race, class, and gender differently from the original. Is the moral imprint of your tale different from the original? What about the tone? What is the purpose of your tale? How does it reflect you and/or your culture? You also need to combine your tale with other themes of your project with extensive research.
2. For all of you who are skeptical about the usefulness or validity of fairy tales in today's society (where the "real" world is often frightening and ugly), this is the option for you. Create a post-modern fairy tale which subverts "traditional" fairy tale motifs and conventions. Your own tale should, in effect, "darken" the fairy tale tradition, making readers aware that the world can no longer be viewed as a place where good is rewarded or "happily ever after" is an option. You should also include some sort of commentary that explains how you adapted/subverted fairy tale motifs and incorporated modern culture. Show how your own opinion about the validity of fairy tales has been changed by your own culture, history, or current events. (Tanith Lee's stories in *Red as Blood* or Neil Gaiman's "Snow, Glass, Apples" are examples of this kind of dark tale.) Here also, you need to connect your researched portion of a certain discipline with your tale.
3. Choose a specific and significant cultural phenomenon directly or remotely related to any fairy tale. Research on that phenomenon while presenting how this phenomenon affects your identity and your perspective on the world, society, or culture. For example, you can write about the online debate on the new *Little Mermaid* trailer. Possible disciplines include, but are not limited to, critical race theory, intersectionality, the Disney empire, or posthumanism.

**This assignment is based, in part, on one created by Mary Cummins, UCR English Dept.

Your Goal

Your aim for this project should be to learn as much about yourself—where you fit into society and how you relate to the fairy tale you choose—as you learn about the texts you are studying. You will also learn a little about how your culture (in this case, your exposure to fairy tales/folktales) has helped to make you the way you are. In turn, you will, perhaps, begin to see how you can acquire some control and/or understanding of the influence of "culture" on you.

Portions of this handout are from the English 1C: Essay #3 assignment created by Kim Turner, UCR English Dept.

Requirements

1. With or without a thesis statement, the essay should show a clear focus.
2. Clear, logical organization
3. Personal Narrative Portion – Vivid Description and Dramatic Arc
4. Research on one or more specific discipline
5. Minimum SIX sources.
 - a. At least TWO academic sources
 - b. At least ONE from required readings

6. Word Limit: 2,000 – 2,300 words, excluding Work Cited. Essays shorter than 2,000 words will lose 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. B- → C+).
7. Strict attention to MLA guidelines
8. Images: Freely use photos, screenshots, or other visual sources.

Important Dates

- Nov. 30th: Draft Workshop. Bring two hard copies to class.
- Dec. 5th: Final draft due: on Canvas by midnight.

Required Readings

- “The Fairy Tale Web” (*CFT* 468-480)
- “Fairytale Adaptations and Economic Desires” (Bacchilega)
- “To Spin a Yarn: The Female Voice in Folklore and Fairy Tale” (*CFT* 393-405)
- “While Beauty Sleeps: The poetics of male violence” (Barzilai)
- “Breaking the Disney Spells” (*CFT* 414-435)
- “The Cloud: Semiotics and the New Media” (*SOL* 325-337)
- “I Helped Create the Internet, and I’m Worried about What It’s Doing to Young People” (*SOL* 337-340)
- “Resituating The Arabian Nights: Challenges and Promises of Translation” (Bacchilega)
- “There’s a Lot More to a Selfie Than Meets the Eye” (*SOL* 340-346)
- “Gamer Identity” (*SOL* 350-354)
- “How ‘Limbic Capitalism’ Preys on Our Addicted Brains” (*SOL* 354-360)
- “Hans Christian Andersen and the Discourse of the Dominated” (Zipes)
- “Walt Disney’s Civilizing Mission: From Revolution to Restoration” (Zipes)
- “Influencing Machines: The Echo Chambers of the Internet” (*SOL* 379-384)
- “Inside Facebook’s (Totally Insane, Unintentionally Gigantic, Hyperpartisan) Political Media Machine” (*SOL* 384-393)
- “Someday My Prince Will Come: Disney and the World Without Shadows” (Leduc)

It was hard to imagine that one day the world would go silent. That streets would be cleared of cars and pedestrians, grocery stores ransacked and emptied out. It was hard to imagine turning on the television to watch case numbers go up. And up. And up. This was unprecedented. The entire world went into lockdown, and schools that planned on closing for two weeks, had to plan on staying closed for nearly two years. The coronavirus pandemic affected the Asian American Pacific Islander community in ways that one could not understand unless they were a part of the community themselves. Undergoing this worldly phenomenon taught me several lessons, one being that the world was a very cruel place. My parents took it especially hard; they had worked their entire lives trying to assimilate with the American culture in our community so that my sister and I weren't alienated from our peers. Our experiences are paralleled with those of the young mermaid in Hans Christian Andersen's cautionary tale, *The Little Mermaid*.



As the young mermaid looked up to and adored humans on land, her desires to fit in with them, to dance and to walk with them, grew so powerful that she sacrificed her comfortable life with her own community. Analogously, my family and I aspired to find a sense of belonging within our city, and we gave up the comfort and safety of our Vietnamese community and found a place to call home in the middle of Orange County, California.

Born in the third largest city of Denmark, Hans Christian Andersen struggled with his sense of identity since his youth. Though born into a lower socioeconomic class, Andersen

“measured his success as a person and artist” by standards that were “not of his own social group’s making.” (Zipes) Like many of the individuals of the Asian American community, Andersen found himself submitting to the more dominant culture of the higher-class, white wealthy folk. Much of his inner turmoil and self-doubt was expressed through his work, one in particular being *The Little Mermaid*. Andersen writes about the young mermaid’s struggles and desires of living amongst the people above water, who can assumably be representative of the dominant upper-class community that Andersen tried to assimilate into. Moreover, the little mermaid is given the chance to experience life as a normal human being with two legs, but as she is betrayed in the name of love and given life-altering ultimatums, the little mermaid reflects on the sacrifices she had made— “she had forsaken her family and her home, given up her beautiful voice, and suffered hours of agony”— and ends her life by throwing herself into the ocean. (Andersen) Though Andersen had an obsessive desire to fit in with the upper-class, he was never fully able to live in peace with his decisions to submit to a more temporal social system. He claims that servility is “most human and understandable” and rarely does he suggest that it is “just as human to rebel against inequality and injustice” out of necessity as it is to “bow to arbitrary domination.” (Zipes) Andersen’s denial of his origins and need for validation from the upper class factored into his inspirations for his written works, as he tended to focus on the lower-class or “disenfranchised protagonists” who worked their way up and into society for the main plot line in the majority of his tales. (Zipes)

I knew I was different from the other kids in my school when they yelped in disgust as I pulled out the *com chien* and *cha gio* that my mother made for my lunch the night before. My parents always placed such a heavy emphasis on listening to my teachers. To never question them, and to always be kind, respectful, and most importantly, to be quiet. Never throw the first punch, and when provoked, just run away. Unlike the little mermaid in Andersen’s tale, I did not willingly give up my voice, I was just always taught to suppress it. Similarly to how the young mermaid’s ability to speak was taken away from her, the model minority myth severely dampens the voices of Asian Americans. Known for our passivity and eager submission, the concept of standing up for myself and voicing my concerns and opinions was foreign to me. Though the assumption exists that all Asians are naturally gifted in all areas of school, Asians are also stereotyped as “hard-working students and diligent workers” but are too passive, and make “implausible leaders.” (Lee) I would sit quietly, smile, and nod as my peers took charge in group

projects, and would jump at the chance to please my classmates with my neat handwriting, or whatever they wanted me to do to fulfill my participation requirements. That is why I felt like I had no choice but to stand idly by and watch as my community, my respected elders, were being punished, attacked, and killed for something that we were not in control of. Our cries of help were drowned out by the rage of the American people, blaming us for bringing this foreign virus to our beloved country of equality.



About one-third of Asian Americans reported experiencing various forms of discrimination such as racial or ethnic slurs, or “negative or offensive assumptions and comments about their race.” (McMurtry et. al.) As the stereotype goes, us Asian Americans were expected to stay passive as we were thrown under attack. We believed that it would pass, that being the scapegoat for this unprecedented phenomenon would only be temporary. But two short weeks turned into two long years, and casual racial slurs turned into violence. In Texas, a man attacked and stabbed a Burmese American family. According to Lee, a father and his two young children (ages two and six) were viciously attacked because the culprit had thought they were Chinese and was angry that they were “infecting people with the coronavirus.” (Lee) My parents were conflicted on whether or not we should find somewhere safer to stay because news reports of fatal attacks grew closer and closer until an incident occurred at my local park where an elderly asian man was beaten in an unprovoked attack. Like the little mermaid, my parents and I looked up to this particular community and believed that they would stand with us in this time of hardship. But like the humans in the tale, we received no support from our white neighbors and community. As the country grew divided, many Asian Americans who identified as politically conservative arrived at the brutal realization that the ally with whom they have “sided in their fight against affirmative action” refused to side with them when they were the target of attack. (Lee)

It was all so sudden. The news of a foreign virus plaguing our country. I personally thought that it would never reach me or my friends, my city or my neighborhood. I thought that I was untouchable. But as news spread, the behaviors of people around me started to change. It was nothing crazy, nothing aggressive enough to call out or cancel, or even label as “racist”. But then it happened. In the early days of the fateful month of March, 2020, I was at a water polo tournament. Since the sport is widely known as a contact sport, I reached over to my opponent in order to guard her. But before my fingertips could graze her polo suit, she jerked back in what I could have only labeled as disgust. I was confused, and with the adrenaline of the game racing through my veins, I was a bit agitated. I lunged for her again, this time with more aggression. But yet again did she dodge my touch! I started to question whether or not she knew how to play the game, and looked to the referee with skepticism and for further direction. After blowing a whistle to establish a time out, my opponent openly announced her refusal to touch me because she “didn’t want to get infected.” In shock and disbelief I got out of the water and asked my coach if I could have a conversation with her to clear up any misunderstanding, because to my knowledge, I was in perfect health. Before he could answer, one of the mothers who tagged along with our team (and I must note that she was a white woman) scolded me and told me that I was displaying poor sportsmanship, and that the comment was not something to make a fuss about. My coach hung his head and shrugged, and ultimately chose the path of least resistance: I ended up on the bench for the rest of the tournament in order to avoid any potential conflict. Had I known that this was just the beginning of constantly being on the defense, I would have been able to hide my shock better.

Like wildfire, news shifted from the increasing number of coronavirus cases to the increasing number of hate crimes against Asian Americans. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Tik Tok “attract and retain our attention” with the use of current events and happenings. (Estrin, 337-340) Amidst the scrutiny, I noticed that for the first time, I saw Asian American creators and social media influencers speak out about their experiences and used their platforms to spread awareness about Asian hate. I was dumbfounded at first, because as I have mentioned earlier, we have been taught to stay passive, to let things pass. But our community grew tired of waiting for it to pass. We were tired of watching our elderly men and women get physically assaulted to the point of death and we were tired of being afraid of going to the grocery store because of the potential verbal harassment we could receive. All around the

world, people spoke out about speaking out. To go against the societal standards set for Asian Americans, and for once, to stop being quiet.



I received a good education growing up. I made friends and played volleyball; I celebrated traditional American holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas— because, well, I had to. I *had* to partake in the holiday activities set by my school teachers. I *had* to call the peach crayon the “skin colored crayon”, because that was the type of community I grew up in. I could not control the fact that I was born an Asian American, though I am proud that I was, and I definitely could not control the coronavirus afflicting the nation. My entire life, I had believed that my neighbors and my community members were my allies, my friends, and that we were on the same side. And though not all of them treated my family and I differently, the vast majority of them developed a protective layer of bigotry and caution. I still receive glares in certain neighborhoods, and I will never forget my mother’s hesitation to send me to the grocery store by myself. I do not think that the Asian American community can ever fully heal from this worldwide phenomenon that we know as the coronavirus pandemic. Like all things in life, this change was unprecedented, but it was necessary. Though there were unspeakable, inhumane things done to my Asian American community, the voices of Asian Americans have been significantly amplified, and a lot of attention has been paid to our community. With the younger generation becoming more aware of the social climate, we are no longer going to standby and watch, rather, we are going to actively work against the model minority myth. Like the cautionary tale of *The Little Mermaid*, our outcomes are bittersweet. But, unlike the fairy tale, this is real life, in a real world. Words on paper and words spoken on national television can

result in death sentences for some. Forgiveness can be sought, but we will not forget. Unlike the little mermaid, the Asian American community will no longer stand by and allow the world to instill its cruelty.

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**“The Jaunt’: Progressing
Towards Disaster”**

Shreyans Jain Patel

Seeds

Instructor: Benedict Jones

Write a formal paper of at least **six** paragraphs and at least **2000** words about what modern American readers will infer that a text is arguing about an aspect. In other words, what argument about the aspect will modern American readers see in the text? Use textual evidence and authorities for support. As always, create a unique title, write formally, and use MLA format for page layout, source citation, and the works-cited list.

According to Moore's law, the capability of digital computers can be expected to double every two years. This, of course, is a projection based on empirical trends, as opposed to a mathematically verifiable law; however, it does present the opportunity to consider the macroscopic implications of such expeditious growth. The advent of industrialized society has constantly necessitated improvements in the technology available. Driven by consumer demand, manufacturers continually alter their value chains—the processes that businesses employ to create and market a particular commodity. These commodities are then distributed directly to consumers, with profit being the obvious incentive. As a result, companies invest heavily in their marketing and R&D (Research and Development) departments to ensure that they are the ones to produce the “next best thing.” From this ever-increasing speed of technological advancement comes a sense of cultural lag. As more emphasis is placed on profits from meeting consumer demand, fewer resources are invested in determining the long-term ramifications of the resultant technologies. Stephen King posits the idea of a society built on such an ideology in his horror short story “The Jaunt.” “The Jaunt” follows Mark and his family as they prepare for their first “jaunting,” the new revolutionary technology of teleportation, and the disastrous consequences it has for his son. Through Mark, King elaborates on the discovery, production, and impact of jaunting, paralleling the progress of technology in the real world. However, more than an entertaining horror story, “The Jaunt” illustrates a warning of the impending consequences of uncontrolled technological advancement and the associated havoc. Throughout the story, the question of “can we” is replaced with “should we” as “The Jaunt” compels the readers to search for an answer.

Aside from jaunting, the world that Stephen King constructs bears a shocking resemblance to the genuine issues of modern times. Even the depiction of jaunt attendants, invoking imagery of real-life counterparts such as flight attendants or train conductors, presents a recognizable inlet for the reader into “The Jaunt.” Inadvertently, King manages to create an ideal piece of fictional “technocriticism,” examining “the exchanges between contemporary cultures and the increasingly technological environments in which they are created and communicated”

(Nirmal 6). Within the opening pages, the story divulges the motivation for jaunting as Mark explains to his family, “‘That’s why we’re going where we’re going, Rick. There’s enough oil on Mars to last almost eight thousand years...but oil isn’t even that important, anymore. Now what we need most of all is—’ ‘Water!’ Patty cried” (King 300). The apparent issues of Mark’s description are not unique to the story. Rather, they are oddly inspired by those of reality—fluctuating prices of oil due to its scarcity, accompanied by diminishing sources of drinkable water. Regardless of their differing impacts, these are undeniably human dilemmas that persist beyond the words of the story. They are consistently representative of the motivation behind technological progression, which is to “produce science advances and new technology to endorse a socio economic [sic] power and leadership directed to take advantage of important opportunities or to cope with environmental threats in competitive settings” (Coccia 1). This familiarity forces the readers, as they progress through the story, to pause and acknowledge the adversities of the world around them and consider the forces that caused them. In this manner, each character in every scene becomes a systematic confrontation to modern technological advancement, with jaunting as a unifying symbol. For the modern reader, “The Jaunt” hits “too close to home” and for good reason: the reader brings the context of a society with an ever-increasing dependency on technology, enabling “The Jaunt” to become a vessel for criticism in any era, so long as technology reigns supreme.

As follows, the portrayal of the conception of jaunting is a satirical critique of the methods that modern inventors justify for their creations and the unending desires of their consumers. Through this satirical lens, the text argues against the notion of progression for the sake of meeting impulsive demands. Jaunting was invented by a scientist named Victor Carune under duress from the US government to discover an alternate method of transportation, non-reliant on gasoline (King 317). Initially, this seems a rational response—searching for a solution to an imminent crisis that would bring the economy to a halt. However, it invites the pertinent question of why this search was necessary to begin with. The energy crisis serves to highlight the unsettling behavior of consumerism, in which the US and the rest of the world in the same regard become so dependent on the technology of internal combustion, that they fail to realize the unviability of such an energy source until the consequence is inescapable. Max Wessel and Nicole Helmer identify this exact concern: “The danger of trusting the pull of user demand to shape an industry is that users’ short-term desires don’t always account for long-term societal

needs” (63). The short-term necessity for oil shaped the world before jaunting, and the current need for a replacement shapes the demand for jaunting. While these conditions are conducive to producing a hasty solution, they are unable to guarantee a safe or sustainable one, paralleling the technology jaunting seeks to replace and mirroring the production of technology in real life. “The Jaunt” delivers the rather terrifying message that blindly fulfilling consumer demands without considering future impact is a danger to all involved.

Furthermore, “The Jaunt” appears to vehemently decry the lack of ethical responsibility reflected in modern production processes. This is demonstrated by the methods that Carune, and eventually, the government, utilized in the production and optimization of jaunting. Carune tested his invention on daily household items and lab rats he stored himself, with total disregard for safety, evident by his accidental jaunting of his own fingers (King 304). Seizing Carune’s work upon discovering his success, the US government continued testing jaunting for human travel. However, the government opted to use criminal convicts with no regard for their mental stability as they were deemed disposable and desirable test subjects (King 323). Of course, these are, at the very least, ethically ambiguous actions committed by both Carune and the government, yet they both maintain a sense of plausible deniability. Carune cannot be held responsible for the violations against the convicts as that was the government’s misuse of his technology, while the US government cannot be held accountable for any consequences as a result of Carune’s invention, as he was the creator. This dangerous dynamic results in a diffusion of liability. Wessel and Helmer condemn such diffusion, stating, “The disaggregation of development responsibility also means the diffusion of responsibility for ethical outcomes” (61). In the digitized era, an increasing amount of product development is offloaded to distinct components while none of the ethical responsibility is retained. This fact is exemplified in the manner that jaunting is created and tested, portraying a fictional interpretation of a genuinely serious predicament.

Of all the incidents King presents in his story, Ms. Michaelson’s murder by her husband Lester stands singularly alone in its atrocity. Lester Michaelson, a Jaunt researcher, murdered his wife by pushing her through one end of a jaunt portal and shutting off the computer that programs an exit portal, thereby leaving his wife jaunting endlessly (King 326). Ms. Michaelson’s murder speaks against the lack of foresight toward involuntary yet possible uses of new technology. Despite the beneficent intentions of jaunting, its utilization for homicide is

unintended, but not without precedent. According to Mark, “The Jaunt had apparently been used several times as a murder weapon,” but Ms. Michaelson’s murder remains “the most famous (and only documented) case” (King 326). In Boaz Miller’s words, “Examining unintended consequences of a technology can even reveal values embedded in it.” At no point is jaunting considered ethically wrong under public scrutiny until its capability as a murder weapon is brought to light. Only then does the public unease impose suspicion on jaunting as a dangerous tool. This entire scenario serves to force the reader to consider how many such cases exist in reality, for technology that is accepted without question. Yet more chilling is the defense Lester’s lawyer provides as he claimed that his “client could not be tried for murder because no one could prove conclusively that Mrs. Michaelson was dead” (326). There is truth to Lester’s lawyer’s claim, as there is no physical remnant of Mrs. Michaelson. However, such a claim is only plausible due to the new possibilities that jaunting introduces. Tsjalling Swierstra addresses comparable arguments stating, “Moral change is not caused by technological change, but can be provoked by it” (11). The lawyer’s contention is a staunch criticism in opposition of compromising morality in favor of technological progress. Although the legal system that eventually convicts Lester continues unchanged, the discussion of the legal proceedings is far perturbed from a normal trial due to the inclusion of jaunting. In similar regard, the murder and its trial act to oppose equivalent instances in the real world, where unintentional repercussions and their impact on morality are ignored in support of the advancement of new technology.

Whereas Mrs. Michaelson’s murder is decidedly jarring, Ricky’s accident has a more immediate impact for the reader, being the only incident that occurs in the present in the story. Through the case study of Rudy Foggia, a convict who was offered an insouciant deal to experience the jaunt whilst awake, the US Government learned that no biological organism can traverse the jaunt while conscious (King 323-325). As a result, gas masks are employed to ensure those that are jaunting remain unconscious throughout the journey. However, Ricky, a victim of his childish curiosity, opts to hold his breath when the gas mask is applied, leading to him experiencing the “long jaunt” (King 329-330), the idea of eternal nothingness which a human mind cannot fathom when jaunting while conscious. Of all the members of Mark’s family, all of whom are jaunting for the first time, Ricky, Mark’s son, is the one to experience the negative consequences. Through Ricky, “The Jaunt” seems to testify about who the unsuspecting victims of undisciplined technological growth are—the next generation. Additionally, despite being aware

of the perils of jaunting, the best solution applied is a simple gas mask. A modern reader would immediately question the efficacy of such an option—why not utilize a more robust method such as a tablet or injection? To this point, Ricky’s accident calls attention to safety concerns modern producers may overlook in order to prioritize releasing a profitable product and potential shortcuts modern corporations may take to maximize those profits. According to Phillip Brey, a professional in the field of anticipatory ethics of technology, “A thorough forecasting analysis of a new technology would consider how it is likely to evolve and mature over time, how it might be combined with other new and existing technologies” (10). Within “The Jaunt,” jaunting is the new technology, while gas masks depict the current, emphasizing the concept that maintaining proper prudence during the production of jaunting could have possibly prevented Rudy and Ricky’s misfortune. In this regard, “The Jaunt” implies the necessity of proper implementation of anticipatory ethics in order to prohibit the suffering of future generations of unregulated technological surges.

Upon initial reading, it can be tempting to dismiss any negative messages within “The Jaunt” in favor of its portrayal of the advanced technology. The story itself admits the benefits of jaunting, having solved an impending energy crisis, eliminating inevitable world hunger, and augmenting the global economy (King 319-320). The obviously avoidable consequences for Ricky, combined with the immediate solutions jaunting provides for humanity, makes it more of a cautionary tale for the haphazard use of technology rather than against the advancement of it. Instead, “The Jaunt ” appears to advocate for such technology and its improvement, condemning human error and misuse for resultant negative consequences. Christine McManus, in her online review of “The Jaunt,” seems to agree that “Jaunting isn’t inherently good or evil, just a powerful tool that can be dangerous in the wrong hands.” But this sentiment sets a dangerous precedent that in its misuse the technology itself is absolved of blame. Miller argues against such thinking, stating that “by virtue of their material properties, technological artifacts are part of the normative moral and political order rather than external to it.” Jaunting cannot be perceived as neutral as the circumstances that incentivized its creation were very much motivated by nonneutral political and material goals. As such, jaunting is an extension of the malefactions in the development of and as a result of its usage. In this light, “The Jaunt ” cannot be reduced to occasional human error with an exclusive focus on the benefits of jaunting, but must be taken whole, as a more serious assessment of the dangers of unquestioned technological advancement.

Taken altogether, “The Jaunt” declares a strong disagreement to the impetuous advancement of technology. But with a keen eye for a more abstract message, “The Jaunt,” specifically the concept of the “long jaunt,” unveils the futility of human minds to comprehend and control all that they encounter. To an extent, “The Jaunt” is an argument against human enhancement, the theory of human transcendence beyond biological limitations. Akin to King’s approach in his story, this theory is rooted firmly in reality with any contemporary reader being surrounded by several real examples: some must wear glasses to improve vision, some take steroids to become stronger than originally possible, while others orchestrate the production of neural implants. Humans were never meant to travel faster than their legs could run and most certainly never meant to fly, yet the technological marvels of the automobile and the airplane defy these rules. Similarly, jaunting enables humans to colonize planets such as Mars and Venus, planets they were never meant to reach, let alone survive on. Through Rudy, Ricky, and the several mice Carune tests, it is known that there is no biological organism that can endure jaunting while conscious. Despite this fact, the US Government persists in uncovering the mystery of the long jaunt through several coerced volunteers and still they failed to do so. This is because the long jaunt was never meant to be understood—it represents the absolute boundary of human understanding and the fatal consequences when humans attempt to cross. The text argues that this boundary must be tightly regulated and cannot be neglected to promote technological advancement because “even if human enhancement seems to be a reasonable practice and even a right, restrictions may still be required to mitigate undesirable circumstances or unintended consequences...” (Lin and Allhoff 1). Whether it’s Rudy’s initial experience, Mrs. Michaelson’s murder, or even Ricky’s demise, “The Jaunt” constantly provides the reader with these unintended consequences. They are intended to mirror the possibilities of the real world and compel the reader to think about where that boundary lies and to protest crossing it.

While originally published in 1981 (and included in the collection *Skeleton Crew* in 1985), King’s writing only becomes more germane to the topic of technological growth as time progresses. Embedded within the pages of an entertaining short story lies an ominous warning. A reader from the 1980s may have pondered the infinite possibilities due to the onset of personal computers, but “The Jaunt” remains relevant for the modern reader, worried about the impact of social media and artificial intelligence, only possible due to the improvement in computing technology. From the lack of ethics during production to unintended consequences in utilization

to abuse of such technology, “The Jaunt” is both a testament and an argument against the unrestrained advancement of technology.

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The background is a watercolor illustration of a natural scene. It features several large, yellow, bell-shaped flowers with blue outlines, set against a light green and yellow wash. A small blue butterfly is perched on one of the flowers in the upper left. The foreground is filled with green grass and foliage, also rendered with soft watercolor textures and blue outlines.

**“Mechanical Nature vs.
Mother Nature”**

Rin Park

Seeds

Instructor: Mary Cummins

English 1C
Prompt: Essay # 1
1500 words

In an essay of no less than 1500 words (not including header and Works Cited page), please conduct a semiotic analysis of a theme in one of the following short stories in *The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction*. **Your essay should present an argument about the meaning of the story, as well as the argument it makes about the society we live in. You should prove your thesis using specific evidence from the story itself (textual evidence), along with evidence from research about the real (historical or modern-day) world.**

- When crafting your thesis, make sure that you are asserting an argument about the connotative, not the denotative, meaning of the text. In other words, you are not dealing with the obvious, surface meaning of the text but with deeper meanings not immediately apparent to anyone who reads the text. Make sure your essay is telling your readers something they don't already know after reading the story.
- The essay must include topic sentences supported by textual evidence and explanations of how the textual evidence proves the topic sentences.
- Claims about the “real world” should be backed with research evidence from news sources, articles from the UCR library databases, or other reliable research sources.
- Cite all quotations from and references to sources using proper in-text citations in MLA format. Your Works Cited page will, of course, cite the story in *WASF*, as well as any outside research you use.

How to conduct a semiotic analysis of a work of literature:

- In your introduction, give a very brief overview of the story's narrative, explaining to your readers the main characters and events of the story.
- Present your thesis, which should be an argument in response to one of the topic prompts below.
- In order to prove your thesis, conduct close readings of passages from the story.
 - A close reading of a literary passage analyzes the meanings and connotations of the text – of words used and the images and associations those words create in the mind. (See SMG Ch. 10.)
 - Remember that whenever you use a passage from the story to prove your thesis, you should explain what is going on in the passage, quote briefly from it, explain how the quotation and passage in general prove your argument, and cite your quotations using proper in-text citations, which include page numbers. (This will be heavily weighted in the grading of this essay. In grading, I will be looking to

see how well you are able to use a text to prove an argument about that text. This is really at the heart of textual analysis.)

Topics:

“The Machine Stops” by E.M. Forster:

1. Consider Vashti’s character and world in relation to modern-day American life. How can you extrapolate from her character and society to our own? What are today’s equivalents of the technologies, lifestyles, and events of the short story? Where do we see similarities and differences, and *what message does Forster’s story convey to today’s readers? Is that message warranted or necessary?*
2. Consider the world of “The Machine Stops” in relation to the world of 1909. How can you extrapolate from characters, situations, and events in the story to the world at the time the story was written? What were 1909’s equivalents of the technologies, lifestyles, concerns, and events of the short story? *What message was Forster trying to convey to his own contemporary readers and was that message warranted or necessary?*
3. *What specific message might this story provide for those who have experienced the pandemic years of 2020-23? Does it tell us anything about our own experience or the experiences we may have as we re-enter society after the pandemic? Is that message warranted or necessary?*

“Speech Sounds” by Octavia Butler:

4. Consider the world of “Speech Sounds” in relation to modern-day American life. How can you extrapolate from this society to our own? What are today’s equivalents of the concerns and events of the short story? What argument is Butler’s story making about language, literacy, speech, and empathy? Where do we see similarities and differences, and *what message does Butler’s story convey to today’s readers? Is that message warranted or necessary?*
5. Consider the world of “Speech Sounds” in relation to the world of 1983. How can you extrapolate from characters, situations, and events in the story to the world at the time the story was written? What were 1983’s equivalents of the concerns and events of the short story? What argument is Butler’s story making about language, literacy, speech, and empathy? *What message was Butler trying to convey to her own contemporary readers and was that message warranted or necessary?*

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Is it selfish to want to be comfortable, to want things for yourself and yourself only? Is it wrong if we are born this way? What if it comes at the cost of others, of the world? Can you give up your own desires if so? These are all questions that E.M. Forster asks us to think about when reading “The Machine Stops,” a science fiction story that explores a dystopian future in which the outside world is supposedly no longer safe to live, the thus-developed underground society being wholly dependent on the Machine, or a piece of technology that can do almost everything and anything for them (50). People have been reduced to hermits in cell-like rooms where the now-established way of communication is through screens, and Vashti, one of these people, is drawn out by her son Kuno who tells her that he has something important to say, but will only do so when they are face-to-face. After an anxiety-riddled journey to his side of the hemisphere, she learns that Kuno has been threatened with expulsion from the bunkers due to going outside without permission, but he waves off her indignant concerns about his enthralling tale of his breach to surface and similarly, Vashti writes him off as being crazy. (61, 69). Years later, after respirators have been abolished due to disuse and religion was reestablished officially, the machine has finally broken down in a loud, silent bang after doing so for a long time with little attention drawn to it (70-71). The immediate chaos results in violent deaths and crumbling infrastructure where, at the end of humanity as they know it, Vashti and Kuno reunite one last time to exchange their dying words before an exploding air-ship wipes them all out (78). E.M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops” warns that passively yielding to our innate selfishness, where-in the machine is a symbolic representation of human nature, will result in an indifferent state of living in which a society reliant on the comforts technology offers, recoils at the thought of self-sacrifice and discomfort even if it’s for the greater good. This warning is warranted by our current response to climate change.

Despite the inherent contradiction, the very mechanical Machine is as human as the ones that have built a world around it, as it represents their innate selfish nature, in which they are wholly concerned with only themselves and act in their self-interest even to the detriment of

others. The Machine is poetic in that it both serves as a stand-in for human nature and serves them, receiving fervent worship in return. Humanity and the Machine are so intertwined with each other that while telling his mother of how he climbed the shaft, Kuno remarks, “It was naked, humanity seemed naked, and all these tubes and buttons and machineries neither came into the world with us, nor will they follow us out” (Forster 64). Similarly, in an earlier conversation with him, Vashti inadvertently likens the two with her assertion that ““It is contrary to the spirit of the age”” (53). Kuno’s reply of, ““Do you mean by that, contrary to the Machine?”” shows how humanity has settled into thinking of the Machine; the two are one and the same (53). Though, there is a new power dynamic in that despite creating the Machine to do their will, it can no longer be fully controlled by humans (67). Humanity has lost its grip on itself, existing as only “the blood corpuscles that course through its arteries, and if it could work without [them], it would let [them] die” (67). It’s tragic, yet ironic and incredibly arrogant, for humanity to indulge itself in creating this great being that could carry out their every desire, to build it in their image and worship it. They constantly lodge complaints when it can no longer meet all their demands, forgetting its very-human origins, and eventually, humanity destroys itself with its own arrogant greed, failing to remember that they are the Earth, not the Sun in which great planets orbit.

Subsequently, though arguments could be made for selfishness being a good, or at least neutral, thing, it’s clearly not portrayed that way in the story. Here, humanity has driven out nature by their selfish wants. This underground society has everything handed to them at the push of a button; they are unable to be truly selfless as a result. Vashti demonstrates this in the very first page of the story, irritated by the interruptions that are socializing humans, and even when it’s her own flesh-and-blood, she makes it sound like a hardship when she says, ““Very well. Let us talk, I will isolate myself . . . I can give you fully five minutes” and, ““Be quick!” . . . her irritation returning . . . [“]I am in the dark wasting my time”” (Forster 51). It’s Kuno, of all people, that she directs these words to. Heedless of his urgent desire to discuss with her, how he says upfront that ““I have called you before . . . but you were always busy or isolated,” Vashti still can’t spare a second for him (52). She goes on to constantly dismiss his request for a face-to-face meeting despite his growing desperation, giving petty reasons as to why. When weighing his concerning matter that involves him not being able to leave his room ““Because, at any moment, something tremendous ma[y] happen,”” her own trivial discomfort at traveling on the airship nearly wins out (56). Vashti was almost unable to grant her child a simple request,

feigning sickness and unable to conceal her irritation when talking to him as she couldn't see past her own self-interest of staying home where she had everything, where she could continue to live in contented bliss. This underground society also cannot see the effects their technological advancements have consumed with thoughts of “defeat[ing] the sun” (59). Vashi alerts the audience to several of their world's bold-faced audacities, of wanting to even “neutraliz[e] the earth's diurnal revolution,” and how they built airplanes to race the sun in a vain effort that was only stopped because the Machine's Committee declared it “illegal, unmechanical, and punishable by Homelessness” (58-59). They used their new, developing technology for horrid things, stripping what was left of Mother Nature even further and finding its beauty so horrifying that it shook them with “A spasm of horror” to see the blinding sun that they could not hide behind man-made blinds (59). In creating the Machine, they have forgotten that nature always comes back, stretching from the dark underground and forcing violent roots to take place in the sunny remains of humanity.

It's incredibly human of us to be selfish, natural even, but that naturalness doesn't equate to goodness when it has the tendency to override others, especially when it comes to the greater good, or more specifically, the ever-real uncertainty that climate change brings. From as far back as Thomas Hobbes, and even further, human nature has been said to be selfish over and over again. Affiliated with the psychology department at the University of Winnipeg, Thomas Jeremy A. Frimer, Nicola K. Schaefer, and Harrison Oakes explore the idea of morality being a performance in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*: “When people feel watched—on stage—they take on the role of the moral actor. Yet, when the curtain falls and the stage lights dim, the selfish agent takes over” (790). Such a duality comes from an evolutionary necessity, where in the case of limited resources, “behaving selfishly garners the maximum resources for an individual . . . [and] behaving morally secures inclusion in groups, making generosity worth its costs” (Frimer et al. 790). Thus a performance is put on as harmonious group membership is desired, and “selfishness and . . . the appearance of generosity” is in the interest of the individual (Frimer et al. 790). They later referenced past research, in the form of behavioral observation, of this phenomenon, starting with the “Dictator Game,” where “one person is assigned to unilaterally divide a set amount of money between the self and another,” and found that behind the veil of anonymity, the “dictators” played selfishly, yet when watched, the generosity increased (Frimer et al. 791). With that, the conclusion they came to was this: “Motivated by

survival, the self-as-agent is selfish in nature...the selfish agent as the more real—and themoral actor as the more ideal— of the two...[S]elfishness is a universal feature of human nature” (Frimer et al. 791-792). Following this logic, Mother Nature has been doomed from the start, because to survive, humans must tap into their innate selfishness, and both cannot coexist peacefully at the same time. In conjunction with the aforementioned, it’s not surprising when Charles Alt, affiliated with Princeton Day School and the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Quarterly Review of Biology*, writes in a review about Nicholas P. Money’s book *The Selfish Ape: Human Nature and Our Path to Extinction* that “His mission is a plea . . . to abandon our selfishness, lest we damage this gift beyond repair” and, “Our...thinking supports our... [biology]...by encouraging self-satisfaction at the expense of the rest of nature” (Alt 342). It’s essentially our fault that we are at the end of the line, damning the planet with a genetic makeup that encourages us to make “bigger machines” (Alt 342). Saving the earth, oddly and irrationally enough, does not serve our self-interests, as we are much more naturally inclined to want to be stuck in an self-inflicted cycle of pumping the atmosphere with the emissions caused by fueling our houses in order to receive cool air that’ll serve as a relief from rising temperatures, which are our fault in the first place (Maher 88).

And not only are the humans of this underground world desensitized to the metaphorical yet also literal burning of Mother Nature, but they have become so increasingly codependent with the Machine that it’s absolutely horrifying to them to even consider ripping away that comfort in favor of bloody self-sacrifices and unpleasantness. Where “Humanity, in its desire for comfort, had over-reached itself...exploit[ing] the riches of nature too far,” and their complacent indulgence in their riches meant that the only way up was with the Machine (Forster 72). You’re either with it or you’re not, hence why Vashti considers her son to be a lost cause when he reveals that he has ventured outside of their protective cells to breathe in air that does not come out of metal vents. Kuno speaks in an awed tone, at that moment oblivious to his mother’s disgusted pity: “I was lying with my face to the sunshine. Blood poured from my nose and ears...the peace, the nonchalance, the sense of space, and, brushing my cheek, the roaring fountain of our artificial air” (65). In a quiet tone, when his story finally concludes, Vashti remarks that ““It will end in Homelessness,”” referring to their society’s threat that such endeavors will ultimately end with euthanasia, and he can only reply, ““I wish it would...I

prefer the mercy of God” (69). Kuno revels in the dripping blood, with no strange apparatuses to wipe it away in a sweeping metallic touch. He has fought against the Machine, against his nature that wants to be greedy and one with it, though his efforts are unfortunately punished by a forceful deportation back to “artificial peace” and the threat of homelessness. There’s no question as to why the citizens of this dystopian beehive find that it’s simply easier to just give in, to accept a glorified cell in which one is safe and coddled from the dangers of a world with dirt, worms, blood, and blazing sun rays with no blinds to hide themselves away with.

From the industrial revolution to the twenty-first century, technological advancements and climate change have been entangled in a positive upward trend that can only mean negative things for us thanks to our staunch refusal of altruism. After all, who would want to give up their luxury cars for riding the bus to work, or stop buying a cup of coffee at Starbucks and making their own at home? It’s just not the same. So again, it does not come as a surprise that humans are horrible at self-sacrifice or thinking decades into the future, as Bryan Walsh writes for the *Time*. He brings up a study done where only ten percent of Americans have savings plan set up for retirement, and likens making selfless decisions for climate change to be like “saving for a retirement you know you’ll never live to see,” which of course makes the mere idea of “long-term cooperation” seem like a long shot (Walsh). Another study done by researchers of New York University for and with *Nature Climate Change* reaffirms this idea, centering a “collective-risk group experiment . . . around climate change” (Walsh). Essentially, “the more delayed the payout was, the less likely the experimental groups would put enough money away to meet the goal to stop climate change,” which does not bode well at all for future generations (Walsh). Similarly, Aishwarya Machani, a Next Generation Fellow for the U.N., uses the term ‘delayed gratification’ to describe this conundrum in her article for *World Politics Review*, stating that ““this ever-present instant gratification is unsurprisingly “distracting us from more meaningful pursuits, and leading to destructive, financial, social, and health outcomes”” (Machani). Such a concept has been accepted and observed since the 1970s as an established part of the human psyche (Machani). Humans are simply hardwired to want things fast and easy, not looking ahead while at the same time making futuristic technological advances that may just doom them.

Again, we are trapped in a situation of our own making, one stemming from the Industrial Revolution whose effects we still feel today as Melissa Joy, affiliated with Mount Holyoke College, details in an article for *International Journal of Humanities & Arts*

Computing: A Journal of Digital Humanities. Even then, it was clear that people acted for themselves, caring not for what would be caught up in their technological advancements: “Despite the detrimental environmental effects caused by the Industrial Revolution and introduction of steam engines, trains, and railroads, this new technology gave citizens an opportunity for leisurely activity” (Joy 20). At the cost of the planet, people found the weight of faster travel over large distances far more to their liking. It’s a similar dilemma we face today, where asking someone to give up their fancy ride in favor of a more ecologically friendly transportation method, such as the bus or a bike, will be met with discomfort and perhaps even haughty laughter for just saying that aloud. Manfred Milinski and others, all affiliated with the science departments at their respective universities, corroborate this in their article for *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. They explain that we are all players in the global climate tragedy of the commons, “a game that we cannot afford to lose,” and yet, faced with such a tragedy, we find ourselves unable to even succeed at a “simulation of the collective-risk social dilemma” (Milinski et al. 2291). The conclusion is all too sobering: “freedom in the commons brings ruin to all” (Milinski et al. 2291). Humanity has picked the forbidden fruit from the Garden of Eve, and with its consumption came the free will to be as selfish as one desires to be.

So, where does this leave us? As established in E. M. Forster's “The Machine Stops” and supported by various real-world writings, humans are selfish beings who find it hard to conceptualize a world in which they need to be actively uncomfortable in order to have just the smallest possibility of reaping future benefits in a world less tainted by their, and their ancestors’ actions. But, not all hope is lost, nor should perhaps all the blame be placed on the individual, though of course some is needed if the world wants to make it far past its morbid seven year timer started in 2020 that “counts down how long it will take for the world to burn through its carbon budget if swift action isn’t taken to keep warming under 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels” (Hassan). Though technology is blamed in both the story and in our current time, the Industrial Revolution being a popular starting point, there are certainly new advancements that will make it easier for the Earth to heal, such as the total phasing out of fossil fuels or vegan substitutes being better than their counterparts in terms of affordability and carbon footprint. Maybe, just maybe, like Kuno remarked in his last breath as his world was wiped out

in a colossal tidal wave of all its mistakes that started with a hunk of almost sentient metal, “Humanity has learnt its lesson” (Forster 78).

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