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FIQWS: Intro to American Musical Theater

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Intro to Musical Theater Reflective Essay

Intro to American Musical Theater, what an amazing and enlightening journey it has been! As an incoming freshman in The City College of New York, I was terrified for the tremendous amount of homework, research papers, and projects I would be confronted with as soon as class started. At the start of the semester, I was skeptical about taking this class. I always had a love for musical theater, but I knew how challenging the tasks would be, seeing that musicals are very complex. After taking this class, I have learned many great techniques on how to approach these tasks and overall, I have improved as a student.

As a highschool student, I didn't care much for the aesthetic of my works. All I really cared about was handing anything in for a grade. As long as I didn't fail, I was satisfied. As soon as I started college, I knew my school ethics had to change. I was confident I was capable of great things, but like a lot of people, I didn't know where to begin. Our first assignment of the semester was the aesthetic experience essay. In my opinion, I don't see a better way to start off this class than the aesthetic experience essay. I was able to include as much of my thoughts, opinions, and emotions as I wanted seeing that the purpose of the essay was to explain a musical that impacted my life. This helped me to not hold back on expressing my emotions in an essay. I believe my grade was a B+ on that first essay which was better than I was expecting. Prior to taking this class, I was very unclear on how to write long essays with the inclusion of my

thoughts and emotions without it sounding like one of my rants on the topic. In other words, I didn't know how to make my emotions sound sophisticated enough. In my aesthetic experience, I wrote about the musical film, *Hairspray*. I had a very personal connection to this film because when I was younger, I used to dance, and ofc I learned a number from *Hairspray*. Writing about a personal experience allowed me to go into great detail about the experience and I was able to get very creative with my writing. After finalizing this assignment, I was feeling very confident in my writing, until Professor Meg-Wise Lawrence introduced the next assignment- the pre-annotated bibliography.

I had never heard of a pre-annotated bibliography before it was mentioned in class. I was very confused as to what we were being instructed to do, as I knew what a bibliography was, but not a pre-annotated bibliography. I was confusing the pre-annotated bibliography for the final essay we were required to write by the end of the semester. Leading up to the pre-annotated bibliography, we had several Blackboard assignments to help us organize our research. I found these Blackboard assignments extremely helpful because I was able to get feedback from my peers and view the assignments of others who were assigned the same musical as me. One of the first Blackboard assignments was learning how to access to the GVRL database and the NYT Historical Edition database, which allowed me to view many books, scholarly journals, and newspapers. This was one of the most useful tools of the semester as it is a skill I can use for my future classes when I will need to write critical research papers. Most of the assignments consisted of researching events from the year our musical took place; in my case I did my research on the year 1957. In addition to this, we were required to research events in relation to the matrix themes Professor Meg Wise-Lawrence spoke about in class. These themes were race,

gender, sexuality, and class. This was especially helpful in my research as it narrowed down my research. After weeks of intense research it came time to write my pre-annotated bibliography.

Puzzled, I would constantly ask for clarification to my peers as to what a pre-annotated bibliography was, and everyone seemed just as confused as I was. Although Professor Meg Wise-Lawrence would never hesitate to clarify what had to be done, I couldn't grasp my head around the whole concept. "How are they simply asking for a works cited page with a few lines on what the article is about? That can't be an actual assignment, I know I'm mistaking it for something else", was all I could think of. It was all so new to me and I didn't understand the purpose to the assignment. As the deadline for the pre-annotated approached, I was able to understand the assignment, with constant clarification from Dr. Robb and Meg Wise-Lawrence. I chose all of the most relevant sources in relation to my musical and wrote a few sentences on what the article was about. After the completion of my pre-annotated bibliography, I realized the importance of the assignment and when it came time to begin writing my critical research essay, I began to put all my sources from my pre-annotated bibliography together, as well as some new ones that I found on the GVRL database and the NYT database.

The deadline for the final critical research paper was getting closer and all I had were a bunch of sources. With the help of Dr. Robb, who showed us clips from our musicals and helped us analyze them every week in class, I was able to figure out where I was going with my essay. In Dr. Robb's class we were separated into groups by musical and were instructed to present our thesis, and include articles and a song/scene analysis supporting our thesis. I found this group project very helpful as it allowed us to share our ideas and set up an outline of our final essay. In addition, it also gave us the chance to present our ideas in front of the class, so we got critiques

from both Dr. Robb and the whole class. In addition, we were given a Blackboard assignment to present a synthesis paragraph, where we synthesized several sources into one paragraph, which helped me a lot as it guided me towards my final essay. At this point in the semester, I was a lot more focused than I was at the beginning. I was also able to figure tasks out on my own and I learned to manage my time more wisely.

Once the time came to write my final critical analysis paper, I was more than confident I would be able to write an exceptional paper. I changed my thesis about three times, and my introduction was a work in progress for quite a while, as I couldn't come up with an engaging hook. Writing the paper and synthesizing all my sources was a bit of a challenge for me because I wanted to express my opinions, but I also wanted to explain the articles and I was not so sure how to combine both. My naysayer paragraph was the most challenging for me because I couldn't find an article that entirely opposed my claims. I managed to pick out certain sections from long articles that opposed my claims however, this took a long time. I was able to understand everything being said in the articles I had after reading Karen Rosenberg's article, "Reading Games", which Professor Meg Wise-Lawrence provided for us. This article taught me to first understand the message that the author of an article is conveying and to look at the title of an article first and really understand what it is that I'm going to be reading. This article helped me tremendously in understanding my naysayers because I was able to find out that some articles that I originally was going to use to support my thesis, were actually in contrast to my thesis. Finally, when writing my conclusion, I was once again stuck staring at my computer screen with a blank expression, not knowing what to write. I did not want to sound so repetitive and I did not want to include statements that I previously made throughout my essay, aside from my thesis. It

took me quite a while to figure this out, but ultimately, I came up with the proper approach to my conclusion. I re-stated my thesis which was, “Puerto Rican women in the 1950s were confronted by domestic stereotyping, sexual double standards, as well as racial oppression”, and continued to discuss the ways in which these issues have either improved or stayed the same since the 1950s. At the end of this long process, my final grade for the paper was an A- and I was more than satisfied with this grade. I ended up re-writing it and will see my final grade at the end of the semester, but as a whole, the intense research throughout the semester was completely worth it to me.

Overall, after taking this class, I have learned so much more than I had anticipated. I have grown so much more as a student seeing that I am more confident in my work, and I know how to properly express myself in my writing. Not only did I learn how to research topics and obtain credible sources from multiple databases, but I learned about many dark and twisted messages hidden in the musicals I was presented with in class, and I am sure this applies to every other musical out there. I have made it a habit to analyze everything I watch on T.V. now and I can't watch a film, especially a musical film, without having the critical lenses in the back of my head. I have acquired useful skills for reading long articles and it is something I will carry with me for the following years in college. With the help of Dr. Robb and Professor Meg Wise-Lawrence for being so patient and understanding, I was able to achieve everything I was expected to do. This class exceeded my expectations because I never thought I would gain so much from Introduction to Musical Theater. My love for musical theater has grown so much more after this class and I am glad I reconnected with my passion towards it. I give an immense amount of gratitude to my professors for their dedication to the students and this class.

