

Dear future Junior AP Student,

Welcome to AP Language and Composition! In preparation for our study of American literature next year, I am including the following directions for your summer reading assignment. This summer you will be reading two books, *Nickel and Dimed*, by Barbara Ehrenreich, and *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and annotating as you read in order to complete a short writing reflection. This assignment will be **due on the first day** that you return to school. This will be in addition to our one school, one book (*Left to Tell*) that you also must read by the first day of school.

In exploring these two texts, we will engage a set of themes that our contemporary American experience has made imminent: our nation's ideals of family values, poverty, wealth, success, and "hard work." We will work on recognizing, questioning, and articulating the inherent values, beliefs, and practices of the "American Experience." Our focus with these two works will be the exploration of how some groups may be disenfranchised by the expectations implicit in our society's concept of the American Dream. We will use Fitzgerald's and Ehrenreich's works to research and debate certain cultural assumptions that surround the idea of the American Dream.

The ideology inherent within the "American Dream" tells us that, in America, anything is possible! In other words, anyone can "make it" in this great country, simply by "pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps." This theory defines hard work as being the key to social and economic success. Therefore, its implications reveal that those who are not financially successful must not "work hard enough." In reading our summer reading books, we will explore how these assumptions are at play in our contemporary atmosphere.

*The Great Gatsby* and *Nickel and Dimed* both explore the ideology of the American Dream. Fitzgerald's novel, written in 1925, investigates the culture of the Jazz Age and the ways in which socioeconomic success defines self-identity in modern America. Ehrenreich's journalistic investigation of the working poor in contemporary America seeks to reveal certain misunderstandings that Americans have about the forces at play in our socioeconomic system. As you read these two books, I want you to heavily annotate the books while considering the following questions.

Annoting for *The Great Gatsby*: Consider all of the following and mark passages in the novel.

1. Relationships between characters in the text.
2. Fitzgerald's opinion of Jay Gatsby.
3. Nick's opinion of Jay Gatsby.
4. Fitzgerald's view of the American Dream.
5. Fitzgerald's descriptions of wealth and how they relate to his own views about excess.
6. Nature of love between characters in the novel
7. Motifs of haunting, ghosts, or nostalgia in the novel.

Annoting for *Nickel and Dimed*: Consider all of the following and mark passages in the novel.

1. Situations or excerpts that relate to the notion of the American Dream—the ideology that suggests that Americans can rise out of poverty and be successful simply by working hard.
2. Injustices that Ehrenreich faces in the low-wage workplace.
3. The attitude of the middle class towards low-wage workers.
4. The attitude of the low-wage workers to the jobs that they hold.
5. The importance of the novel's title in relation to scenes in the book.
6. The economic situation behind minimum wage, supply and demand, and capitalism in America as revealed by Ehrenreich.

7. Take a stand on living wage laws using Ehrenreich's journalistic investigation to support your views.
8. The relationship between employee and employer in the minimum wage world that Ehrenreich visits.
9. Consider why people may have difficulties with some of Ehrenreich's proposals.
10. Consider whether you believe that Ehrenreich is exaggerating the workplace as she describes it.
11. What is Ehrenreich's attitude toward her coworkers? Does she appreciate them? Is she condescending? How do you react to her observations?
12. According to Ehrenreich, who is to blame for the situation of those who work at low-paying jobs? Are there heroes and villains, or does the workplace itself change the people who are part of it.
13. Consider your attitude toward Ehrenreich and her method of research. Does choosing to live as one of the working poor for a short time—as a kind of visitor or tourist—give her an accurate picture of their lives? Explain whether you find her presentation of them respectful, convincing, sympathetic, patronizing, superficial, or some combination of these.

After you finish reading, write an essay between 700-900 words answering one of the following questions:

- What shape has the American dream taken in modern America?
- How has the concept of the American dream evolved and what has remained consistent?
- Is the American dream an inclusive or exclusive ideology?
- How has the concept of the American dream shaped our actions and beliefs as a society?

Your essay must have perfect grammar and be in MLA format. You should include at least 3 quotes from *The Great Gatsby* and 3 quotes from *Nickel and Dimed* to support your reasoning. You should include a works cited page for both novels. Your paper should be well organized with an introduction and thesis statement, body paragraphs with topic sentences, concrete details, and commentary, and a conclusion.

I am very much looking forward to next year. Please don't hesitate to drop by my class (108) to ask me any questions about next year. Have a wonderful summer,

Mrs. Vigen ([evigen@loyolaprep.org](mailto:evigen@loyolaprep.org))  
318-422-4212