**Reading Questions: Writing About Culture**

You don’t have to write answers to these questions, just think about them as you read, and we’ll discuss them in class.

**“Finding My Daughter’s Roots”** This essay was published in *Parade Magazine*, which is a weekly publication that gets slipped into Sunday papers all over the country. So the audience is that segment of the population that reads a Sunday paper and reads the “human interest” stories, as well as the news.

1. Like many Americans, Helen has a dual identity: she is an American, but she also, to some degree, belongs to the country of her birth. How does her mother, the writer here, show us both sides? Which of Helen’s characteristics and/or attitudes seem American? Which link her to Ethiopia?
2. Consider the elements of a personal essay: description, characterization, action, dialogue. How do these elements operate here? What details stood out for you when reading this?
3. The strongest appeal here is pathos. How does the writer appeal to the readers’ emotions? What “typical” American values does she tap into? Is there anything in this story that some people might find offensive or objectionable? (Consider not just Americans but also Ethiopians or other Africans who might read this.)
4. How does this story relate to “A Single Lucid Moment”?

**“Performance Philanthropy”** This is a chapter from the book *Richistan: A Journey Through the American Wealth Boom and the Lives of the New Rich*, written just before the Recession started in 2008. The writer’s regular job is to produce a weekly column about wealth for the *Wall Street Journal*.

1. This chapter is largely a personal profile of one man, but he is also presented as an example of a type: the mega-rich entrepreneurial philanthropist. Why do you think Mr. Frank chose this man to interview in depth? Why not Bill Gates, for example?
2. Philip Berber is described in terms of what he looks like, what he says, what he does, and what others say about him (both the writer and some people the writer interviews). Out of all this, what themes emerge? What are some specific details that strike you as interesting or unexpected?
3. Is there enough about this class (the “performance philanthropists”) as a whole to convince you that this is a real group, maybe even a new trend, not just a few eccentrics or a passing fad? Is there anything that the writer should have said more about, either to understand Mr. Berber or the group as a whole?
4. Again, consider the pathos appeal here. The writer doesn’t come right out and state an opinion on the man he is profiling nor the group he represents, but how do you think he wants us to judge them? Admiring, critical, both? How can you tell? What “typical” American values are at issue here? What seem to be the values of this group?