

English 1301 “This I Believe” Project

Important Dates

Tuesday, May 6—hand out “This I Believe” guidelines in class

Tuesday, May 6-Thursday, May 8—work on “This I Believe” project in class

Tuesday, May 13—“This I Believe” writing due on Blackboard (11:30 AM)

Thursday, May 15—“This I Believe” presentations in class (11:30-1:30)

Essay Prompt

For your final project, you will be composing a brief “This I Believe” essay about your beliefs about social class and work, based on what you have learned this semester. For inspiration, you should read or listen to several examples of this form from the “This I Believe” website (<http://thisibelieve.org/>). Then, write your own essay in this same style that focuses on your own experiences and beliefs related to work or class. When writing, keep in mind the advice offered by the website:

- **Tell a story:** Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life and your own reading/research. Feel free to draw upon your writing in previous essays, readings you have completed for class, your discussion board postings, as well as your own personal experience. Consider moments when belief was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work, and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching—it can even be funny—but it should be *real*. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and the shaping of your beliefs.
- **Be brief:** Your statement should be brief, no more than two pages.
- **Name your belief:** If you can’t name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. You might imagine trying to complete this statement, “When it comes to social class in the United States, I believe.....” or “With regard to work in the United States, I believe.....” Also, rather than writing a list, consider focusing on one core belief, since you only have a small amount of space to make your point. You don’t necessarily have to state explicitly “I believe” somewhere in your essay, but it should be clear to the reader.
- **Be positive:** Please avoid preaching or editorializing. Tell us what you do believe, not what you don’t believe. Avoid speaking in the editorial “we.” Make your essay about you; speak in the first person.
- **Be personal:** Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. Try reading your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak. As Ballenger tells us in your textbook, try to find your voice.

Criteria

A successfully written essay will meet the following criteria:

- Length of the essay will be **two pages**;
- The writing should be **typed, double-spaced, with proper MLA formatting and heading**;
- As guidance, students should use the **“This I Believe” website**;

- As reference, students should go back to their **previously written essays, readings completed for class, discussion board postings, and personal experience**;
- It should be clear that students have made **revisions** in each stage of their writing. In other words, the rough draft and final draft should not be the same exact paper;
- Please use **strong grammar, punctuation, and spelling**; and
- Students will turn in their final drafts through Blackboard by **11:30 AM on Tuesday, May 13**. Please note that there will be no Student Draft Review or Writer’s Workshop for this assignment, though students are certainly welcome to come see me or visit the Writing Center for additional assistance. No late work will be accepted on this assignment;
- On **Thursday, May 15, from 11:30-1:30**, students will present their “This I Believe” essays to the class in brief, informal presentations. More information on these presentations is listed below; and
- The writing portion of this assignment is worth **5% of your overall course grade**.

Presentation Guidelines

On Thursday, May 15, from 11:30-1:30, each student will be expected to present their “This I Believe” assignments in front of the class. While these are intended to be informal (and, hopefully, fun!) presentations, there are still certain guidelines I would like students to follow:

- Each presentation should be approximately **three to four minutes** in length. While some may be a bit shorter and others slightly longer, everyone should be near this time mark. Students who go much longer will be encouraged to wrap it up;
- The presentation should present the **main ideas addressed in the “This I Believe” assignment**. This project is meant to be a culmination of all the writing, work, and thinking you have done this semester and sum up your ideas and what you have learned about social class and work. Students are welcome to read their essays or present them extemporaneously;
- While this is an informal and brief presentation, students should still follow some basic guidelines for effective presentations, such as **1) speak loudly and clearly; 2) have a clear plan before they get up to speak; and 3) maintain a certain level of professionalism**; and
- Finally, students should be prepared to **answer questions** at the end of the presentation from either their classmates or me.

Remember that this presentation will count for 5% of your final grade, so some planning and preparation are a good idea. Once presentations are complete on our final exam day, I will post grades in the Blackboard gradebook.