

Sample Interdisciplinary Unit Essay Prompts

The culminating assessment of each unit, and the cornerstone of Cleveland Humanities Magnet, is the interdisciplinary essay exam, a two-hour in-class writing exam. The following are examples of the essay prompts we have used. These prompts demonstrate the focus of each grade level as well as the rigor and excitement of the curriculum.

9th Grade Unit 1: Australian Aboriginals

For 60,000 years, the indigenous people of Australia survived by preserving a society that was completely interdependent with its environment. In a well-written essay, describe the Australian Aboriginal way of life as a model for living sustainably with the land. Begin your essay by discussing the necessary interactions that allow organisms to maintain their way of life within their ecosystem. Then, explain how the Aboriginal people, a folk society, adapted to their environment in order to preserve their culture and land. Conclude your essay by contrasting the “taker” way of life with the aboriginal Australian “leaver” worldview, and by discussing how we might incorporate specific elements of their way of life in the 21st century.

10th Grade Unit 1: Ancient Greece

Living a virtuous life was the chief concern of many Classical Age Greeks, including the influential Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In a well-written, coherent essay, choose one of these philosophers and analyze how their definition of virtue was shaped by and helped further develop Greek society. First, using an in-depth study of the following documents as a springboard, thoroughly explain the philosopher’s definition of virtue, as well as why he felt being virtuous was so important to Athens. Next, explain the historical context that influenced the development of the philosopher’s ideas, and how his philosophy furthered Athenian society. Then, show how the art and literature of the time reflected or challenged this definition of virtue. Finally, explain whether this philosopher’s definition of virtue is still applicable to modern life.

11th Grade Unit 1: The American Meritocracy

“The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie – deliberate, contrived and dishonest – but the myth – persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.”
- John F. Kennedy

Even with the proclamation that through hard work and perseverance anyone can achieve the American Dream, history has exposed this belief as a myth for the many who had been excluded. In a well-written, coherent essay, demonstrate your understanding of the ways in which people have been prevented from attaining the American Dream. First, using Troy Maxson from *Fences*, discuss his disillusionment with the American Dream. Then, connect the discrimination that Troy experiences to the exclusion of African Americans that began with slavery. Next, explore the role the Transcendentalists played in fighting for marginalized people who had been exploited by the greed inherent in the material pursuit of the American Dream. Then, explain how, despite the fervor of the Transcendentalists, third wave immigrants also suffered from that same exploitation as illustrated in *The Jungle*. Finally, conclude your essay with a discussion of whether or not you believe the American Dream is beneficial or detrimental to moving forward as a society.

12th Grade Unit 1: Biology and Ideology

At the beginning of the modern period both Shakespeare (in *Hamlet*—1600) and Descartes (*Meditations on First Philosophy*—1641) express the traditional thought that human beings are a special kind of animal on the planet Earth. For example, they think that Hamlet differs from a wonderful dog like Willy IV. So, just what do they say or suggest are the significant differences? What might Hume (*Treatise of Human Nature*—1739-1740) and Wilson (*Consilience*—1998) say in response? In writing, keep in mind what the four thinkers might say about our basic human nature, our mental lives, our moral lives, and why our lives go well or badly. Finally, based on your own evaluation of the ideas of these four thinkers, what should we conclude about this complex topic?