English 1A **Book Club Response Essay *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. Choose an argument to serve as a prompt. Go to the comments section of the original Wall Street Journal site (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704111504576059713528698754.html#articleTabs%3Dcomments>) and browse the comments until you find one that strikes a chord with you. **Choose a substantial one** that is worth discussing, not one that is making an obvious point or that is merely ranting. Part of your grade will reflect whether you have chosen a worthy target, whether to agree or disagree with the comment. (There were 8849 comments when I checked on 4/19/12: you don’t have to read them all.) **Check with your book club peers** to make sure you aren’t using the same one. (If you ignore this, you and the other student will be marked down 50 points.)
2. Paste the comment you’re responding to on a separate page from your response, and hand it in with your paper. (This comment doesn’t count in the 1200 word requirement.)
3. **Write a response to the comment that contains an arguable claim** (the thesis), supporting your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate.

English 1A **Book Club Response Essay—Film Club**

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. Use the excerpt below (from the *NY Times* book review) to serve as your prompt.
2. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: parents, students who hate school, film lovers, or just readers of a forum that might include one of these.
3. **Write a response to the ideas in the review.** Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major question of the book—the validity and implications of this educational experiment. Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate.

“Home Screening”By DOUGLAS McGRATHJuly 6, 2008

[. . . .] David Gilmour is a father as well as a novelist and former film critic. He has written a memoir, “The Film Club,” about his decision to allow his 15-year-old son, Jesse, to drop out of school on the condition that he watch three movies a week of Gilmour’s choosing. Because it smacked of a plot gimmick from one of the movies Gilmour used to review, I feared the book would be similarly cute and tidy. But it’s a heartfelt portrait of how hard it is to grow up, how hard it is to watch someone grow up and how in the midst of a family’s confusion and ire, there is sometimes nothing so welcome as a movie.

Given that Gilmour was a film critic, a lot of the book is about the films he and Jesse watch. [. . . .] But the book is not a catalog of film recommendations. Gilmour uses the movies and, more important, the time he and Jesse spent together watching them, as an opening to explore and maybe understand who each of them is. The book chronicles Jesse’s troubles — mostly with girls, but also with drinking and drugs. And it does not spare Gilmour: he is out of work when the story starts, at an age when finding something new is both difficult and embarrassing. But he is modest about his own problems and doesn’t ask for pity. Like any good parent, he focuses on his son and he makes us care very much about what happens to him.

Like the two men at its center, the book itself stumbles every so often. Early on, I wanted to know more about Gilmour’s decision to let his son quit school in exchange for watching three films a week. That doesn’t seem like much of a standard for a boy as quick and smart as Jesse; I wondered why he set the bar so low. I also wanted to know more about why he felt that watching movies was a worthy equivalent to a more formal education. Or even an informal one. Gilmour is a novelist, yet he never made reading a part of the deal; I wondered why. I’m not trying to set up a home-schooling system for the Gilmours. I just would have liked to hear his case for why he felt movies were a better way to reach his son than museums or books or Outward Bound. [. . . .]

My regard for Gilmour’s best writing, my sympathy for his struggles and my engagement in his story make my complaints seem small. If his style sometimes irked me, he has my admiration as a father for making his son, not himself, the very winning hero of this story. Not only did I find Jesse smart and funny, but more than once I was moved to tears by his battle to find his place. At the end of the book, Gilmour, helpless with love for his son, watches him onstage performing, and recalls a line from “True Romance,” a movie they’d both loved: “You’re so cool, you’re so cool, you’re so cool!”

Not only as a reader but as a father, too, I know how he feels.

Douglas McGrath is a writer and director. Among his films are “Emma,” “Nicholas Nickleby” and “Infamous.”

English 1A **Book Club Response Essay *Gang Leader for a Day***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. Use the excerpt below (from the *NY Times* book review) to serve as your prompt.
2. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: teachers deciding what book to choose for their students, maybe, or people interested in crime, race, social justice, poverty.
3. **Write a response to the ideas in the review.** Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major question of the book—the challenges of understanding a culture you don’t belong to, the problems of poverty in America, and our culture’s love-hate relationship with charismatic criminals. Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate.

**“Sociologist Venkatesh gets cozy with gangs in Chicago”** By Brendan Wolfe 12/30/ 2007

[. . . .] Venkatesh wasn't always an expert, though. In fact, his initial efforts at field research are almost comically naive. When some Robert Taylor men demand to know why he's hanging around, Venkatesh responds with a questionnaire. "How does it feel to be black and poor?" he asks. "Very bad, somewhat bad, neither bad nor good, somewhat good, very good." The men reply with a barrage of obscenity and, for a time, even hold him hostage.

Too often, though, Venkatesh's wide-eyed innocence threatens to derail his narrative. [. . . .] What kind of sociologist takes years to figure out that cavorting with drug dealers might pose ethical problems? Or that actually taking over a gang for a day - a gang that deals crack, pimps women and administers various forms of violence - might "lay a bit out of bounds of the typical academic research"? The oblivious kind, apparently.

At the heart of the book is J.T. He's a complex character - college educated, interested in management, brutally violent - and Venkatesh necessarily has a difficult and complex relationship with him. Venkatesh allows J.T. to think, erroneously, that he's writing a biography about him, while J.T. often manipulates Venkatesh for his own nefarious purposes. In one memorable scene, J.T. and Ms. Bailey, the crafty building president, debrief Venkatesh on weeks' worth of interviews he has done on the subject of the projects' underground economy. They use this information to tax anyone making money behind their backs and, in the process, destroy Venkatesh's credibility with Robert Taylor's residents.

That it takes him forever to realize what has happened is typical. "I could feel people staring at me," he writes. "But I couldn't figure out why." A hustler called C-Note is as surprised as the reader that Venkatesh doesn't get it."I know you ain't that naive, man," he snaps.

But again and again, Venkatesh is that naive. As "Gang Leader for a Day" progresses, he finds himself caught between corrupt city housing officials, mendacious cops, paranoid gangsters and increasingly desperate residents. At times it seems like a miracle he got out alive.”

English 1A **Book Club Response Essay *Outcasts United***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. Use the excerpt below (from a book review in *The Guardian*, a British newspaper) to serve as your prompt. (You can read the full review, but comment on this excerpt.)
2. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: sports fans, people with an interest in international issues, people interested in the immigration issue, teachers or school administrators trying to pick a book for their students, or just readers of a forum that might include one of these.
3. **Write a response to the ideas in the review.** Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major issues addressed in the book. Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate.

# “There's only one Luma Mufleh ...” By Tim Lewis for *The Observer20* June 2009

*Tim Lewis is gripped by the story of a female football coach who has transformed the lives of refugees in America's Deep South.*

[. . . .] Politicians often talk about the capacity of sport to bring social change, but the Fugees are an exceptional and heart-warming example of this phenomenon in action. [. . . .] *Outcasts United* succeeds so emphatically because, just as the Fugees are so much more than a football team, this is much more than a sports book. St John, a reporter for the New York Times, has produced a dense and unjudgmental portrait of America in the 21st century (and a vital primer to African and colonial history in the last one).

Some villains do emerge, mostly the good ol' boys in Clarkston who are struggling to come to terms with the way their town is changing, but you sense that St John wants to leave you with a fuzzy, optimistic feeling. In one digression, he reveals how, after 125 years, the Clarkston Baptist Church has renamed itself the multi-denominational Clarkston International Bible Church.

"Jesus says heaven is a place for people of all nations," says Phil Kitchin, the current pastor. "So if you don't like Clarkston, you won't like heaven."

• Tim Lewis is editor of Observer Sport Monthly. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/jun/21/outcasts-united-refugee-team-warren-st-john>

English 1A **Book Club Response Essay *The Translator***

**Overview**: The purpose of this assignment is to give you a chance to reflect on your book in some depth and join the public discussion on it. Each assignment is a little different, but they all share this goal. You should be aiming for 1200 words, and the format should be MLA.

It is important that you do your own work, though of course you can discuss it with your group.

1. Use *The Spartan Daily* column below to serve as your prompt. Respond to it directly, but mostly this should be your comment on the situation, using material from *The Translator* as your main support. Note that the column is 6 years old by now.
2. **Choose an audience** that would have some reason to care about this: people with an interest in international issues in general or conflict resolution in particular, teachers or school administrators trying to pick a book for their students, or just readers of a forum that might include one of these.
3. **Write a response to the ideas in the review.** Your own thesis (an arguable claim) should concern the major issues addressed in the book, particularly what would be our (America’s, the West’s) appropriate response to the situation described in the book. Support your views with material from the book itself and from your own experiences, observations, and other readings, if appropriate.

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| “[Should the United States intervene in Sudan? — No](http://spartandaily.com/57148/should-the-united-states-intervene-in-sudan-no)” by [defaultuser](http://spartandaily.com/author/defaultuser) May 4, 2006 What is happening in Darfur, Sudan, is a travesty and is sickening. Someone should step up and intervene in the killing of Africans in the country. But it shouldn't be the United States. While the U.S. should do something to help, the American government should leave this situation to the United Nations.First, the U.S. military is worn a little thin right now. With the bulk of the country's troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military can't afford to send troops to another country. According to an article on Reuters.com, since the start of the war in March 2003, about 2,300 U.S. troops have been killed and 133,000 troops are still currently stationed in Iraq. It seems as though every day there are headlines about troops being killed in battle. I don't think the American people can hear about any more deaths of young U.S. soldiers, and it isn't fair to send our military to another country without fully analyzing the situation.My second reason to stay out of Darfur is that I don't think this will end as quickly and easily as people think. Remember how most of us thought the Iraq war would be over after a couple of months? Well, that didn't go as smoothly as we thought it would. Insurgents and rebels have helped drag the war out, which led to bloody results. The same can happen in Darfur. I don't think sending American troops to the region would help or be good for either country.In a recent audiotape allegedly put out by Osama bin Laden, he urged Muslims to fight anyone from the West who interferes in Darfur. The Washington Post Web site posted a transcript of the recording. "In this regard, I call on the mujahedeen and their supporters in Sudan … and the (Arabian) Peninsula to prepare all that is necessary to wage a long-term war against the crusaders in Western Sudan," Laden said.The presence of U.S. troops in Darfur could cause more violence from the rebels who control the land, and by sending troops, America could be making the situation worse.Americans only need to look at what is going on in Iraq to see what could happen if things go badly in Darfur. A report put out by the State Department stated that terrorist attacks tripled in Iraq from 2004 to 2005. Insurgent attacks against U.S. forces also rose from 23 percent in 2005, a report by the Government Accountability Office stated.In an Agence France-Presse article, Michael Scheuer, the former head of the CIA, said that U.S. troops in Iraq have increased the hatred of some Muslims toward Americans. Going into Darfur will not help the country's image. I think the government will use this as a way to overshadow other major events going on in our country. Stopping the genocide of thousands of people would give our country a much-needed win. It would look good to our people and people across the world. But I am afraid that the government would use this as a shining moment in a dark time."Hey we did something good," the government could say. "Now cut us some slack on the little things that are going wrong."You know, the little things like surging gas prices, a never-ending Iraq war, immigration rights and that whole issue about not finding Laden yet.Yes, someone should intervene in Sudan, but it shouldn't be our troops. The U.S. should back any measures taken by the U.N. to end the genocide, but for now we should hold back on starting another war that may lead to many American and Sudanese deaths.Andrew Torrez is a Spartan Daily staff writer.<http://spartandaily.com/57148/should-the-united-states-intervene-in-sudan-no> |