

ESSAY TOPICS

Choose from the following topics for your essays. You want your essay to have a clear thesis and concrete support. Remember your audience is your classmates and I. If you have another idea for a topic based on the class readings or on another California-related topic, please come talk to me about it before submitting it for your thesis statement. Otherwise, **topics must come from this list.**

Papers 1, 2, 4 Topics

- Pick a definition of California from one of the class readings (you will have to cite it) and show how your hometown fits, or doesn't fit that definition.
- Compare the city you were growing up in ten years ago to that city today. What do the changes indicate about the times or the area?
- Remember back to fourth grade when you studied California history (or ? grade when you studied your state's history). What were the related field trips? Do you think they were important to your understanding of California or would you have chosen another place or places?
- Many movies are set in California. Which do you think best represents the part of California you are from and why? Or which do you think best represents California in general and why? (some CA based movies: *City of Angels*, *American History X*, *Vertigo*, *The Parent Trap*, *American Graffiti*, *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, *Born in East LA*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Sideways*)
- I think *CDR* underrepresents the San Francisco Bay Area and many other parts of California. Find an editorial, periodical article, radio or TV ad, or literary piece that epitomizes another area of California and explain why you would like to add it to the text. (I'll need a copy of the piece.)
- Describe a celebration, street, restaurant, hangout, building, (?) that you feel someone would need to see in order to really understand your town (think of "In Search of Oildorado" from *CDR*). Consider adding photos to this essay—if need help putting together the document, let me know.
- Do you agree that California is "free from the restraints of tradition and history"? (*CDR 10*) Say why or why not based on your experience.
- Compare yourself to one of the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* (*GOW*) or *The Kite Runner*—either someone very like you, or very different). What do the comparisons say about California (or the state you come from) or our times?
- In *GOW*, Steinbeck's characters learn about the "thin line between hunger and anger." Demonstrate how we have or have not learned that lesson yet.
- The family in *The Kite Runner* brings a tradition of a highly stratified society with them when they come to America. Do you feel that America is less stratified, more,

or the same? Base your assessment on evidence from the place where you grew up or the place where you live now.

- Choose one of the things “they” say about Okies and show how some people still use that same type of labeling (but perhaps in different words) today.
- Defend this statement by Robert DeMott based on your own experiences of the world: “If a literary classic can be defined as a book that speaks directly to readers’ concerns in successive historical eras, then surely *The Grapes of Wrath* is such a work.” (*GOW*, ix) Or, using this definition, demonstrate how *The Kite Runner* should become a literary classic.

Paper 3: Research topic

Paper 3 must include at least five sources. You may use the internet as long as you can identify an author and date of publication (or last update) for your sources.

From the following list of topics, pick an issue you find interesting. You must present the arguments of both sides, but you should also make clear where you stand on the issue. You might consider making one of the above topics into a research topic as well.

- Research and take a stand on one of the following controversial issues:

- the state mandate of housing increases in counties
- the continuance of the California Coastal Commission
- the sewer system in Los Osos
- the building of box stores in San Luis Obispo
- an issue important in your hometown (don’t forget to clear it with me first)

- Find a small historical fact in *GOW* or *The Kite Runner* that interested you and research its history. How is its history relevant to our society to today? (Ex: “The clerk thought, I get fifteen dollars a week. S’pose a goddamn Okie would work for twelve?” (386) How/when did minimum wage become part of our system? Has it helped?)

COMPLETELY OFF LIMITS TOPICS

The Columbine shootings, abortion rights, TV violence, euthanasia, cloning, legalization of marijuana, stem cell research, or anything else readily available on line
How my life has changed since I started college,
Roommates or other dormlife
Why I should stop partying and start studying
My summer vacation
Love, Truth, War, Hope, and so on
Why I should/should not leave my boyfriend/girlfriend
Cal Poly food
How to/not to write a paper/essay