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### Musical Theater Reflective Essay

This semester was not as stressful as I thought it would be when I was in high school, but it still has been slightly challenging and at times difficult. College is different from high school in the sense that you don't receive the constant reminders on assignments like you would in high school. Especially in this FIQWS course, it's all about doing things on your own and if you need help you are in charge of making the effort to find help yourself. It's not as easy to get an A or a B as it was in high school. I've realized that college revolves around time management, as a student, there were times where I'd procrastinate, however little by little I have become better at managing my time. I recently became a City College student and I am finally relieved to say that I have completed my first semester as a college freshman. As a freshman, I was required to take a freshman composition class, FIQWS. I decided to pick a topic that would be fun and interesting rather than boring, which is why I picked a musical theater class. I love music, but I never really watched musicals other than the Disney ones, so I was curious on whether I'd like the class or if I was smart enough to even take it since I knew nothing about musical theater. It was a few weeks into the semester when I started to realize how fun and entertaining musical theater is. From the tragic love stories, the fairytales, and the current events that are portrayed through them that I wouldn't have or know if I didn't choose to take this class. This FIQWS course has opened me up to so many useful skills and techniques that will not only help me with theater-based courses, but any other course that I take, and a love for musical theater that I didn't think I would have

compared to when I first started the class. I learned how to critically analyze musicals, search for reliable academic sources, and how to write literary works such as a precis and an annotated bibliography.

On our first day of class, our first assignment was to create an aesthetic essay based on our first experience seeing a musical. I had trouble thinking of musicals that have really had an impact on me since I wasn't really into them in the first place. However, I remembered that as a child I loved the musicals *The Lion King* and *Mulan*, they were my absolute favorites. I decided to write about *Mulan* since it had a much deeper meaning to me based on the story behind it. The same week that the essay was assigned, in our class with Dr. Robb that Friday we were going to watch *Mulan*. I was excited because I loved the Disney musical and I would be able to refresh my memory to help writing my essay. After seeing the musical, I loved how engaged my classmates were with discussing the musical with our professor. They also helped me see things differently towards the play and opened me up to viewing new perspectives in it. So, at the end of class, this day really was my aesthetic experience with a musical because it was the day that I realized the real purpose of a musical and how much I'd love them. Musicals aren't just for fun and entertainment, they also express messages, themes, and real-life issues that need to be fixed and they show us ways in which it can be fixed. For example, we all know *Mulan* is about fighting for the stereotypes given to women in general about being the lesser gender. She solves that problem by fighting for her dad in the war and showing the men that she can do everything they do, if not better. This is a common issue that still exists today and what we women can do is the same thing *Mulan* did, fight for our rights and show society that we can be equal and sometimes even better.

Our following assignments were based on three musicals; *West Side Story*, *Oklahoma*, and *The Chorus Line*. The class was split into three groups, so in my group, we were all assigned

West Side Story. I have heard of the musical and its general overview, but I have never sat down to watch the musical. In our class with Dr. Robb, she was a very helpful, engaging and outgoing professor. In every class, we would see different clips from West Side Story and she would help us carefully analyze the musical more in-depth, even the little things that we thought didn't matter with her help and my classmate's help I was able to see how they had an important meaning in the musical. For example, Dr. Robb pointed out how Maria wore a white dress with a red ribbon. My classmates helped me see the meaning of just an outfit by pointing out how the dress gave Maria the innocent/virgin look and that the red ribbon means blood symbolizing the feud between the Jets and the Sharks. I would've never interpreted Maria's outfit like this nor would I see it as a symbolic or meaningful item. After this, I started to take every little thing I noticed in the musical into consideration, and I am glad I did because it has helped me in so many ways when it comes to critically analyzing all musicals in general, not just West Side Story.

Another assignment we worked on for Dr. Robb to help us with our final critical research essay was a pre-annotated bibliography. To be honest, at first, I didn't see how this would be useful towards helping us with our essay, but I guess that was because I've never done an annotated bibliography before. We used our CCNY library databases online, which has been the most useful skill we've learned in class. We used databases such as Gale virtual library, NYT historical edition, and Oxford to find credible academic sources from the year of our musical, which in my case was 1957. This helped us find books, old newspapers, and journal articles that we would use to support our thesis for our critical research essay. I found this so useful because I was able to use it towards other courses and I know that I will be able to use it for any future research papers for my upcoming semesters. It was always accessible, reliable, and it was not complicated in any way. After using the CCNY library to look for academic sources, we began

to cite them in MLA format on a separate document, which the website already does for us, so it was definitely a bonus and a time saver. After citing our sources we basically wrote a brief paragraph under each source summarizing what is discussed in that certain source. Creating the annotated bibliography helped with developing my thesis for my paper by giving me a better understanding of what my sources really talked about. Summarizing the sources made it easier to narrow down topics for my critical research essay, especially for a musical like *West Side Story* that had so many themes and topics portrayed in it.

The weekly blackboard discussions assignments were extremely useful because it helped me interact with my classmates. I was able to collect feedback from many of them and use the critiques to improve my writing. In addition, other students who were also working on *West Side Story* would post their gathered information or new findings, which I would benefit from because it would help me obtain more information for most of my assignments and vice versa. In blackboard everything was an open book, I was able to see everything my peers posted and comment on their work to help them and ask them questions that would help me and probably other students who had been wondering the same thing. The most useful assignments for me were the synthesis paragraph, the matrixes, and the song/scene analysis. The synthesis paragraph created an outline for my critical research essay along with the matrixes because they gave me a good understanding of the main theme of *West Side Story*. The song/scene analysis was useful because it was a group work assignment so I received help from my peers and I was able to see new perspectives towards the theme of my essay. Looking back at all of our blackboard assignments I noticed that we had basically created a small portion of an outline each week, which at the end of the year contributed to creating our final critical research essay.

Professor Meg Wise-Lawrence provided us with readings and practice worksheets that have helped me tremendously with my writing. The article “Reading Games”, by Karen

Rosenberg discussed what strategies, as readers, we should use while reading scholarly sources. Rosenberg mentioned how it was important to pay attention to the authors' intended audience, along with the title, introduction, headings, and the conclusion. The advice that was given by Rosenberg was useful when it came to understanding and critically analyzing my sources to find out exactly what portion I could use for my essay. A rhetoric form worksheet that I found very useful in this class was the matrix worksheet. This worksheet assisted me in organizing my sources for *West Side Story* and with analyzing these sources by determining what exactly in the sources supported my topics of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Considering that I am a visual learner, seeing everything organized in a chart-like format clarified my understanding of my assignments in the course. For example, I was able to realize that the women in the musical were seen as objects by the men, referring to the topic of sexuality in the matrix sheet. In addition, the character Nobody's, a tomboy, wanted to be one of the guys and proved that she was good enough multiple times, however, they always denied her as becoming a member because she was a female, which refers to the topic of gender in the matrix worksheet.

A few months back from today, right before the semester had started, I wouldn't think that I would've learned so much from one course, this class has exceeded my expectations. I had great professors, which was one of my fears before coming into the first semester, but they were clear and lenient when we needed it the most. This course is the reason why I now love musicals and why with any musical that comes my way I will be able to figure out the hidden meaning behind it with the analyzing techniques and skills that I've learned in these couple of months. I'll certainly be putting the provided worksheets, readings, and my knowledge of the CCNY library databases into use through my upcoming classes when needed. Some personal skills that I can say I've obtained from this class are time management and teamwork.

