

English 100/101A

Assignment: Chapter 2 Critical Essay
Text: *Rereading America*, Chapter 2 “Learning Power: The Myth of Education and Empowerment”
Essay Length: 5 full pages (minimum) (not including the Works Cited List also required with this assignment)

Choose **one** of the short essays you read this unit from Chapter 2 in *Reading America* and write a 5 full page analytical essay about how effectively you think that piece communicates its ideas.

The primary goal of this assignment (and the rest of the essays in this class) is to begin learning how to link *what* a writer says with *how* (and how well) he or she says it. The task is NOT to agree or disagree with the writer’s message, or to offer your own moral, political, religious, etc. opinions about it. From now on you should be evaluating the clarity and effectiveness of the writer’s words and rhetorical strategies, not the truth of his or her ideas. Ask these kinds of big critical questions of the text from the very start:

- *What specific writing decisions (also called “rhetorical strategies”) does this writer use to put forth his or her arguments?*
- *What makes these strategies effective, or not?*
- *How do the methods of argumentation in a given piece of writing either help or hurt a writer’s message?*
- *How exactly does the writer succeed or fail in making his or her points?*

Look closely at your chosen essay reading: how does the writer put together his/her arguments and convey them to us – with cold reason, nostalgic storytelling, casual analysis, humor, anger, anecdotal data? Are these essays personal in nature, or journalistic pieces, or political tracts? How do they treat us as readers – contemptuously, sympathetically, earnestly, ironically? What does each writer have to say about the state of education in America? How effectively does each convey his/her message? Why do you think so? What does each actually *do* in his/her writing to convince you of the truth of his/her position, or not?

Your **thesis statement** should lay out a clear position on what you believe to be the ultimate success or failure of a given element or set of elements in your chosen text. It should state a clear position on what you take to be the primary effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the argumentative strategies used in the work. State clearly why it is you think the way you do about the text, and use good textual examples to support and illustrate what you believe to be true about the piece of writing. Examine 3 to 4 (at the most) different writing strategies in order to evaluate *how and how well* the writer writes.

In your **introduction**, introduce and summarize the selection you are examining *before* stating your primary thesis about it. Then, your thesis should argue that the writing either succeeds or fails to deliver its message(s) effectively **for specific reasons you list briefly in your thesis sentence(s)**, and then much more thoroughly in the body of your essay discussion. **Remember the three things a good thesis always requires: 1) a clear and narrowly focused topic, 2) the position you are taking on that topic, 3) and the specific reasons why you are taking that position.**

In your **body paragraphs**, clearly state the single topic point of each paragraph at the start, and then introduce direct textual evidence in the form of quotes or paraphrases. Remember to use quotation marks if you use direct quotes, and always put page numbers in parentheses after the textual evidence, whether it’s a direct quote or a rephrasing of textual evidence in your own words (this is called a “paraphrase”). Your quotes and/or paraphrases should always support and illustrate your primary paragraph topic, but you should **never** let an author you’ve cited speak *for* you: use textual references to *echo* and *amplify* your own ideas that you have already offered in your discussion. Next, spend several sentences analyzing and discussing your topic point and the textual evidence that

you have included, and then link us back to your paragraph topic point and the thesis argument once again for continuity and to provide a transition or bridge to the next paragraph discussion.

I'll be looking for you to show competence in these areas:

1. Good grammatical control of your sentences *and* A narrow, focused thesis argument
2. Body paragraphs that offer lots of discussion *and* Textual examples that support each paragraph's main point
3. A clear description of the main point of the text at the beginning of your discussion
4. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the writing based on your assessment of the writer's specific method(s) of argumentation

Remember:

- Fully introduce and summarize the essay you're analyzing before you begin your analysis
- Be specific in your argumentation: Develop a sound main argument in your first paragraph that revolves around a single point you wish to make about the selection
- Use lots of **textual evidence** to support your discussion – body paragraphs that do not offer direct or paraphrased textual support will not be credited toward your required essay page total
- Develop your body paragraphs by announcing a single supporting point, then by introducing and inserting a textual quotation to provide evidence of your point, then by explaining and discussing that evidence and tying it back to the main point of your paragraph
- Cite your textual quotations with a page number in parentheses after the quotation, and follow all other formatting guidelines outlined in the **The Rules: An MLA Primer**
- **Do a Works Cited List for this assignment – use the template and sample Works Cited List documents provided within the course to help you format your own**
- Use academic language: Write only in the **present tense**, even when speaking of a text that has been written in the past: write "the author **says**," NOT "the author **said**"
- Use academic language: Write only in the **3rd person** (use: he, she, it, they, the authors, the reader, etc.). **DO NOT use me, I, you, or your anywhere in your essay – submissions that do not follow this rule will be returned ungraded and marked down a full letter grade**

Type your summary in Microsoft Word or a similar word processing program. Make sure you spend adequate time proofreading it for clarity, spelling, and sentence construction. Read your work aloud to yourself in a quiet place, or have someone else you trust read it to you – this is a very good way of catching mistakes that your eye can easily miss when rereading your draft work on the computer or on the page. Please make sure your paper formatting matches exactly the model I have provided in the **Sample Format Page** sheet on the website. Please also make sure that your language has been fully proofread and edited so that it does not contain any of the sentence level errors covered in the **Proofreading Notes** sheet on the website. Remember to use the **Sample Student Essay** provided on the website as a model to help you build your own essay.

Good luck. Start on this assignment early, and ask lots of questions to clarify the assignment for yourself. Remember too that I am happy to look at draft work if you wish to show it to me, providing helpful feedback and comments as you rework your essays for submission.