English I Research Essay Topics and Guidelines – Professor Khan

I. Topics

1. Language and Power
   A few of our readings explored the connection between language and power and how language can be misused for the benefit of those in stronger positions. Drawing on a few sources from our reading list and other reputable outside sources, research the ways that language can be used as a tool of power. Describe and discuss this connection, thinking of how language is used to obscure violence, subjugation, difference, etc. You could think of how language is used for political power, determine who has control over the conversation, what tools are used to create and control discourse, and the repercussions to society and individuals. Try to understand the connections between language and thought and the role it plays in reinforcing power and obscurity. Finally, tell us what should be said and how should we say it. You can focus your paper on one of the following topics: gender, sexism, race, immigration, and/or education.

2. Consumption and Choice
   Barry Schwartz wrote about the paradox of choice concentrating his essay on the negative psychological effects on students in universities. Naomi Klein has commented that overconsumption is one of the leading factors of climate change, while Roxanne Gay insists that there is a direct correlation between our entertainment consumption habits and our cultural perception of rape (which includes topics of violence and gender). All three topics presuppose wealth and choice, therefore examine the connection between choice and consumption. What factors impact choice or cause a lack of choice? Does increased choice lead to increased consumption? Is that always a bad thing or are consumers able to make a positive difference? You can focus your paper on one of the following topics: poverty, environment, sexism, morality.

Impact of Technology

3. Discuss technologies’ impact on people’s health, lifestyle, and/or values. Has technological progress had an entirely positive effect on us, or are there issues that need to be addressed? What are those issues and do you have any suggestions to address them? Draw on sources from our class and outside scholarly sources analyze and discuss specific examples to support your viewpoint and suggestions.

4. Research the issues of electronic waste and the impact it has on developing countries. Draw on sources from our class and outside scholarly sources to paint a picture of a few of the unique characteristics of the e-waste problem in your research country. Include any examples and major incidents you find. Include a discussion of the potential impact of green computing. Finally, include a critical analysis of who is responsible for e-waste, the issues regarding control, and what you think should or could be done.
5. **Environmentalism**

For Robin Wall Kimmerer and Hope Jahren, “the life of plants is not so different from human life” (412). Their essays promote an ethical attitude towards environmentalism that can (arguably) be categorized under the broad heading of ecocentrism. Ecocentrism is a term coined by Aldo Leopold. It is used in ecological philosophy to “denote a nature-centered, as opposed to human-centered (i.e. anthropocentric), system of values.” Based on the sources from our reading list and other reputable outside sources, analyze and the impact of viewing all life-forms and natural elements as beings, deserving of existence and protection. How does this perception affect attitudes toward environmentalism? Think of the rivers that have recently been granted “personhood” status.

6. **Cultural Identity and Media**

Some of the essays we have read consider plural identities and unconventional viewpoints (Iranian, Indian, African-American, Indian-American). Drawing on a few sources from our reading list and other reputable outside sources, discuss the impact of media on our cultural identity. What is its role in cultural diffusion across the United States? Can it be used as a tool to bring people together? In your discussion and analysis, consider how each writer negotiates their identity in relation to others, especially the current culture of suspicion that we live in.