Big Questions

**Targets**

Limited target and limited so students could focus their efforts. Below are the guidelines we gave students for writing in responses to a series of “big questions.”

**BIG QUESTIONS BINDER**

*WRITING CRITERIA*

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| **Criterion** | **DO THIS!** | **NOT THAT!** |
| State your position (argument) on the question | Western expansion feels problematic because it dismisses the perspective of those displaced by white American policies. | I view Westward Expansion as heroic, progressive, and integral because it added to shaping our country and our citizens. |
| Provide AT LEAST one piece of concrete evidence to support that position **from a piece of writing we’ve read or a movie/image we’ve seen!** | I am also for expansion because the West exuded lawlessness, which provided the “free” feeling that Turner notes in his 1893 reflection on the frontier. | Just as Boone says, “Curiousity is natural to the soul of man.” |
| Analyze concrete evidence **directly** to illustrate the way it supports your position | The “free” sense created motivation and encouragement for white Europeans to conquer the task and create wealth. | This proves it was bound to happen that people would migrate westward. |
| Exhibit creativity and depth of thought in your response | The bravery of westward expansion is praiseworthy but also problematic because Native Americans were bombarded with white Europeans who generate a constant struggle for land. | The expansion was beneficial because it led to wealth. In essence, more land equaled more wealth, which created more power for the citizens. |
| Clear writing that avoids generalities, superficial thinking, weak wording (i.e. “this quote shows… or “how” in the middle of sentences) | When citizens began moving west into unknown land, the thrill of adventure was apparent and so was the sense of a new beginning and taking on the unexpected. | This quote shows how exciting it was to move west and start things fresh again. |
| After whole class debriefing, quote a voice of a classmate and analyze the way it supports or enhances your own viewpoint. | Samantha noted that the wide open western sky seen in so many Hollywood movies solidifies the myth of freedom in the West, which supports the notion that freedom was not free for those displaced through Jefferson and Jackson’s policies. | Samantha also helped my point when she talked about the open sky in Western movies. |

Students would draft a response to a question at home and we would debrief in class. Students would add students to their draft and possibly revise their ideas.

We eventually asked students to revise two of their big questions according to the above criteria.

The American Studies team met as a group and normed our responses to several pieces of student writing. From there, we crafted some writing goals for the class so as we continue to pursue Big Question writing, we can hone in on skills students still need to develop.

* Students continue to struggle with distinguishing between summary and analysis, especially with non fiction texts
* Students struggle to communicate succinctly and logically