**Book Club Reflection Assignments, Combined**

English 1A **Book Club Reflection Assignment *Little Princes***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1000-1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: people with an interest in international issues in general or conflict resolution in particular, teachers or school administrators trying to pick a book for their students, or just readers of a forum that might include one of these.
2. **Write a response to the ideas in the review.** Use the excerpt below to serve as your prompt. Respond to it directly, then build on it. Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major issues addressed in the book: the challenge facing a young American who wants to really understand the hardships of less fortunate people in different cultures, the difficulty of doing real good in the world, the conflict between the our better impulses and our fear of being seen as self-serving or overly virtuous, and maybe the question of what should be our (America’s, the West’s) appropriate response to the problems described in the book.
3. You should also be evaluative. Is it an interesting, well-told story or not? Why? Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate. (Don’t take up all the space with your own story, though. Keep the focus on the book. Convince me that you read it, and read it thoughtfully.)

From a review for *The Huffington Post* by Peter Clothier Posted: 02/25/11

“Lest you fear, as I did when I first scanned the title page, that this might be just another chronicle of do-good activity in a distant part of the world, let me assure you that it's also an extraordinarily compelling human drama, leading up to a sometimes nightmarish "journey into the interior," in a landscape forbidding enough to put body and soul to the ultimate test. [. . . .]

Initially as self-absorbed as the average young person in the privileged Western world, Conor finds himself confronted with real hardship, widespread suffering, deprivation and violence in a country torn apart by civil war[. . .]--all evoked in sharp relief in Conor's narrative. In this flight-or-fight situation, he chooses to stay, and the story he tells becomes also, but unobtrusively, about his personal change and growth. Observing, and having to struggle at first hand with human suffering, this young American becomes himself more human, more fully compassionate, more concerned with the happiness of others than his own. [. . . .] When I say the journey is a harrowing one, I think back to the old meaning of that word, the harrowing of the soul--because it involves excruciating pain and daunting physical impediments, described in such riveting detail that we, the readers, feel that we are living through it with the author. That we also experience the towering beauty of the natural environment is sometimes small compensation. But the greater compensation by far is the joy--both for the parents and the children--in reconnecting. Conor shows us that the love of the human family transcends the boundaries of time and place.” <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-clothier/little-princes_b_827944.html>

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English 1A **Book Club Reflection Assignment *Cooked***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1000-1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: people with an interest in salvaging lives that began badly, or students interested in becoming a chef, or some other logical group of your chosing.
2. **Write a response to the ideas in the review.** Use the passage below to serve as your prompt. It is from a reader who posted her comments on the Web site of Powells.Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major questions of the book—the challenges of defining one’s identity when others want to define it for you, the difficulty of dealing with remorse and believing you can change, the challenge of changing other people’s assessment of your nature and capabilities.
3. You should also be evaluative. Is it an interesting, well-told story or not? Why? Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate. (Don’t take up all the space with your own story, though. Keep the focus on the book. Convince me that you read it, and read it thoughtfully.)

[kaitlynk](http://www.powells.com/Comments/View/kaitlynk), December 14, 2011

“Chef Jeff Henderson’s autobiographical memoir, Cooked, is exemplary proof that it is possible for an author to provide an inspiring message without sounding preachy and repetitive. [. . . .]

A main focus of the memoir is Henderson’s process of self-realization. Though Henderson’s initial view of his drug business is purely monetary-based, over the course of his 20-year prison sentence, he comes to terms with the reality of how drug dealing affects others, and begins his journey towards making a life and career from his newfound passion for cooking. Always staying true to his street-life nickname of “Hard-Head,” Henderson stays true to his goals of making something of his life, even when cliques of other chefs attempt to run him out of kitchens. He makes it evident that he will not let anything or anyone deter him from his dreams of becoming a top chef in the fine dining industry. In the end, this is what separates him from his coworkers and allows him to gain the trust and mentorship necessary for him to learn and excel in the competitive world of hotel fine dining.

Throughout the book, Henderson manages to maintain a casual, yet professional writing style that keeps the story interesting and easy to read, and keeps Henderson’s message clear without leaving the reader as though they have just been lectured by a parent. I had a blast reading Cooked, and would certainly recommend it to anyone, especially those with a passion for cooking or for motivated and relatable main characters.”

http://www.powells.com/biblio/1-9780061153914-4

English 1A **Book Club Reflection Assignment *Autobiography of a Wardrobe***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1000-1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: teachers deciding what book to choose for their students, maybe, or people interested in fashion, gender, or social history.

2. **Write a response to the ideas in the review.** Use the excerpt below (from the *Washington Post* book review) to serve as your prompt. Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major questions of the book—the challenges of defining one’s identity when others want to define it for you, the difficulty in accepting an imperfect body in a body-obsessed culture, etc.

3. You should also be evaluative, like a book reviewer. Is it an interesting, well-told story or not? Why? Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate. (Don’t take up all the space with your own story, though. Keep the focus on the book. Convince me that you read it, and read it thoughtfully.)

“What She Wore” book review by Robin Givhan Sunday, May 18, 2008 *The Washington Post*

“It's hard to fault Kendall for being drawn to such a tantalizing device for examining the connection of fashion to cultural and personal history. As her story moves from the buttoned-up 1950s, through the mod 1960s and on into the 1970s and '80s, styles shift dramatically and, for women, ultimately settle into what seems to be an eternal debate focusing on sex, power and status. When typical fashion histories try to investigate those topics, they tend to fall into one of two categories: academic pontificating and self-indulgent navel-gazing.

Kendall wisely realizes that while each of those approaches has its advantages, it is the tension between group-think and personal expression that explains the irresistible appeal of fashion: We dress for ourselves and for the times in which we live. *Autobiography of a Wardrobe* ambitiously attempts to explore fashion in both contexts.

But Kendall has left the telling of that tale in the hands of an inarticulate storyteller. The wardrobe-as-narrator is awkward and unfulfilling. It begins as a cute conceit and quickly becomes an aggravation. There are hints of an eating disorder, but the wardrobe never explores the way in which clothing is complicit in both hiding a starving body and prodding a healthy one into becoming thinner and thinner.

The death of B.'s mother requires a black dress. She is advised to buy something that she likes. But what does that mean? What sort of dress would a woman like to wear to bury her mother? How do you choose that dress? Ultimately, would you be dressing to please your mother one last time or to soothe yourself?

The wardrobe is neither eloquent nor insightful. It isn't particularly funny or wry. Instead, it muddles along, offering up glib comments that one wishes were more fully fleshed out, colored in with greater detail and endowed with more from-the-gut truthfulness. We are left not knowing much about B. -- other than that she managed to accumulate a closet full of rather unremarkable clothes.”

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/16/AR2008051600142.html>

English 1A **Book Club Reflection Assignment *Yes, Chef***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1000-1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: students interested in becoming chefs, teachers deciding what book to choose for their students, or people interested in race in general or the African diaspora in particular.
2. **Write a response to the ideas in the review, addressing also the main ideas in the book.** Use the excerpt below (from the *NY Times* review) to serve as your prompt.

Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major themes of the book, while also addressing something in the prompt below. For this book, those themes include the challenges of defining one’s identity when others want to define it for you, the difficulty of finding your true career calling, and of proving you can meet the standards of the gate-keepers, and the difficulties of balancing your work with your personal life.

1. You should also be evaluative, like a book reviewer. Is it an interesting, well-told story or not? Why? Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate. (Don’t take up all the space with your own story, though. Keep the focus on the book. Convince me that you read it, and read it thoughtfully.)

“A Life Spent in Sugar and Spice” Review By DWIGHT GARNER June 26, 2012

“The universal rule of kitchen work, Marcus Samuelsson says in his crisp new memoir, *Yes, Chef*, goes as follows: ‘Stay invisible unless you’re going to shine.’ That rule applies to writers too, especially to those who would write food memoirs. Because you like to put things in your mouth does not mean you have a story to tell. Mr. Samuelsson, as it happens, possesses one of the great culinary stories of our time. [. . . .]

*Yes, Chef*  is a good book to give to the aspiring professional cook in your life because its abiding theme is the brutal and selfless work that must undergird culinary inspiration. As a low-ranking member in a good kitchen, he says, “you have to completely give yourself up.”

He adds: ‘Your time, your ego, your relationships, your social life, they are all sacrificed. It’s a daily dose of humility.’”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/27/books/yes-chef-by-marcus-samuelsson.html?_r=0>English

1A **Book Club Reflection Assignment** ***Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1000-1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. Choose an argument to serve as a prompt. Go to the comments section of the original Wall Street Journal site (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704111504576059713528698754.html#articleTabs%3Dcomments>) and browse the comments until you find one that strikes a chord with you. **Choose a substantial one** that is worth discussing, not one that is making an obvious point or that is merely ranting. Part of your grade will reflect whether you have chosen a worthy target, whether to agree or disagree with the comment. (There were 8849 comments when I checked on 4/19/12: you don’t have to read them all.) **Check with your book club peers** to make sure you aren’t using the same one. (If you ignore this, you and the other student will be marked down 50 points.)
2. Paste the comment you’re responding to on a separate page from your response, and hand it in with your paper. (This comment doesn’t count in the 1200 word requirement.)
3. **Write a response to the ideas in the review.** Use the passage below (from a book review posted on Salon.com) to serve as your prompt. Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major questions of the book—the challenges of defining one’s identity when others (particularly your family) want to define it for you, the difficulty of following your own theory of parenting when so many people around you believe you’re wrong, how to admit to yourself that maybe you ARE wrong, and how to balance the desire for excellence with other important values.
4. You should also be evaluative, like a book reviewer. Is it an interesting, well-told story or not? Why? Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate. (Don’t take up all the space with your own story, though. Keep the focus on the book. Convince me that you read it, and read it thoughtfully.)

English 1A **Book Club Reflection Assignment** ***Film Club***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1000-1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: parents, students who hate school, film lovers, or just readers of a forum that might include one of these.
2. **Write a response to the ideas in the review.** Use the excerpt below (from a review posted on the *Book’s End* Web site) to serve as your prompt. Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major questions of the book— the challenges of defining one’s identity when others (particularly your family) want to define it for you, the difficulty of following your own theory of parenting when so many people around you believe you’re wrong, how to balance the desire for conventional ideas of success and security with other important values, how to know when your kids need your help and when they need to be allowed to fail or succeed on their own, and the challenge for young people to find their true career and life path.
3. You should also be evaluative, like a book reviewer. Is it an interesting, well-told story or not? Why? Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate. (Don’t take up all the space with your own story, though. Keep the focus on the book. Convince me that you read it, and read it thoughtfully.)

By [Charles-Adam Foster-Simard](http://booksend.wordpress.com/author/cafsimard/) 16 Aug 2011

“There have been a lot of these kinds of memoirs in recent years where people try to get over something difficult by binge eating, binge running, binge reading, or bingeing on something in a way that is organized enough that it actually gives a new purpose to their lives. I’m sure it works well for all these people, but does it necessarily make a good book? Well, in this case, yes. What makes The Film Club so successful as a narrative is that it doesn’t simply enumerate all the movies watched by these two guys over several years. In fact, the movies are quite secondary. What Gilmour sets in the foreground is the relationship between the father and the son, and more specifically the absolute, unbearable love the father bears for his son. The film club in question became an opportunity for them to take a break from the torments of their lives and spend quality time together, during a period in a child’s life when time with your father is about the last thing you want to have, but potentially one of the most important things you need.

That’s not to say we don’t hear about a few good movies along the way. Gilmour is a true film fanatic, and a wonderful guide into the world of cinema. [. . . .]

The other great thing about The Film Club is that it’s compulsively readable. Gilmour is a master of pace, and he intersperses the actual movie watching in the book with bits and pieces of his and Jesse’s life. The rhythm he achieves is pitch-perfect. Where he sometimes goes over the edge and risks losing the reader is in the emotional intensity and sensitivity of the son, who descends into very very deep black holes whenever he has girl problems, and eventually breaks one of the rules of the film club. Of course, as these things go, a father’s love (especially one ready to write a memoir about his son) is unconditional, and as memoirs go the plots itself is hard to criticize because, of course, the author can defend himself by saying that it’s all true. In the end The Film Club is another heartfelt and moving reminder that art can bring people together and change lives for the better. I sincerely recommend this book to fathers and sons everywhere, and anyone else who may get between them.”

<http://booksend.wordpress.com/2011/08/16/review-the-film-club-by-david-gilmour/>

English 1A **Book Club Reflection Assignment** ***Gang Leader for a Day***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1000-1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: teachers deciding what book to choose for their students, maybe, or people interested in crime, race, social justice, poverty.
2. **Write a response to the ideas in the review.** Use the passage below (from a book review posted on Salon.com) to serve as your prompt. Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major questions of the book—the challenges of understanding a culture you don’t belong to, the problems of poverty and crime in America, and our culture’s love-hate relationship with charismatic criminals.
3. You should also be evaluative. Is it an interesting, well-told story or not? Why? Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate.

“The Unlikeliest Gangbanger” By Laura Miller Feb 28, 2008

“What the budding sociologist found, in the end, was not the depraved chaos that the political right imagines ghetto life to be, nor the left’s tragic melodrama of a powerless, victimized population terrorized by its most hopeless members. (J.T., a gifted manager by Venkatesh’s account, went to college on an athletic scholarship and gave up a job selling office supplies when he realized that white employees were receiving preferential treatment.) What he did find was an economy, and a rough social order that the residents had assembled out of the broken pieces left to them by society at large. Without meaningful police services, they cobbled together a security force of sorts. Without much in the way of social services, they figured out how to extract some of what they needed from the main economic engine in their environment: the gang. Within the borders of a major American city, they lived in the equivalent of a corrupt third-world nation.

At times, the creativity and ingenuity of the people Venkatesh meets are impressive, but they were still spent in getting what most of their fellow citizens take nearly for granted: a roof over their heads, food for their kids, protection from thieves and brutes. [. . . .]

[More recently, Venkatesh] writes that few of today’s gangs are as extensive, stable and well organized as the Black Kings once were, and by the time you get to the end of *Gang Leader for a Day*, it’s hard not to wonder if that’s such a good thing. Criminals though they were, the job they did wasn’t always as dirty. And somebody’s got to do it.”

<http://www.salon.com/2008/02/28/gang_leader/>

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English 1A **Book Club Reflection Assignment** ***The Translator***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1000-1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: people with an interest in international issues in general or conflict resolution in particular, teachers or school administrators trying to pick a book for their students, or just readers of a forum that might include one of these.
2. **Write a response to the ideas in the review(s).** Use one or both reviewsexcerpted below to serve as your prompt. Respond to it (or them) directly, but add something of your own to their views. Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major questions of the book: the challenge of facing danger, violence, and despair with courage, the difficulty of not returning evil for evil, and the near impossibility of getting people in the West to care about the traumas of distant, foreign people. Here’s one issue you might discuss: You will notice, if you read several reviews, that all say something about Hari’s surprising moral stance, his amazing lack of bitterness or anger in the face of the terrible human atrocities he has seen. Do you agree with this assessment of his tone and message? Do you think it makes his book more or less likely to have an impact on the debate over what the international community should do to help his people?
3. Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate. (Don’t take up all the space with your own story, though. Keep the focus on the book. Convince me that you read it, and read it thoughtfully.)

“The narrative displays a light touch befitting the author’s friendly disposition; even near the end, when he describes a frightening period of torture and imprisonment, he remains the kind of man who wants to look for the good in everybody.

A book of unusually humane power and astounding moral clarity: evenhanded but pointing a reproachful finger at all the right targets.” From the Kirkus review

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/daoud-hari/the-translator-4/>

"'Unique,' a word avoided by most journalists, is just the first to describe this heart-stopping memoir, written by a native Darfuri translator who, after escaping the massacre of his village by the genocidal Janjaweed, returned to work with reporters and UN investigators in the riskiest of situations. Taking readers far from their comfort zones, Hari charts the horrific landscape of genocide in the stories of refugee camp survivors [. . . .] Throughout, Hari demonstrates almost incomprehensible decency; those with the courage to join Hari's odyssey may find this a life-changing read. A helpful appendix provides a primer on the Darfur situation." Publishers Weekly (Starred Review) <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-1-4000-6744-2>

English 1A **Book Club Reflection Assignment** ***Working in the Shadows***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1000-1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: people with an interest in U.S. labor issues, or international issues in general or immigration in particular; people interested in social justice, teachers or school administrators trying to pick a book for their students, or just readers of a forum that might include one of these.
2. **Write a response to the ideas in the review(s).** Use one or both of the reviewsexcerpted below to serve as your prompt. Respond to it (or them) directly, but add something of your own to their views. Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major questions of the book: how to uncover objective truth about an issue that our society has trouble thinking rationally about (race, immigration, poverty in America); how to deal with the knowledge that as consumers we are supporting industries that exploit people on a regular basis (for example, just by buying food); and how to deal with public apathy on these subjects.
3. Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate. (Don’t take up all the space with your own story, though. Keep the focus on the book. Convince me that you read it, and read it thoughtfully.)

**Review #1: from Publisher’s Weekly, 12/14/2009**  
Working in the Shadows: A Year of Doing the Jobs (Most) Americans Won’t Do Gabriel Thompson. Nation, $24.95 (272p) ISBN 978-1-56858-408-9

“Thompson ([also author of ]*There’s No José Here*) details working alongside undocumented workers in this stirring look at the bottom rung of America’s economic ladder. Thompson’s project feels initially like a gimmick; that this middle-class white American can go undercover in the lettuce fields of Arizona or the poultry plants of Alabama seems more stunt (or rehash of Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed*) than sound journalism. But the warmth with which he describes his co-workers and the heartbreaking descriptions of the demanding, degrading, and low-paying jobs quickly pull the reader in. Gimmick or no, the author pushes his body and his patience to the limits, all the while deferring attention to the true heroes: his co-workers, whose dignity, perseverance, physical endurance, and manual skill are no less admirable for being born of sheer necessity. What emerges are not tales of downtrodden migrants but of clever hands and clever minds forced into repetitive and dangerous labor without legal protections. Thompson excels at putting a human face on individuals and situations alternately ignored and vilified.”

# Review #2: from the SF Chronicle 'Working in the Shadows' Mary D'Ambrosio, Special to The Chronicle Monday, March 15, 2010

Unfortunately, Thompson neither delivers enough portraiture to make "Working in the Shadows" a memorable read, nor adds much to the debate over how immigration affects U.S. jobs. He also, imprudently, makes himself the central character in his tale, so we hear far too much about his struggles with manual labor, and far too little about the lives of the people he meets. A more accurate subtitle might be: "A liberal New York vegetarian hangs out with lettuce pickers, poultry processors and bike delivery guys, and survives to write this book."  
  
Read more: <http://www.sfgate.com/books/article/Nonfiction-review-Working-in-the-Shadows-3195749.php#ixzz2DSLiLybD>

In case you’re interested, I also ran across this, a more recent commentary on the subject by Thompson, an article related to the poultry plant job: <http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/forced-work-broken-ankle-workers-defy-abusive-supervisors-big-union-win>