

21W.730

FALL 2002

EXPLORING SOCIAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN FILM AND PRINT

ESSAY #1: PERSONAL ESSAY: REASONS TO BELIEVE: DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF A SOCIAL OR ETHICAL ISSUE

Due Date: Draft (First Version): Class #6. (Put essays in hanging folders on my door –or slip them, in a large envelope, under the door.

Revision: Class #10

Exercise 1.1: Due Class #2. (4 copies)

Please submit TWO copies of your draft together with a cover letter to me describing what you see as the strengths and problem areas of the piece. With TWO copies of your revision, please include your marked-up draft with my comments (or a copy) and a cover letter describing your choices in revision and your overall sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the new version. Please consult syllabus for manuscript form.

ESSAY #1 (Suggested length: 4 pgs., typed, double-spaced)

Introduction:

We begin the course by reflecting on the sources of our own personal beliefs and commitments. Individuals become aware of and committed to addressing social and ethical issues in a wide range of ways. Some people, for example, trace the roots of their social consciousness or particular beliefs to the powerful influences of family members, peers, teachers, religious leaders, groups or rituals, books, lectures, films, personal experiences (or witnessed experiences) of social injustice and exposure to movements for social change. If you are seriously considering a service-learning commitment this term or have previously done community volunteer work, this assignment can enable you to narrate the “backstory” of how you decided to work on a particular community issue. If you have a strongly held position on a particular issue (e.g. for or against capital punishment, human cloning, abortion rights or gay marriage), this essay offers you the opportunity to trace the roots of that position. Essays like this can inspire readers to ponder the sources of their own beliefs, recognize different pathways to social engagement and question their preconceptions about particular kinds of issues.

Essay Assignment:

In this essay you will have the opportunity to reflect upon one or two key influences upon your own awareness of a social or ethical problem or issue. The influence may be a person(s), experience(s), event(s), or text(s) (book, poem, film, play). Note that many student writers choose to focus on a specific social issue such as racial or gender equality, capital punishment, environmental justice or animal rights. However, it is also possible to write about a more general awakening of social consciousness or awareness of social injustice (as Marian Wright Edelman does in “A Family Legacy”).

Writing Challenges:
Crafting a Reflective Essay:

Our focus in the course is to create clear, vivid and well-supported essays as “public scholarship” for a broad community of readers. The challenge in this essay is to move beyond “purely personal” narrative or unprocessed experience. When writers engage in personal narrative for a public readership, they are reflecting upon, shaping and framing their own experience so that the essay connects with a wider audience. As you craft your essay, think about **motive**. Why do you want to narrate this story – to inspire readers, to challenge their preconceptions, to motivate them to care about an issue or, more generally, social justice (however you may define the term)? Successful personal essays create a bridge between the personal and the public and invite serious reflection from readers on the sources of their own deeply held beliefs.

Questions of Structure

An effective essay communicates a clear argument or perspective in which the writer supports claims with evidence. Although this essay deals with the realm of personal life, you will still be supporting a claim that, for example, a particular experience was “life-changing” or “highly influential” by a clear, reflective and well-structured presentation of that experience. Remember: “argument” can take many forms!

Voice and Style:

In essays like this, you have an opportunity to be more colloquial than in more formal academic prose. Carefully consider your choices of words and phrases, the length of your sentences and paragraphs. Be sure that your language expresses the power of the experience that you have chosen to narrate. Writing engaging personal essays provides an avenue for the writer to craft more vivid expository prose in more traditional essay forms.

EXERCISE 1.1(Bring FOUR copies to class):

Due Date: Class #2

Write a brief (one or two paragraph) proposal for this essay (4 copies). Assume that you are submitting this proposal to a magazine editor to convince him or her to consider hiring you to write this piece. In your proposal, address the following questions: What experience(s) have you chosen to write about and why? How does this experience connect to your awareness of or commitment to addressing a particular social or ethical issue? In Class #2 we will discuss these proposals in small groups.