Due Date
Wednesday, August 29 (posted in WebBoard no later than 10:00 p.m.)
The minimum required length for this essay is 600 words.

The Diagnostic Essay: Purpose and Expectations
The diagnostic essay allows me to offer you some feedback on your writing at the beginning of the course. The essay will not receive a grade and does not count toward your final course grade, but I will collect and evaluate the essay just as I will evaluate the other essays you submit for the course, giving you suggestions that you can apply to your other essays. The diagnostic essay is also a way for me to see how much you know about writing an essay at the beginning of the semester.

You will have approximately two weeks to work on each of your graded essays, plenty of time to plan, pre-write, write, revise, and proofread, major aspects of the writing process that I feel are vital to writing a good essay. However, you do not have as much time to write your diagnostic essay. Because you do not have a lot of time to work on this essay, I don’t expect any literary masterpieces, but I do expect the basics:

- an introduction and conclusion,
- a thesis statement,
- relevant topic sentences,
- body paragraphs focused on one main idea each,
- a logical progression of ideas,
- ideas developed and supported with specific details,
- a clear presentation of your ideas,
- sentences free or almost free from errors, and
- at least 500 words.

Don’t worry if these expectations sound intimidating; just do the best job you can in the short time you have to write the essay. You will read a lot of information about strengthening your writing throughout the semester, but if you feel you need to review the basics before you write the diagnostic essay, you might read the web handout Evaluation and Grading Criteria for Essays. You should also read the web handout Requirements for All Essays.

The Assignment
Maya Angelou’s “Graduation” (483-490) is the story of Marguerite Johnson’s eighth-grade graduation, but the events of the story and Marguerite’s reactions to them also suggest Marguerite’s personal growth in terms of her understanding of herself and others.

In an essay, explain how Marguerite gains a greater awareness of herself and others in Maya Angelou’s “Graduation” (483-490).
You can assume that your audience has already read “Graduation,” so you should not just summarize it. Instead, try to focus on answering the question above.

One of the first things you should consider when you begin working on a short essay is how you will divide your essay into different body paragraphs. You will need a minimum of three body paragraphs, along with an introduction and a conclusion.

For your other essays, you will need to decide on the main point of each body paragraph, but, for this diagnostic essay, I will give you a suggestion concerning what you might discuss in each body paragraph. I usually do not give such specific suggestions concerning what you could write about and how you could organize, develop, and support your ideas, but, because of the limited time we have for this essay, and because this is the first essay in the course, I have included specific suggestions below for each body paragraph of your essay. Again, in the future, you will need to do this early work of deciding what you might explain in each part of your essay.

Below are questions that you might use to help you organize and develop the body of your essay:

- **Body Paragraph 1:** How do Marguerite Johnson and other members of her community feel about the upcoming graduation? Why is the graduation important?

- **Body Paragraph 2:** What is the effect of Mr. Donleavy’s appearance and speech at the graduation ceremony? How does Marguerite react to Donleavy? How does Marguerite’s attitude toward herself and others change because of Donleavy?

- **Body Paragraph 3:** After Donleavy leaves the graduation ceremony, how does Marguerite’s attitude change and what causes this change? In the end, what does Marguerite’s learn about herself and others?

Answering these questions should help you prove your thesis, or the main point of your paper. You might start by coming up with one sentence for each of the body paragraphs that would answer the questions presented above for that paragraph. This sentence could serve as the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph, and you should then use specific examples from the story, including quotations, to help you support and develop the idea throughout the rest of the paragraph. In each body paragraph, you should stay focused on proving the claim you make in the first sentence of the paragraph.

You will also need a one-sentence thesis statement in the introduction of your essay. The easiest way to formulate the thesis statement is by combining all of the main ideas from your topic sentences into just one sentence.

Of course, you can come up with your own questions to help you develop your essay, and you may discuss any aspects of Angelou’s essay as long as your essay addresses “how
Marguerite gains a greater awareness of herself and others.” The suggestions above are just designed to help you get started on this first essay and to give you an example of an effective way to think about the organization and development of ideas for an essay before you begin writing a first draft.

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**Preparing and Posting Your Essay**
Your essay should be word processed and double space. Type your name, class, the assignment name, and the date in the upper left corner of the first page, and give your essay a title (different from the title of Angelou’s story). Make sure to save your essay as a Rich Text Format (RTF) file.

When you are finished, post your essay as an attachment to a message in WebBoard. Under the “Orientation and Introductions” conference area, click on the words “Diagnostic Essay.” When you see the instructions for posting the diagnostic essay on the right side of the screen, just follow those instructions.

Remember that the diagnostic essay is due no later than 10:00 p.m., Wednesday, Aug 29. As always, please ask if you have any questions about this assignment!

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