

## 09 Sample Writing Assignments

### Sample Personal Narrative Essay

*This essay is very effective at presenting compelling, well-organized narrative for its reader. Ms. Bobbitt's story of facing racial prejudice in Baltimore is very descriptive and features very coherent paragraphs that stay directly on topic. Note how the writer transitions effectively between different "chapters" of her story.*

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Professor R. Abdulillaha

English 101.101

May 6, 2008

Final Draft

#### Prejudice: Breaking the Barriers in Baltimore

I never thought much about equal rights or prejudice growing up. I was born in the mid fifties in the ghetto of Baltimore City. Ironically, I lived right at Baltimore Street where north and south divides (it still does). There was an unwritten rule that we could not cross Baltimore Street, because that was where the white people lived. We would become brave on occasions, but we knew we would have to fight our way back home. That was the extent of my dealings with white people. As a kid, I would hear about the great Martin Luther King and his fight for equal rights. But it never occurred to me that riding in the back of the bus with my mother, for some Blacks, was by force and not by choice.

My first encounter with prejudice came about when I graduated from high school and was looking for a job. The Baltimore Gas & Electric Company was a very well known company. I grew up hearing my parents and their friends comment about paying their BG&E bill. Everyone

paid the BG&E Company. I remember when I took the BG&E clerical test. I was so nervous that I didn't think I would do well. My family and friends encouraged me to go for it. From the time I had been a little girl, there had been no doubt in their minds or in mine that I wouldn't succeed. When I got to the building for the test, there was only one other black person there to take the clerical test. From the moment we walked through the door, we were getting strange looks.

The actual test turned out to be very easy. I knew that I had done very well, but out of about 100 people, I never dreamed I would be in the top two percent. When I received the letter and finally the call from BG&E saying that I had been hired, I really wasn't surprised. I was to report to work that following Monday. Everyone was so happy and proud of me. I bought a brand new outfit, and my mother pressed my hair so straight it felt like silk. I was a seventeen-year-old girl, three months out of high school and going to my first real job. Most importantly, I would now be able to take care of my one-year-old son without anyone's financial assistance. I couldn't have been happier.

The morning finally came for me to go to work. Ignoring the funny stares, I walked right up to the receptionist and announced I was there to start work. She immediately jumped up and ran into the back offices. When she returned, she kept asking me my name. She claimed she couldn't find my name on her list. When I showed her my letter of my job offer, she returned to the back office again. I remember sitting in that lobby for three hours. Finally a middle-aged white woman came out and said to me that there had been some kind of mistake. Even though I asked a couple of times, what kind of mistake, I still to this day don't remember the reason she gave me.

At that point, I believe I was in shock. I remember standing there for a long time not moving. Naturally I was hurt and confused. I was raised to believe I could be anything I wanted

to be, but I wasn't told that I would be denied because of the color of my skin. It seemed like everyone was staring at me. I was the only black girl surrounded by white people. I wanted to cry, but I remembered my parent's words, "You are as good as anybody." I walked out of there with my back straight and my head held high. When I was about a block away, the tears started, and I couldn't get them to stop. I ran all the way home. When I got home and my mother saw my face, she knew something was terribly wrong. It took a while before I could choke out what had happened to me. We both cried for a long time. I kept asking her how they could treat me like that. I don't know how long we stood there like that. The next thing I remember is my mom grabbing me by the hand; we were marching back to BG&E.

When we got to BG&E, my mother was screaming and crying about how unfair they had been to her daughter, and that she wanted to see someone in charge. Eventually, the same worn out white woman, along with a white man, appeared. Still, I can't remember their explanation. By now a crowd had gathered, and black people that were passing by on the street started gathering. Needless to say, the black people who had gathered were getting more and more agitated while the whites were looking more and more petrified. At this point, I think all of the security guards in the building were outside threatening to have us arrested. You have to imagine my mom, barely standing five feet tall. This was a woman who was normally a quiet Christian woman who never bothered anyone, but who was now hysterically crying. I believe seeing her that way was what finally brought me out of shock. I remember saying "Come on mama, lets go home."

When we returned home and told our family and friends, there was another up roar. My friends intentionally crossed Baltimore Street and beat up every white person they could find. This went on for weeks. We tried, for weeks, calling and writing BG&E, but of course nothing

came of it. You have to remember during that time, we were poor black people with no knowledge of how to address such issues. We finally stopped calling and writing when my daddy said, “Don’t worry about it, you are too good for them anyway.” So I moved on.

Several months later, because of the efforts of people like Dr. Martin Luther King, Affirmative Action was created and enforced. The new law made it mandatory for businesses to hire a certain amount of minorities. I applied to the State of Maryland for a job. Again, I was in the top two percent. I know in my heart that it was mainly because of Affirmative Action that I got the job. I was one of the first black women to work for the State Highway Administration.

I would love to be able to say that I didn’t experience any other forms of prejudice or inequality, but I would be lying. The years that followed were very challenging. I believe because of those struggles, I became a stronger person. I was given the opportunity to pave the way for others behind me. In spite of what I have experienced, I have always believed in Martin Luther King’s dream that one day we would all be equal. It really hurts me today when I see our people not taking advantage of so many opportunities that so many of our people have fought so hard to achieve. But I also think of how far we have come from sitting in the back of the bus to a black man running for president of the United States.

## Sample Compare-Contrast Essay

*This essay uses the “block” format of comparing and contrasting its topics. Its thesis statement is very clear and easy to find, and it offers solid, detailed evidence for its claims. Note how the topic sentences follow the thesis statement closely, and guide the audience through material with which they might not be familiar. Also, pay attention to how the writer moves between subjects—he transitions well between his first and second subjects.*

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English 101

19 October 2011

*Watchmen* and *X-Men*: Social Commentary Through Comics

Many people might not think that comic books can be a “serious” medium for examining social problems. Throughout the years, comics have been called “mindless” entertainment for kids, and even a dangerous or corrupting influence, as a famous book written in the 1950s called *Seduction of the Innocent* once argued. While it is true that a great many comic books throughout the years have been mindless or even needlessly violent, I assert that two works of comic art have actually contributed in a positive way to how people—especially young people—understand and talk about real-world problems like race and violence. Marvel Comics’ *X-Men* and DC Comics’ *Watchmen* offer critical insights on these problems, but in vastly different ways.

*X-Men* was created in 1963 by Stan Lee and Joe Kirby, and the series centers on a group of superhuman “mutants” who must live in (and protect) a world that hates and distrusts them due to their dangerous powers. From the beginning, this series was a perfect way for Lee and Kirby to discuss issues of race. The mutants in *X-Men* are born with their powers, making them different from the other “normal” humans in the world: they are part of *homo sapiens superior*, the next step in human evolution. The prejudice and distrust that the mutants in *X-Men* suffer, up to and including genocide, are analogous to prejudice faced by racial minorities in the “real world.” The *Days of Futures Past* storyline, for example, takes place in a timeline where mutants are considered criminals at birth, and are hunted and killed by the U.S. government. Genosha, a fictional island nation in the series, is an apartheid state where mutants (“gene-jokes”) live in ghettos and are second-class citizens.

Two of the series' principal characters, Professor X and Magneto, are often seen as analogues for Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Professor X, who dreams that mutants and humans live together in harmony is obviously the more King-like figure, while Magneto, who takes a far more militant, "liberation by any means necessary" stance toward humans, clearly evokes early Malcolm X. The ongoing and evolving conflict between these worldviews drives much of the drama of the series.

Violence is also a primary concern of *X-Men*. The most popular character in the series, by far, is a character named Wolverine, a hero with unbreakable bones, metal claws, and a body that heals itself instantly after any injury. Wolverine is compelling because he has no problem with killing the bad guys, unlike many other superheroes. He doesn't tie them up and deliver them to the police, but often kills them. Many story arcs revolve around the morality of what Wolverine does in the name of being a "hero," as well as how his methods fit or clash with the ideals of his leader, Professor X. A recent story arc, *Wolverine in Hell*, shows this conflict, as Wolverine is kidnapped by a demon and tortured, in hell, for all the killing—just or unjust—that he has done in his life.

Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, published by DC comics in 1986, is a much darker story than anything in *X-Men*, but deals with some similar themes. Set in a grittier, alternate version of the United States, *Watchmen* tackles race and difference in much the same way as *X-Men* does: by having his heroes be outcasts from the society they protect. While in *Watchmen* the heroes are not "born" different than other humans, they are shown to be socially awkward, obsessive and perhaps even unstable—and clearly distrusted by those they seek to protect. Nite Owl, for example, cannot talk meaningfully to a woman without his costume on, and the Comedian is clearly a violent sociopath and rapist. Dr. Manhattan, a near-omnipotent being created of pure

atomic energy, is isolated and withdrawn from his own (partial) humanity, so much that he spends a good part of the series sitting alone on Mars, thinking. That the “masks” are so different from everyday people forces readers to think about the “others” in their own lives—those on the margins of society that we depend on every day, in many cases without even realizing it.

Violence, and the morality of violence, also plays a big part in Moore’s story. In *Watchmen*, however, two characters stand out as especially violent: The Comedian and Rorschach. The Comedian is a character who believes in nothing, that the entire world is one sick joke, and who lives his life accordingly: he kills, rapes, and maims as he sees fit, when the political or personal situation calls for it. As he is a nasty and brutal character, the reader is primed to be disgusted by the Comedian’s methods. Rorschach, on the other hand, presents a more complicated, but no less violent character. Dressed in a trench coat and covered with a “face” (a mask) that changes like an inkblot, Rorschach is the “dark detective” of the series, who seeks out evil and kills it wherever he finds it. He has no guilt about this, as he lives in a black-and-white moral world. He is often shown in the story as taking violent revenge on rapists, murderers and other reprehensible characters. Rorschach, however, like the Comedian, isn’t exactly someone you might want to have over for dinner, which suggests to most readers that Moore isn’t exactly endorsing the character’s harsh black-and-white worldview or his violent methods.

Both of these works, as you can see, are serious contributions to our understanding of how race and violence function in our society. Through their uses of heroes that are “different” or “outcasts” from society, as well as their implied criticism of the violence that some of their

characters perpetuate, it is clear that *Watchmen* and *X-Men* will continue to instruct young (and old) readers on these topics for a long time.

## Sample Argument Essay

This essay is easy to follow and well-organized, and makes use of the five-part structure and three-part thesis. The topic sentences the writer uses refer directly back to the thesis, and the writer includes a great deal of descriptive evidence to support his claims. He also uses the proper MLA in-text citation style for films or television shows.

Ty Kellogg

ENGL101

Dr. Stark

11 March 2012

### *Game of Thrones*: Something for a Student to Believe In

Every day, students attending college face serious challenges. They face financial difficulties, issues with their families, and even academic problems. For example, they might have trouble covering their rent for the month, they might need to care for a younger sibling or older grandparent, and they might be totally lost in their Introduction to Macroeconomics class. These types of problems don't go away, and require students to be resilient, creative, and decisive to get through them. Popular television, a common pastime for college-aged students, is full of examples of characters struggling with similar problems—and overcoming them. HBO's fantasy epic series *Game of Thrones* is a perfect example of this. *Game of Thrones* is an important show for students to watch because it illustrates the power of resilience, creativity, and decisiveness in overcoming life's challenges.



*Game of Thrones* in many ways illustrates the need for people to be resilient and tough to overcome the difficulties that life throws toward them. Numerous characters throughout the fictional kingdom of Westeros—the main setting of the story—are repeatedly shown as drawing on reserves of strength they never even knew they had. Perhaps the best example of this is the character of Bran, young son of Lord Eddard Stark, the story’s main hero in Season 1. Early in the story, Bran, who enjoys climbing all around the walls of his castle home, is caught witnessing through a window two nobles—including the Queen of Westeros—in a compromising, scandalous situation. One of the nobles then pushes Bran out the window, presumably to his death. We find out, though, that Bran is not killed by the fall, only paralyzed. For the remainder of the season, Bran struggles with his new status, slowly learning how to move and care for himself, and even to ride a horse. He even learns how to “stand in” for his older brother Robb (who is off fighting a war) and his father (off working in the capital city) by serving as the Lord of Winterfell, helping the commoners in his father’s kingdom. He also starts to have dream-visions and is suggested to have some ability in magic—something unheard of in his time. Bran is a great example of a character overcoming horrendous odds by being tough, and is someone that any college student could look to for a positive lesson.

Creativity is also shown as extremely important in *Game of Thrones*; many characters have to think on their feet in original ways in order to survive. The character that most exemplifies this idea is Tyrion Lannister, played to Emmy and Golden-Globe perfection by Peter Dinklage. Tyrion, who is a dwarf (a human with dwarfism, not a fantasy “dwarf”), is the son of one of the richest families in the country, the Lannisters, though he is treated as somewhat of the black sheep of the family—he greatly enjoys drinking, reading, and women. His extremely sharp mind serves him very well throughout the series, saving his life on many occasions.

When he is taken prisoner by a noblewoman of questionable mental stability, Tyrion uses his wit and creativity to demand a “trial by combat.” When his wish is granted, he wisely chooses a violent, amoral mercenary named Bronn to fight on his behalf; the mercenary fights the battle and wins, earning Tyrion his freedom and his life. At another point in the story, Tyrion, making his way home from captivity, is confronted by members of “hill tribes” who seek to rob and kill him. He makes them laugh by responding, when asked how he wanted to die, by saying “In bed, at the age of 80 . . .” (*Game of Thrones*). He then talks the tribe into not only *not* killing him, but protecting him and fighting for him by promising them arms and equipment to better fight their own enemies. He later leads them in a climactic battle, and they shout a battle cry in his honor: “Half Man! Half Man! Half Man!” (*Game of Thrones*). Tyrion’s resourcefulness and creativity are qualities that would be relevant and important for any student pursuing a college degree.

*Game of Thrones* also illustrates the importance of decisive action. Characters in this story must often make split-second decisions that mean life or death. While college students might not be making decisions of this magnitude every day, they must often think quickly and decide clearly in order to achieve success. Robb Stark is a perfect example of a decisive character. When his father is arrested for treason and imprisoned, Robb makes the decision to go to war to get him back, calling all the families loyal to his house together to get him back. “My word is my oath,” Robb says, as he pledges to end his father’s imprisonment (*Game of Thrones*). A bit later in the story, one of Robb’s generals challenges his authority, even threatening him with a knife during a dinner meeting. Robb then orders his pet wolf to attack the man, biting off one of his fingers. This show of “guts” impresses the general, who then pledges to respect and be loyal to Robb.

Aside from being really compelling and interesting television, *Game of Thrones* is a relevant and important work for any college-aged person to see and learn from. Following the characters of Bran, Tyrion, and Robb, and all the hardships they overcome through their resilience, creativity, and decisiveness, will enable any college student to be more successful in whatever he or she decides to pursue.

#### Works Cited

*Game of Thrones*. Prod. David Benioff. Perf. Peter Dinklage, Sean Bean, Lena Headey. HBO Films, 2011.

# Sample Writing Process Analysis Essay

Kelly Success

English 101

Dr. Wannamaker

24 April 2010

## English Process Analysis Writing

The English 101 experience at Coppin for me was very helpful in developing my writing skills. In this class, we were assigned three major essays, the Narrative (on an experience that changed us somehow), the Compare-Contrast (examining two different technologies), and the Argument (attempting to convince an audience of my peers that a work of art is relevant to their lives). All of these essays helped me develop a new approach to my writing.

For our first English 101 assignment, our instructor had us write a 750 word essay on an experience that in some way changed our lives. We also learned a lot about the writing process in Dr. Wannamaker's class. To generate ideas, I primarily used brainstorming and questioning for my paper, because I had a hard time choosing a topic. By writing lists of ideas and questions, I came up with the idea of writing about my first day of high school, one of the worst days of my life, but of course one of the most transformative. After I decided on that topic, I started going through the day itself. I outlined the major events of the day and set them up in chronological order. I then tried to remember the characters and people involved in each little scene. Once I had the basic timeframe of the paper written out, I tried to write good topic sentences for each of the paragraphs in my essay. I tried to follow the rules of good topic sentences like we discussed in class, but it was hard. Eventually I had about seven paragraphs telling about my day, with each one started with a good strong topic sentence that outlined the reason for the following

paragraph and what I had to say about that experience during the day. I turned in the paper and was sure I would get an “A.” After getting the grade (a C minus), I got back to work; I looked back over my first draft and tried to get rid of information that didn’t directly address my point. I was careful about proofreading the second draft too. I had my friend look it over and see if there were any misspelled words or awkward sentences. My hard work paid off with a higher grade.

I followed a similar writing process for the Compare-Contrast essay. Dr. Wannamaker asked us to examine two different technologies. I chose to examine the similarities and differences between two forms of audio / music files, the MP3 format and the FLAC format. I generated ideas using the brainstorming method, and then tried to plan out the essay using the “block ” format that we learned about in class. I decided to talk about the MP3 format first by discussing its quality, file sizes, uses, and compatibility. I then did the same thing for the FLAC format. The revision process was even more in-depth for this essay than the previous. I carefully went through each paragraph to make sure I stayed on topic, and had several friends read the piece for coherence and then again for grammar. I got a B on the first draft of this paper, and revised it further based upon Dr. Wannamaker’s advice; I finally ended up with the elusive “A” that I’d wanted.

Our final paper, the Argument / Encomium, was much, much harder. Though Dr. Wannamaker gave us a broad choice of topics, an argument on “work of art that is relevant and important for a Coppin State student,” it was hard for me to find what I wanted to write about. First I had to figure out what kind of things my audience (people like me) cared about; I then brainstormed and figured out that Coppin students care about being successful in school and overcoming obstacles. So I chose the movie *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* as my topic,

because it shows kids in school overcoming obstacles and becoming successful. I wrote down all the examples in the movie of how Harry and his friends did this. My next phase was planning and organizing. I tried to come up with three ways the movie showed us how to overcome obstacles—I chose teamwork, dedication, and hope as my three ways, and tried to organize my details around them. Drafting was difficult, but I tried to keep my discussion focused on each one of my topic sentences, which were based on my thesis statement. When I turned in the paper, I wasn't confident at all that I would do well. My grade was a disappointing D+ this time. Dr. Wannamaker said that I needed a more specific thesis statement and more details from the text. As I revised, I kept those ideas in mind, putting more information from the movie in my essay and narrowing my thesis to "Harry Potter shows that through teamwork, dedication, and never giving up hope, we can achieve great things." My next revision was stronger, a B-; Dr. Wannamaker suggested that I work more on my mechanics to improve further.