

Education Essay

To what extent do our schools serve the goals of a true education?

Stacy Teicher Khadaroo of the *Christian Science Monitor*, in her review of *Waiting for Superman*, states “The film offers a broad-brush indictment of America's school system and teachers unions, prompting praise from reform advocates. Yet in the eyes of some education observers, the movie oversimplifies the problems facing US students and implies a silver-bullet fix for struggling public schools.” Jeanette Catsoulis, in the New York Times review of *Race to Nowhere*, claims “the first-time filmmaker Vicki Abeles tries to condense a Hydra-headed problem — America’s overstressed, overscheduled, overcompetitive school kids — into a single, clear narrative. The bad news is that she doesn’t entirely succeed; the good news is that she and her co-director, Jessica Congdon, admirably convey the complexity of the issue with considerably more compassion than prescription.”

Using the films as your starting points, consider the failures and successes of education in America. *To what extent do our schools serve the goals of a true education?* What specifically do the films claim about the failure of American education? How do they claim it (some rhetorical analysis required here)? What evidence do they provide? Who or what do the films blame? What solutions are offered? Are there flaws in the conclusions drawn by the films? Considering the wealth of information and opinions about education at your fingertips (textbook, the articles and essays on whsroets.weebly.com, and any other research you may pursue), provide the necessary “complication” that remedies the films’ “oversimplification [of] the problems facing US students.” What are other possible problems or solutions? How does the very definition of successful “true” education change the conversation? (You can find several different definitions in the texts we read – Prose, Emerson, Talbot, Mori, and Baldwin, for example, all provide definitions or philosophies of successful education that are in opposition to the test score/standards definition provided by the films.)

This essay will require a blend of narrative, exposition, description and argumentation. You are expected to synthesize quite a bit of information – including your own personal experiences - in order to enter the conversation about the state of American education and how its deficiencies may be addressed. Use the films as starting points – they “start” the conversation –but then be sure to branch out, including points of view provided by the other texts we have read. You will need to prioritize – after starting with the films, what major elements of education do you want to focus on? Why? What is your aim or purpose?

Always keep the rhetorical triangle in mind: for all of you the subject is American education, the audience is your peers and the education community, but the aim is particular and unique to each writer. Knowing the audience and context (writing as current students involved in the education system) should shape your organization and style. This is not just a rant, although there may be elements of a rant included. It is not just a critique, although your critical faculties must be brought to bear. It is not just a personal essay, although personal experience – judiciously applied – may be used to exemplify certain issues.

You need to not only enter the conversation, but also persuasively make a point about what might be done to improve education.