

UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE READY WRITING CONTEST

HIGH SCHOOL TOPICS

INVITATIONAL B • 2016

Read both of the following statements carefully; then write an expository essay on a topic clearly related to one or the other of the two statements. **Provide your own title.** You are not expected to write on both topics.

Contestants who are hand-writing their compositions must use their own standard 8 1/2 x 11-inch ruled white notebook paper or typing paper or the paper provided by the host school. Contestants shall write or print the composition **in ink and on only one side of the paper.** If contestants choose to use their own laptop computers, they must bring portable printers and associated hardware, software and paper. The typed entry must be single-sided and double-spaced, using any standard 12-point font on 8 1/2 x 11-inch white paper. When printing the contest on an electronic printer, the print command must be started by the time contest time expires. Students who opt to compose their entries on computers accept the risk of computer malfunction. In case of computer malfunction, the contestant may use the remaining allotted time to complete the composition in handwriting or compose on another computer (if available).

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Topic I

“At any given instant, all solids dissolve. No wheels revolve, and facts have no endurance – and who knows if it is by design or pure inadvertence that the Present destroys its inherited self-importance.”

— W. H. Auden, British Poet, *For the Time Being*, 1907-1973

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Topic II

“Resist much, obey little.”

— Walt Whitman, American Poet, *Leaves of Grass*, 1819-1892

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Topic I

“Those who can make you believe absurdities, can may you commit atrocities.”

— Voltaire, French Writer/Philosopher, 1694-1788

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Topic II

“The greater the difficulty, the more glory in surmounting it.”

— Epicurus, Greek Philosopher, 341-270 BC

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District 1 • 2016

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Topic I

“Arguing that you don’t care about the right to privacy because you have nothing to hide is no different than saying you don’t care about free speech because you have nothing to say.”

— Edward Snowden, former CIA Employee
and U.S. Government Contractor, b. 1983

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Topic II

“Violence is as American as cherry pie.”

— H. Rap Brown, Black Panther Party
Member, b. 1943

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District 2 • 2016

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Topic I

“We need to consume news with compassion. Just imagine walking a mile in someone else’s headline.”

— Monica Lewinsky, former White House Intern, b. 1973

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Topic II

“Prejudice, a dirty word, and faith, a clean one, have something in common: they both begin where reason ends.”

— Harper Lee, American Novelist,
b. 1926

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Regional • 2016

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Topic I

“It is increasingly intolerable that financial markets are shaping the destiny of peoples rather than serving their needs, or that a few derive immense wealth from financial speculation while the many are deeply burdened by the consequences.”

--Pope Francis, *“Investing in the Poor: How Impact Investing Can Serve the Common Good in Light of ‘Evangelii Gaudium,’”* Conference, June 17, 2014

Topic II

“We’re in a world of truncated sentences, soundbites, and Twitter... [Language] is being eroded – it’s changing. Our expressiveness and our ease with some words is being diluted so that the sentence with more than one clause is a problem for us, and the word of more than two syllables is a problem for us.”

--Ralph Fiennes, British Actor/Shakespeare Interpreter, b. 1962

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State • 2016

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Topic I

Man cannot survive, like an animal, by acting on the range of the moment. An animal's life consists of a series of separate cycles, repeated over and over again, such as the cycle of breeding its young, or of storing food for the winter; an animal's consciousness cannot integrate its entire lifespan; it can carry just so far, then the animal has to begin the cycle all over again, with no connection to the past. *Man's* life is a continuous whole: for good or evil, every day, year and decade of his life holds the sum of all the days behind him. He can alter his choices, he is free to change the direction of his course, he is even free, in many cases, to atone for the consequences of his past—but he is not free to escape them, nor to live his life with impunity on the range of the moment, like an animal, a playboy or a thug. If he is to succeed at the task of survival, if his actions are not to be aimed at his own destruction, man has to choose his course, his goals, his values in the context and terms of a lifetime. No sensations, percepts, urges or “instincts” can do it; only a mind can.

Such is the meaning of the definition: that which is required for man's survival *qua** man. It does not mean a *momentary* or a merely *physical* survival. It does not mean the momentary physical survival of a mindless brute, waiting for another brute to crush his skull. It does not mean the momentary physical survival of a crawling aggregate of muscles who is willing to accept any terms, obey any thug and surrender any values, for the sake of what is known as “survival at any price,” which may or may not last a week or a year. “Man's survival *qua* man” means the terms,

methods, conditions and goals required for the survival of a rational being through the whole of his lifespan—in all those aspects of existence which are open to his choice.

Man cannot survive as anything but man. He *can* abandon his means of survival, his mind, he *can* turn himself into a subhuman creature and he *can* turn his life into a brief span of agony—just as his body can exist for a while in the process of disintegration by disease. But he *cannot* succeed, as a subhuman, in achieving anything but the subhuman—as the ugly horror of the antirational periods of mankind's history can demonstrate. Man has to be man by choice—and it is the task of ethics to teach him how to live like man.

--Ayn Rand (1905-1982), American
Novelist/Philosopher, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New
Concept of Egoism*, 1964.

**qua* - in the capacity of; as being; as

Topic II

I insist thus emphatically on the importance of genius, and the necessity of allowing it to unfold itself freely both in thought and in practice, being well aware that no one will deny the position in theory, but knowing also that almost every one, in reality, is totally indifferent to it. People think genius a fine thing if it enables a man to write an exciting poem, or paint a picture. But in its true sense, that of originality in thought and action, though no one says that it is not a thing to be admired, nearly all, at heart, think that they can do very well without it. Unhappily this is too natural to be wondered at. Originality is the one thing which unoriginal minds cannot feel the use of. They cannot see what it is to do for them: how should they? If they could see what it would do for them, it would not be originality. The first service which originality has to render them, is that of opening their eyes: which being once fully done, they would have a chance of being themselves original. Meanwhile, recollecting that nothing was ever yet done which some one was not the first to do, and that all good things which exist are the fruits of originality, let them modest enough to believe that there is something still left for it to accomplish, and assure themselves that they are more in need of originality, the less they are conscious of the want.

In sober truth, whatever homage may be professed, or even paid, to real or supposed mental superiority, the general tendency of things throughout the world is to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind. In ancient history, in the Middle Ages, and in a diminishing degree through the long transition from feudality to the present time, the individual was a power in himself; and if he had either great talents or a high social position, he was a considerable power. At present individuals are lost in the crowd. In politics it is almost a triviality to say that public opinion now rules the world. The only power deserving the name is that of masses, and of governments while they make themselves the organ of the tendencies and instincts of masses. This is as true in the moral and social of private life as in public transactions. Those whose opinions go by the name of public opinion are not always the same sort amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric marks the chief danger of the time.

--John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), English Philosopher,
On Liberty, 1859

2016 Ready Writing
3A Champion

“I Am What I Say I Am”

Mankind has before been called “the most dangerous game.” This, I propose, is because we are not “game” at all. Of course this sounds ridiculously apparent – of course we separate ourselves from the beat of the field. They are beasts and we are not. In the fields of science, and even history, we seem much the same. Biologically our compositions are vastly similar: same cell structure, same diet more or less same basic needs to a point. But when considering mind, the differences begin to appear.

Looking at Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs is one way to see the distinction between what is human and what is animal. It begins with basic needs – shelter, food, water. These are things that are needed by all inhabitants of earth; bears need caves, squirrels need nuts. However, the upper levels begin to diverge from this mold. They begin to explain the need for self-assurance and esteem. This is one view of where man becomes himself and branches away from the flora and fauna.

Mark Twain, famed author of literature such as “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” and “The Prince and The Pauper,” took a defined stance on what sets mankind apart from the rest of earth’s inhabitants. He says that man is different because it is evil – or rather because of its ability to be evil. This is not to say that animals cannot be perceived as evil; this is clearly displayed to us as children when in cartoons or movies the antagonist is portrayed as a predatory animal, such as the Big Bad Wolf who wants nothing but to devour the poor, defenseless piggies. We have a tendency to often view certain inhuman creatures as “bad” but Twain proposes that on a basic level, they are not. His philosophy supports the idea that regardless of action, nothing lacking a moral compass has the capacity to do wrong. It is similar to the idea that when an

infant squeezes a cat's tail like there's no tomorrow he is not doing anything malicious or wrong but just "doesn't know any better. The Christian bible supports this idea, as well. In the book of James, chapter four, verse seventeen "sin" is described by one universal standard. It states that if any man knows the good he ought to do and does not do it, then that is sin for him. This brings sin (or evil) down to a personal level making it unique to each individual. The only circumstance that constitutes an action as evil is the knowledge that it is by the individual who partakes in it. In this, Twain is supported in saying that, as the only begins with knowledge of right and wrong, humans are set apart by our capacity to be evil.

However, it is important to note that by this philosophy mankind is not inherently evil; it is something we choose. Hobbes presents a different viewpoint. His philosophy presents the idea that the natural state of all things, both human and non, is disorder and chaos. He claims that war is the natural order of the world. This idea is not far-fetched; a look through history supports the view. Of course, World Wars seem far and uncommon war itself is to this world as cherry pie is to America. Speaking of America, she herself has been involved in struggles such as the Revolutionary war, the Civil War, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War (not to mention both World Wars) – and these are only the tip of the iceberg! As we speak, there are uprisings taking place in the Middle East, among other regions, and covert operations happening all over the world. Foucault seems to support this stance in his claims that resistance is a part of nature – every bit as belonging and inevitable as rains, hurricanes, and earthquakes. According to Foucauldian philosophy, when any given force rises up, another will rise to challenge it. Then, as one knife sharpens another, the two forces will propel their enemy thereby propelling themselves and creating an endless cycle of clash. These points support human nature as wicked and unruly – but as Foucault predicted, there are forces that contend with these propositions.

Philosophical mind Augustine saw the good not only in humans, but in life itself. Augustine claimed that everything must be good, or it would not exist. By this, he justified the belief that everything we presume to be bad contains some element of good. In layman's terms, every dark cloud has a silver lining. Say a town floods; well, it provided the plants with water. Say the star basketball player at a high school breaks his legs; at least now the other students get a chance to shine. Essentially, Augustine took an optimistic approach to life and human condition. Levinas' ideas coincide with this, as he suggests that we have a natural predisposition toward helping one another. Levinas describes and explains the connection felt between persons; we are drawn to helping those in need because we inherently see ourselves in others. Humans are good and charitable creatures because we relate to one another. There is no way around seeing this relation, regardless of who it pertains to – it simply happens when we interact. He even goes as far to say that relations built between people, even two total strangers, are the building block to realizing potential and understanding success rather than one's relationship to himself or any relationship to a god or higher power. Both of these philosophers view mankind as fundamentally good and oppose ideas like those of Foucault and Hobbes.

Aristotle proposes an entirely different view: that although we see everything to be caught between two worlds, that of Good and that of Bad, it is not so. Rather, what we see as "good," is the mean between two evils. The Mean Theory states that a balance between catastrophic sides is what is desired. For example, self-confidence is desired. However too much leads to arrogance which is hazardous. On the other end of the spectrum, too little leads to low self-esteem which is equally as catastrophic. Aristotle taught that finding the Mean is the only way for us to really prosper and avoid chaos.

These philosophies offer differing viewpoints, yet each man holds his own viewpoint to be absolutely true. It is human to assume that only one of these dispositions is the correct one, and the others are incorrect, but, were you to question these various men as to what is right, you would never come to one final answer no matter how many years of debate ensued. Each man believes his own stance to be the right one, and so, for him, it is. Whichever philosophy, or combination of philosophies, you believe to be true will also be true for you. There is only one truth – but it is dependent upon the individual; it is *his* truth, and it is absolute. Just as James 4:17 personalized sin, this takes truth and belief to an individual level. Whatever is true, then, whatever is good or bad, you make so by believing that it is.

So it has been said, “to be human is to be flawed.” What does this mean? When supposing that humans are characteristically good or bad, it is always a game of comparisons based on a scale with no end. Then, it must be realized that upon saying “good,” or “bad,” we truly mean “better,” or “worse.” When pondering what composes the upward end of the ruler we use to measure ourselves, it must be established what constitutes perfection; what constitutes “flawlessness.” This question seems redundant when it is taken into perspective that the concept of immaculacy, whether portrayed in traits, disposition, or circumstance, is determined itself by human mindset and assumption. So should we not simply deem ourselves as perfect seeing as we decide what perfection is? Then, when contemplating what lies toward the bottommost end of the ruler, we must ask the same questions of what constitutes evil. Once again, this is decided on by our own mindset, so it seems inevitable that we would simply place traits we don’t possess toward the lower end of the scale as to make ourselves look good. Yet we don’t do this as made evident by the fact that each and every one of us sees evil in himself. We are what we see ourselves to be – we are as good or as bad as we believe we are, yet we don’t choose to consider

ourselves perfect. This is justified in identifying and realizing the most human of all traits we possess: curiosity. Through all forms of advancement and evolution, mankind has been linked by a single habit of ours being the desire to learn and the belief that we can. We hold out for hope that we can progress toward something greater, something *better*. Without believing that there is some form of a “light” at the end of our tunnel, the purpose of life itself would cease to exist. We, as mankind, bring to fruition the purpose of life in trusting that there is always a greener grass, a brighter horizon, or an upper plateau. By believing that we are not yet perfect but someday can be.