

Senior Composition

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Room 2415

Course Description

This course will focus on the 21st Century analytical writing skills students will need once they graduate to include: argumentative writing, analysis of source information, and portfolio creation. It will also focus on 21st Century Communication skills in small and large groups. Students will write pieces based on contemporary informational texts and media-based pieces that connect to students' lives and will impact the choices they make moving forward in either college or career. Students will be expected to create and deliver presentations using various kinds of technology and forms of media. This required course is one-half semester in length and will be students' fourth and final English credit.

Objectives:

- Students will study and produce argumentative writing.
- Students will study perceptions of race, gender, and culture through current events and contemporary literature.
- Students will practice evaluation of personal writing and peer writing in order to independently edit and revise writing.
- Students will study multiple sources of media to analyze different perspectives on current topics.
- Students will produce, edit, and publish writing throughout the semester and complete a portfolio at the end of the semester.
- Students will produce writing that is specific to individual college and career goals.
- Students will analyze rhetorical appeals from media sources.
- Students will study argumentative and narrative nonfiction.
- Students will incorporate strong, appropriate, and varied word choice and sentence in writing.

Missing:

- ① grade distribution?
evaluation?
- ② course content?
- ③ text, supp. materials
for reading?

- expository
writing?

?? - demonstrate proper
grammar, word choice, organization, research
(clarity)
↓ citation.

Laramie Project Reflection Assignment

Respond to both essential questions **giving at least 2 specific examples from *The Laramie Project*** to support each answer. You've already answered these questions in a general context. Now answer them **as they apply to *The Laramie Project***.

Essential Questions:

1. Are all people treated equally in this world?
 2. How can a past be so prevalent it always affects the future?
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"We Should All Be Feminists" Reflection Assignment

Answer the following questions as they apply to "We Should All Be Feminists". Find 2 pieces of textual evidence to support EACH answer.

- a. Are all people treated equally in this world?
 - b. How can a past be so prevalent it always affects the future?
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13th Reflection Assignment

Answer the following questions in paragraph form (5-7 sentences).

PART 1

1. "History is not just stuff that happens by accident. We are the products of history that our ancestors choose if we're white. If we are black, we are the products of the history that our ancestors most likely did not choose. Yet here we are all together, the products of that set of choices. And we have to understand that in order to escape from it." —

Kevin Gannon, 13th

How does this quote speak to our essential question about the past?

PART2

2. Crack vs Cocaine. Same drug (one powdered, one cooked) but used in different racial communities and carry different sentencing. Share your thoughts on how this contributed to mass incarceration. Use evidence from 13th to support your answer.

3. Super predator. Criminal. Think about the power of media and the power of words. Discuss media and how words impact the perception and criminalization of people of color, both in the past and the present (animalistic, violent, to be feared, threat to white people, criminals, etc.). Give modern-day examples.

PART 3

4. PRISONERS FOR PROFIT. Were you aware of the Prison Industrial Complex and how corporations are profiting from incarceration?

- Were you surprised to know about ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council—a committee of politicians and corporations influencing laws that benefit its corporate founders and pushing forth policies to increase the number of people in prison and increase sentences)?

- Talk about CCA (Corrections Corporations of America, leader in private prisons that is required to keep prison beds filled—the leading corporation responsible for the rapid increase in criminalization) and how that impacts our communities.

POST-VIEWING

5. Did you learn concepts that were contrary to what you initially thought or believed? How did this film shape your understanding of the prison system? What challenged your pre-existing view?

6. List three ways this documentary has impacted you:

- What did you learn?
- What insights did it provide?
- What questions do you still have?

In this unit, you are asked to think about the different social justice issues we study and discuss, and then write an essay in which you discuss one (or both) of the following Essential Questions:

- **Identify a current social issue and examine reactions through policy or advocacy, indicating how those impacted by the issue are affected.**
- **How can a past be so prevalent it always affects the future?**

You have read *The Laramie Project* and discussed issues of LGBTQ+ rights and hate crimes, read "We Should All Be Feminists" and discussed issues of women's rights and the equality of different genders, and you have watched *13th* and discussed issues concerning the African American population and the prison system in the United States.

Purpose: When you enter the world after Lansing High School, you will meet people of varying backgrounds and experiences, regardless of workplace or college. You will need to understand that even though they are in the same time and place as yourself, there may be things about them that you do not necessarily know or understand; these things may not always make themselves apparent. These individuals may be facing issues that are hard for you to relate to. Through expository text and media analysis, you may better understand the challenges of those around you.

Essay Requirements:

- A clear, concise thesis statement (address one or both Portfolio questions)
- 3-5 pages in length, excluding the Works Cited Page
- Minimum 1 social justice issue discussed, but you may have 2 if you like, using at least 4 sources. Your four sources can be a combination of ones which have been provided for you and ones you found during Media Study.
- MLA format: Purdue O.W.L.
 - 12 point Times New Roman font
 - Double spaced
 - In-text citations
 - Heading and header
 - Works Cited page
- Show active thought, analysis, and synthesis of sources
 - TIQA TIQA format may help you with this. (Remember that from last year? 😊)
- Adhere to basic grade level grammar and mechanics
- No use of first person or second person pronouns
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- **Portfolio Requirements:**
- **THREE Revised Reflections (*The Laramie Project*, "We Should All Be Feminists," and *13th*)**
- **Revised Social Justice Expository Essay**
- **Reflection Letter**

Unpacking Adult Mindsets

Willing to Be Disturbed

A chapter from Margaret J. Wheatley's *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*. Wheatley asks educators to reflect on their willingness to have their beliefs and ideas challenged by others. She also espouses the idea that strong leaders cannot create change unless they are willing to be disturbed. This is a great read when working with teams that are stuck and need a fresh approach to the work.



Wheatley, Margaret J. Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future San Francisco: Berrett-Koshler Publishers, Inc., 2002

"Willing to Be Disturbed"

As we work together to restore hope to the future, we need to include a new and strange ally—our willingness to be disturbed. Our willingness to have our beliefs and ideas challenged by what others think. No one person or perspective can give us the answers we need to the problems of today. Paradoxically, we can only find those answers by admitting we don't know. We have to be willing to let go of our certainty and expect ourselves to be confused for a time.

We weren't trained to admit we don't know. Most of us were taught to sound certain and confident, to state our opinion as if it were true. We haven't been rewarded for being confused. Or for asking more questions rather than giving quick answers. We've also spent many years listening to others mainly to determine whether we agree with them or not. We don't have time or interest to sit and listen to those who think differently than we do.

But the world now is quite perplexing. We no longer live in those sweet, slow days when life felt predictable, when we actually knew what to do next. We live in a complex world, we often don't know what's going on, and we won't be able to understand its complexity unless we spend more time in not knowing.

It is very difficult to give up our certainties—our positions, our beliefs, our explanations. These help define us; they lie at the heart of our personal identity. Yet I believe we will succeed in changing this world only if we can think and work together in new ways. Curiosity is what we need. We don't have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes. We do need to acknowledge that their way of interpreting the world might be essential to our survival.

We live in a dense and tangled global system. Because we live in different parts of this complexity, and because no two people are physically identical, we each experience life differently. It's impossible for any two people to ever see things exactly the same. You can test this out for yourself. Take

any event that you've shared with others (a speech, a movie, a current event, a major problem) and ask your colleagues and friends to describe their interpretation of that event. I think you'll be amazed at how many different explanations you'll hear. Once you get a sense of diversity, try asking even more colleagues. You'll end up with a rich tapestry of interpretations that are much more interesting than any single one.

To be curious about how someone else interprets things, we have to be willing to admit that we're not capable of figuring things out alone. If our solutions don't work as well as we want them to, if our explanations of why something happened don't feel sufficient, it's time to begin asking others about what they see and think. When so many interpretations are available, I can't understand why we would be satisfied with superficial conversations where we pretend to agree with one another.

There are many ways to sit and listen for the differences. Lately, I've been listening for what surprises me. What did I just hear that startled me? This isn't easy – I'm accustomed to sitting there nodding my head to those saying things I agree with. But when I notice what surprises me, I'm able to see my own views more dearly, including my beliefs and assumptions.

Noticing what surprises and disturbs me has been a very useful way to see invisible beliefs. If what you say surprises me, I must have been assuming something else was true. If what you say disturbs me, I must believe something contrary to you. My shock at your position exposes my own position. When I hear myself saying, "How could anyone believe something like that?" a light comes on for me to see my own beliefs. These moments are great gifts. If I can see my beliefs and assumptions, I can decide whether I still value them.

I hope you'll begin a conversation, listening for what's new. Listen as best you can for what's different, for what surprises you. See if this practice helps you learn something new. Notice whether you develop a better relationship with the person you're talking with. If you try this with several people, you might find yourself laughing in delight as you realize how many unique ways there are to be human.

We have the opportunity many times a day, everyday, to be the one who listens to others, curious rather than certain. But the greatest benefit of all is that listening moves us closer. When we listen with less judgment, we

always develop better relationships with each other. It's not differences that divide us. It's our judgments about each other that do. Curiosity and good listening bring us back together.

Sometimes we hesitate to listen for differences because we don't want to change. We're comfortable with our lives, and if we listened to anyone who raised questions, we'd have to get engaged in changing things. If we don't listen, things can stay as they are and we won't have to expend any energy. But most of us do see things in our life or in the world that we would like to be different. If that's true, we have to listen more, not less. And we have to be willing to move into the very uncomfortable place of uncertainty.

We can't be creative if we refuse to be confused. Change always starts with confusion; cherished interpretations must dissolve to make way for the new. Of course it's scary to give up what we know, but the abyss is where newness lives. Great ideas and inventions miraculously appear in the space of not knowing. If we can move through the fear and enter the abyss, we are rewarded greatly. We rediscover we're creative.

As the world grows more strange and puzzling and difficult, I don't believe most of us want to keep struggling through it alone, I can't know what to do from my own narrow perspective. I know I need a better understanding of what's going on. I want to sit down with you and talk about all the frightening and hopeful things I observe, and listen to what frightens you and gives you hope. I need new ideas and solutions for the problems I care about. I know I need to talk to you to discover those. I need to learn to value your perspective, and I want you to value mine. I expect to be disturbed by what I hear from you. I know we don't have to agree with each other in order to think well together. There is no need for us to be joined at the head. We are joined by our human hearts.