

AP English Lang. Summer Reading

Require Text: *The Anthropocene Reviewed* by John Green

Your responses must be entirely handwritten. Neatness and legible handwriting are required.

The Premise: We live in the Anthropocene – the current geological age, heavily shaped by human intervention. In *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, John Green reviews a different element on modern **public life** in each chapter, ending each review with a score out of five stars.

In public life, we are bombarded by platforms trying to dictate what we value. Writing a “review” is fundamentally an act of **power**. It is an individual using their **voice** to establish authority over a piece of our shared world and argue for its worth. This is very much in line with how the College Board likes to ask its argumentative essay questions: “Make an argument on the value of ____.”

Part 1: The Rhetorical Reading

Read the whole book, and then for **three** of the following chapters, write brief analytical responses that address the following questions: *What specific writing choices (such as historical research, personal anecdotes, or dark humor) does Green use to challenge the way society normally views this topic, and to what extent do these choices work?* In parentheses after each chapter title is a potential theme seed to focus on.

1. “You’ll Never Walk Alone” (How shared cultural artifacts build communal voice and collective power to withstand public crisis)
2. “Our Capacity for Wonder” (The civic necessity of maintaining an individual perspective)
3. “Canada Geese” (The conflict between human power and the natural world in public spaces)
4. “The Internet” (The democratic promise of a universal voice vs. the reality of corporate centralization)
5. “The Nathan’s Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest” (An analysis of American consumer culture and spectacle)
6. “The Yips” (The psychological weight of performing in the public eye)
7. “Auld Lang Syne” (The power of global public ritual and how a shared song constructs collective memory)
8. “Monopoly” (How corporate and political power structures devour public life)

9. “The World’s Largest Ball of Paint” (The power of ordinary citizens to create community and meaning in public life)

The Response

Keep each response relatively brief (150 – 300 words), and separate each response into two paragraphs. The first paragraph should apply an analytical lens, while the second paragraph should apply an evaluative lens.

The Analytical Lens

- **What is the speaker doing?** Identify Green’s primary rhetorical move in the essay. (e.g., Is he using historical information to subvert a common assumption? Is he using a deeply personal anecdote to humanize a massive global corporate structure?)
- **What is the intended effect?** Explain how this specific move is designed to make the audience rethink the power that this everyday object or phenomenon holds over our public life.

The Evaluative Lens

- What is the most effective part of the review? Pinpoint a specific line, argument, or synthesis of ideas where Green’s voice is at its most persuasive. Why does this moment land so well?
- What is the least effective part of the review? Critically assess where Green’s argument weakens, stretches too far, or borders on sentimentality rather than rigorous analysis. Where does his rhetoric falter?

Rhetorical Moves

When analyzing John Green’s work or writing your own essay, do not look for basic literary devices like “metaphors” or “alliteration.” Instead, look for **rhetorical moves**—the strategic choices a writer makes to achieve a specific purpose with their audience.

1. Anecdote

- **Definition:** A brief, revealing story about a real incident or person.
- **How it works:** Writers use anecdotes to humanize massive, abstract concepts. By sharing a vulnerable or funny personal story, the author builds *ethos* (credibility and trust) and makes a global issue feel deeply personal and relatable to the reader.

2. Historical Context & Archival Research

- **Definition:** Presenting documented background information, origins, or data

about the subject.

- **How it works:** This move subverts common assumptions by showing how an object came to be. It argues that the way things are today isn't inevitable; rather, it is the result of specific, past human choices and power structures.

3. Juxtaposition

- **Definition:** Placing two completely different ideas, objects, or places side-by-side to highlight their contrasts.
- **How it works:** By forcing the reader to compare two clashing things (e.g., highly advanced smartphones next to an archaic 19th-century keyboard layout), the writer shocks the audience into seeing a familiar situation in a completely new light.

4. Definition Shifting (Recontextualization)

- **Definition:** Taking a familiar word or concept and redefining it based on broader societal impact rather than its literal dictionary definition.
- **How it works:** This move strips away the corporate or standard public framing of an object. For example, redefining a “penny” from “a unit of currency” to “an expensive monument to political stubbornness” instantly shifts the power dynamic of the argument.

5. Paradox

- **Definition:** A statement or situation that seems self-contradictory but reveals a deeper, complicated truth upon closer inspection.
- **How it works:** Public life is full of contradictions. Highlighting a paradox (e.g., how the internet connects the entire world yet makes individuals feel deeply isolated) forces the reader to abandon simplistic thinking and engage with nuance.

6. Irony, Satire, & Dark Humor

- **Definition:** Expressing meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, or mocking public absurdities.
- **How it works:** Humor breaks down a reader's defensive walls. By pointing out the ridiculousness of a public ritual or corporate practice with a sharp, witty tone, the writer gets the audience to laugh at – and then critically question – the power structures around them.

7. Shift in Scale (Inductive Reasoning – Moving from Micro to Macro)

- **Definition:** Zooming in closely on a tiny, mundane detail and then abruptly zooming out to show its massive, global implications.
- **How it works:** This move proves that nothing in public life is trivial. It demonstrates to the reader how small, daily consumer habits or local traditions are actually connected to giant systems of power, economics, or human history.

Sample Response for Chapter: "*The QWERTY Keyboard*"

In reviewing the QWERTY keyboard, Green is systematically dismantling the illusion of choice in modern public life. He does this by tracing the historical accident of the keyboard's layout, highlighting how a configuration designed to *slow typists down* in the 19th century still completely dictates 21st-century digital speech. His intended effect is to show how public life is governed by path dependency – a passive acceptance of inefficient structures simply because change requires too much collective effort. By personifying the keyboard layout as an authoritarian force that quite literally molds our fingers, Green argues that our very voices are restricted by invisible, historical power structures.

The most effective element of Green's rhetoric is his juxtaposition of our hyper-advanced digital technology with this archaic physical constraint. It lands beautifully because it forces the reader to look down at their own device and recognize the quiet compliance of their own daily life. However, the least effective portion occurs when Green shifts into an overly sentimental conclusion about how human touch transcends the keyboard. This emotional appeal feels unearned and weakens his stronger, sharper systemic critique. By trying to end on an optimistic note about human connection, he briefly abandons his insightful analysis of how corporate infrastructure quietly controls public expression. (223 words)

Part 2: The “Reviewing Public Life” Project

Select one specific element of modern life:

- **Civic Infrastructure:** Physical spaces and systems that organize society (*public buses, the school cafeteria layout, highway bypasses, public parks*).
- **Digital Public Squares:** The virtual spaces where we communicate (*the TikTok algorithm, Wikipedia edits, group chats, online gaming lobbies*).
- **Cultural Rituals & Spectacles:** Events that gather the public under a shared script (*pep rallies, concert lines, Black Friday, local festivals*).
- **Consumer Infrastructure:** The commercial items and corporate habits that shape our days (*the drive-thru window, subscription services, grocery store layouts*).
- **Shared Narratives:** The stories or cultural myths we collectively buy into (*true-crime media obsessions, social media "hustle culture," romanticized teenage milestones*).

Write a formal, John Green-style essay (600–800 words) where you review this facet of public life on a 5-star scale. Your essay must move beyond superficial complaining. You must use an authentic, distinct **voice** to argue how this object exerts **power** over human beings, and how it alters our collective experience. Be sure to title your response.

RUBRIC

I. Part 1: The Rhetorical Reading (45 %)

Evaluates three handwritten, two-paragraph responses (150–300 words each).

- **Advanced (41–45):** Perceptively analyzes Green's specific choices (research, anecdote, humor) and accurately connects them to the theme seeds. Sharp, balanced evaluation of both the most and least effective rhetorical moments. Flawlessly follows paragraphing and length rules.
- **Proficient (34–40):** Clearly identifies choices and connects them generally to public life, though may occasionally slip into plot summary. Evaluates both strengths and weaknesses, though one side may be stronger. Meets basic formatting parameters.
- **Developing/Novice (0–33):** Simplistic identification of choices with little connection to power or public life. Evaluation is superficial ("it was good/bad") rather than rhetorical. Fails to separate lenses into distinct paragraphs or missed assigned chapters.

II. Part 2: The "Reviewing Public Life" Project (45 %)

Evaluates the original, handwritten, John Green-style essay (600–800 words).

- **Advanced (41–45):** Establishes a compelling, distinct voice that balances personal insight with societal critique. Avoids superficial complaining to argue how the object exerts systemic power over collective experience. Includes a creative title, 5-star rating, and meets the word count.
- **Proficient (34–40):** Voice is present and authentic. Focuses on the object's influence on public life, though arguments may lean occasionally toward surface-level complaints. Imitates the review style well; includes title, star rating, and matches word count.
- **Developing/Novice (0–33):** Weak or inconsistent voice that reads like an informative report or unreflective rant. Fails to explore themes of power or civic life. Missing a title, a star rating, or deviates significantly from the word count.

III. Neatness and Conventions (10 %)

Applies globally across all handwritten text.

- **Target (9–10):** Entirely handwritten. Script is exceptionally neat, legible, and well-spaced. Demonstrates excellent grammatical control with virtually no errors.
- **Developing (7–8):** Entirely handwritten, but sections are rushed or difficult to decipher on first read. Occasional errors in mechanics do not obscure meaning.
- **Novice (0–6):** Portions are typed (violating rules) or handwriting is illegible. Frequent grammatical errors consistently distract from the arguments.