

Literature PBAT

“The Man and Down These Mean Streets”

Assessment: Good/Competent

ELA Performance Based Assessment

TASK: Write a Literary Analysis paper, five-seven pages in length, which compares/contrasts two texts. You may choose to focus on characters, a theme or particular literary elements, techniques, or style to form the basis of your argument. Formulate a clear thesis and support your argument with evidence from **both** texts.

Compare and/or Contrast text 1-The Man by Irving Wallace with one of the following books:

Text 2-Choose One:

Male Protagonists

1. Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison
2. Down These Mean Streets by Piri Thomas
3. Autobiography of Malcolm X by Alex Haley
4. 11/22/63 by Stephen King

Female Protagonists

1. The Help by Kathryn Stockett
2. The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison
3. Caucasia by Danzy Sena
4. Coming of Age in Mississippi by Anne Moody

***You must have relevant evidence from the beginning, middle and end of BOTH texts to clearly prove your assertions.**

*You will present your work to a panel of adults and peers after you've completed the process for your Final paper. Stay focused, be reflective, be accountable and meet the deadlines. Take this very seriously. Use your Habits of Mind to prove what you know and can do as a Senior ELA College-ready student.

Meaning of Life Senior Seminar

Labels of Society

Tupac Shakur said, “I want to grow. I want to be better. You Grow. We all grow. We’re made to grow. You either evolve or you disappear.” Everyone is made to find inner growth in life whether it is growth of acceptance or forgiveness. Every individual is made to carve a path only for him/herself in order to leave behind the past and a carve new beginning. In The Man by Irving Wallace and Down These Mean Streets by Piri Thomas the protagonists undertake a journey to self-acceptance. In The Man, the protagonist of the story is Douglass Dilman who becomes America’s first African-American president. As president and a black man in society, Dilman often endures the cold shoulder of being a person of color that it has affected many decisions he wants to make. Dilman is in a position where he tried not to favor one race over the other because he wants to maintain peace between both the Black and White communities which is hard due to everyone criticizing his skin color. This caused him to be insecure about accepting his own skin but as the story progresses he slowly overcame this fear. As for Down These Mean Streets, protagonist Piri Thomas is faced with many obstacles but the main obstacle he wanted to acknowledge was himself. Everywhere Thomas goes his skin color is the magnet to the problems he faces. He is confused to why people treat him as he was Black when he is only accustomed to Puerto Rican ways. Due to the behavior of others, Thomas would often question himself and others of why he is treated this way. The responses he usually would receive would always be about his complexion and having features of an African-American. From these responses he embarks on a journey in acceptance of himself. Though many claim true growth can only come through the help of others, true change can only come from within. Through the use of external conflict, Thomas and Wallace similarly illustrate that true growth comes from accepting oneself. Overall, both protagonists go through an experience in which they undertake the concept of growth from a distorted society.

Through The Man, we see that there will always be people who makes an individual feel inferior due to following society norms. Society causes these norms so individuals can feel a sense of dominance over one another. This concept is shown last

night when Dilman became president due to multiple vacancies because of the Presidential Succession Act of 1947. This result in mixed emotions amongst the white and black communities. The whites are in a state of panic because a black man became president while the Blacks are ecstatic to have one of their own to grant them freedom and their wishes. It is present through Zeke Miller, a congressman who owns a newspaper; he is discussing with Arthur Eaton and Wayne Talley, how he feels about Dilman becoming president. On page 77, bottom of page it states, "This is the American people joined and united in one voice of protest against the greatest humiliation and danger of our century -- against having an ignorant nig possum politician dirtying the White House and shoving us around (Wallace 77)." From this quote, Miller is venting his bitterness towards Dilman becoming president to Eaton and Talley. Wallace uses the literary device of metaphor to Miller comparison of Dilman to a possum in order to show his indifference in society. From this, one can see that Miller is trying to stereotype Dilman for being of African-American descent. This is because African-Americans gained "bad" reputation over the centuries for defending themselves in a violent way from white during the times of segregation and slavery. While, there were some who reacted peacefully it is more profound to act violently towards their aggressors in defense of self and loved ones. This caused a person of color to be viewed as ruthless savages who only cause harm within their community and themselves. In reality, it is the whites who caused African-Americans and other minorities to gain this senseless name because of the treatment they have endured for generations. In short, Miller compares to a possum Dilman because the threat they are to society. In this quote, Miller has already painted a vivid picture in his mind of how Dilman will run the White House just because he is Black. With no confrontation whatsoever with Dilman, Miller already degrades him as a human and president of the United States. Miller uses exaggerated terminology to describe the hatred towards Dilman becoming president such as "greatest humiliation" and "danger of our century". From his own perspective of colored people, Miller is using the excuse that every American does not like Dilman being president due to his color. Most Americans may not agree with this change but with Miller's harsh words it shows how whites make themselves seem superior to minority groups. In other words, Miller feels just

because he is white that every American would take his side about not accepting a Black man into presidency. Moreover it is inferred that Dilman has to face this prejudice throughout his presidency due to his color. In Down These Mean Streets, the protagonist, Piri Thomas, has to undergo the same concept of prejudice but in a more violent way. Piri suffers through forms of racial abuse more physically than what Dilman. He suffers prejudice from this view because unlike Dilman he is an average dark-skinned Puerto Rican teenager living in the ghetto. While Dilman is a high class African-American man who has worked his way up into being a senator to a president. This shows regardless of who you are or how high an individual's status in life that you are always judged or made to feel inferior by others. Just like in today's society how a muslim is judged to be a terrorist because what they wear or how they look. Once people see a muslim they think is muslim, they automatically want to be far away from them, make fun of them, or even worst attack them due to muslims terrorists which affects to have a label the whole race themselves. In summary, society displays its corruptness with labels to make others have a sense of dominance towards others.

In Down These Mean Streets, Piri experiences being a victim of feeling inferior to those who are a different complexion. This is because usually society would choose the dominant race to worship while degrading the other races due to them not being the same. Young Piri undergoes this concept with his father in which he runs away plenty of times due to the sense of feeling inferior. Thomas runs away because of his father's abusive ways towards him that he could not take it anymore. Instead of staying home Piri took to the cold streets of Spanish Harlem to seek comfort and feel a sense of belonging. When Piri finally went back home he started to unravel the relationships he has with all the members of his household. Piri and his mother relationship is described to be very tight knit and he embraces his Puerto Rican heritage immensely from his mother. As for his siblings, there is typically playful sibling relationship. Then, as the story progresses he begins to talk about his father once again. On page 22, paragraph 2 it states,

“How come it sounds so different when you holler
at me? Why does it sound harder and meaner?
Maybe I'm wrong, pops. I know we all get the
same food and clothes, anything and everything --
except there's this feeling between you and me.
How come when we all play with you, I can't

really enjoy it like the rest? How come when we all get hit for doing something wrong , I feel it the hardest? Maybe' cause I'm the biggest, huh? Or maybe it's 'cause I'm the darkest in the family."

Through the use of characterization, it can be inferred from the description of Piri's attitude towards his father that there are qualities of insecurities brewing within him. He is shown to be questioning himself due to the amount of unfairness persisted from his father. Piri knows that no one can hear these thoughts nor answer his questions but expressing these thoughts amongst himself helps him cope with the bad relationship he faces. Piri method of soliloquy shows how the treatment he receives from his father is a complexion issue not race affiliated. He shows confusion within the first couple of sentences of the quote because him and his siblings are of the same descent but it can be inferred it from the text that his siblings are of a lighter complexion which is why they receive the better treatment. With this in mind, Piri does admit being the darkest of the siblings that is why he receives the harder end of the stick due to how society views blacks and whites. Even though, his father race is not present within the text it is clear that society causes him to act the way he does. In this society, Blacks often endure unfair treatment because of their complexion. They are treated as if they are wild animals that harms anyone in their path. While, whites are viewed as the saints of society who knows what is best for everyone despite how cruel they treat others. Likewise, blacks are often disrespected and not worthy of anything glorious in life. This is where parents who are minorities with at least a fair-skinned child are valued more because of society. Overall, Piri will carry these thoughts of feeling lesser than what he is due to the treatment he receives from his father. Unlike Dilman's the protagonist in The Man, who is a father and not a teenager like Piri. Dilman he has two children, one who is dark-skinned like him and another who is very light-skinned like the mother. Even though Dilman was blessed with two children who has different skin colors he did not dare to treat them any different. He loved both children equally regardless of their color and what society thinks of them. Dilman clearly does not agree with society ways of favoring one child over the other even if society values fair-skinned individuals better. This sense of value is still present in today's world where there is some parents who value one of their children over the other. Due to the fact that child is prettier, smarter, or even color wise because of

society labels. Not all parents follow these societal norms but many do and it is degrading to see how they rather value a child who fits into what others accept. I feel people should value everyone the same and not differently because degrading someone based on other's perspective is disappointing. All in all, an individual should know their worth instead of seeking a sense of value from another's perspective.

In life it is your own decision whether or not to give an individual a key to your success. Not many people would encourage an individual to do better in life instead they would take advantage to seek betterness for themselves. As the first Black president, Dilman was aware of this change and this caused him to be scared of running things his way because of other's reactions towards it. Though within the first week, Dilman is guided Arthur Eaton, who is the Secretary of State for the White House, who helped him run the White House like how the previous president once did. After some time, Dilman wanted to voice some of his own opinions on some of the situations because he did not like the intentions Eaton and the rest of the staff was putting forth. This led to the downfall of Dilman presidency because Eaton and the other staff members did not want him to voice his opinions because they feel he would put the country into chaos. Due to this acting of voicing his opinions, Eaton and the other staff members started hiding important information from Dilman as a result of voicing his own opinions. Eventually, the other staff members of the white house sidetracked Eaton into trying to kick Dilman out of presidency so he can be the next president. This is because in the law of the New Succession Act if something was to happen to Dilman, Eaton was next in line to take his place. As a result, the staff members got into Eaton's head and eventually led to the staff members in the White House to build up false accusations against him and his family for an Impeachment trial. On page 478-479 Eaton is telling Dilman to resign as the easy way out of presidency or face an impeachment trial as the hard way out of presidency. In paragraph 5 shows what Dilman is thinking of Eaton's harsh words, "They wanted Eaton, and Eaton wanted Eaton, to run a comfortable white country, and comfortable white world, for privileged, superior white people, cynically bribing with Federal charities the susceptible minorities at home, cynically betraying through lies and peace bartering they helpless small nation abroad." In this quote, Wallace uses repetition to emphasize how Dilman feels about the prejudice whites. Dilman uses the word "white" multiple times

because he feels as long as you are white, society would be fine with however you run the country no matter what bad intentions are put forth. As he stated they are more “superior and “privileged” than any other race so the people are more bounded and willing to listen. Dilman is expressing his hatred of people mindset of society and how they view whites. With that being said, Eaton is a prime example of how others would rather see an individual fall than succeed. According to the fact that Eaton was suppose to be there for Dilman instead he got sidetracked by other's perspective of life.

Due to this perspective change, Eaton wants to remove Dilman of his presidential powers because of the claims that him and the others build against him. Dilman knows behind all these false accusations that the real reason is because he is African-American. Dilman knows if he was White that no one would ever doubt him being president or remove him from power. He knows he would not be judged on whatever decision he makes to the country. This is because whites are viewed as privileged and educational individuals who knows what is best for the country and their own community. He feels as long as you are white, you will always be the dominant race of America and every human being that is not that same as you. Since he is Black, he will always be at the disadvantage point. This gives off a sense of insecurity Dilman always faces with being an African-American. Dilman knows he will always be connected to the hyphen of African-American never truly just known as just an American citizen . With this in mind, Dilman is clearly confused into giving Eaton the power of presidency since he knows society overall will be better with a white president which is clearly shown through his terminology of describing Eaton to this perfect white society. This shows a comparison to Piri who as well feels as if whites dominants everything in society. Both protagonists actually try to brush past how society views whites as the dominant race. This is shown in Dilman by actually trying to be a president and taking action instead of the whites controlling him. Instead it is clearly shown that he is put down and made to feel inferior due to being dark-skinned. As for Piri, Since he is of a hispanic heritage Piri feels he has to advantage of abiding the treatment of a dark-skinned person. Piri would speak his native language to these ignorant whites but it is still no use because of his dark complexion. They both clearly try to mold into their own perspective but there is always

someone holding them back. In conclusion, abiding by others perspectives in life does not allow oneself to grow as an individual.

Not following your own individual perspective will never allow you to prosper in life. Piri Thomas shows this concept as a dark-skinned Puerto Rican who lives in a prejudiced society. He often feels more comfortable being around those the same complexion as him or race. As a proud hispanic he uses his nationality to fit in anywhere he goes but the complexion of his skin gives him the unfair treatment of an African-American. This is shown whenever he is around a group of white people, Piri is the target of harassment. An example, If Piri is with a girl who is lighter than he is and a white person spots this he would get instantly teased or beat up. Piri gets highly upset at the different treatment he receives whenever he is around those of a different color or nationality. As a result of his color, it was also harder for him to find a job a good paying job. Then one day, his friend named Louie asked Piri if he wanted to make big money by doing robbing spree with him and two other men. The two other men are named Danny and Billy who did sprees all the time for a living with big cash who never get caught. Piri decides to join them who was the only dark-skinned one in the group. The men robbed many places till one day they hit rock bottom. They got caught robbing a gay club and accidentally shooting a cop in the process. The next day later all men stand in front a job awaiting their prison sentences. On page 247, paragraph 3 it states, "That maricon got zero to five years!" I screamed. He'll be out in a year And *he* fainted! Oh, that punk, that shit-eating punk . . ." In this quote, the use of conflict highlights the battling inner discords Piri is facing with the judge. This is shown in his colorful language of "Oh, that punk, that shit-eating punk" which demonstrates the reactions of the one guys he worked with during the crime scene. The white man Piri worked with in the crime reacted this way because he is in disbelief of his prison sentence of zero to five years. Piri is very upset at the scene the man displayed in front the judge because he is faced with such little time in jail for a crime while Piri is faced with fifteen years. This is what happens when an individual decides to follow another person's perspective of life. These men who Piri worked with obviously did not have the same chances of prison as him. It all boils down back to skin color and that is what Piri did not notice till he got his prison sentence. That is why Piri was so furious when he heard that the two white men got zero to five years

because it was not fair because they was apart of the whole robbery. Instead, Piri got fifteen years because of his complexion. Piri did not know the judge would base him on the hue of his skin. Consequently, with being a dark-skinned in this society he should have taken more of an extra precaution. In other words, Piri did not think of himself as dark-skinned but as an hispanic through this whole process so he did not accept the worst to come for him. Similarly with today's world, most teenagers would follow what others do to "fit" in. Fitting in can include drinking, smoking, or even robbing because it is what everyone else do. Instead of taking their own lense of life into play, people would rather view the lense others created to feel a sense of importance or coolness. Sometimes following others can lead into very bad situations like going to jail or even losing a sense of who you are. At the end of the day, Following others routes does not help an individual bloom into their own mindset.

You begin to grow into a new person once you start accepting yourself. Accepting the new changes brought upon your life is an open door full of new opportunities. This is shown in Dilman who eventually accepted the impeachment trial instead of backing down from Eaton's intentions of gaining presidency. Dilman is showing that he is taking matters into his own hands instead of following the path Eaton wanted him to take which was giving up his presidency. In the impeachment trial, Dilman is not allowed to speak or be on trial and is only allowed to watch it on television. Only those who represents Dilman in the trial are allowed to be there and defend Dilman. One of the best representatives Dilman has is his best friend Nat Abrahams, who is an Jewish attorney that represents all minorities. With the help of Nat for Dilman trial, he has won over many people with his speeches against the false accusations but it still was not enough due to the ignorance of Dilman's color. With this in mind, Dilman was telling Nat how he wants to speak against those who put dirt on his name from false accusations. On page 668 in paragraph 11 showcases Dilman passion towards Nat for him to speak in the trial, "I am the black man President of the United States. I don't care what I'm asked or what I say, I only want to stand up there and be seen and heard by my judges. I know my appearance can lose it. But I also know this -- something more may be finally won." In the quote, "I am the black man President of the United States. I don't care what I'm asked or what I say, I only want to stand up there and be seen and heard by my judges. I

know my appearance can lose it. But I also know this -- something more may be finally won”, Dilman is shown here through characterization gaining the confidence to accept himself. Just the fact alone that Dilman says “I don’t care what I’m asked or what I say, I only want to stand up there and be seen and heard by my judges” shows the confidence boost he is finally gaining within himself. Before, Dilman had people stepping all over him and discouraging him due to his color.

Now, Dilman is going into the trial with his head held high which shows the kind of character he is trying to mold himself into. Also by his words of “I am the black man President of the United States. I don’t care what I’m asked or what I say, I only want to stand up there and be seen and heard by my judges” additionally shows he is tired of feeling inferior to the white man and Dilman is finally accepting his own skin as an African-American. Before Dilman was the type to hide and not to speak up but now he wants to show the world and those against him that he will not let anyone run his life due to being a person of color . That is why he also states “I am the black man president of the United States” he wants to show he holds the ultimate power which is presidency due to the fact it is rare to see a Black man seize such high power in this society. Despite the hell and chaos these ignorant people have put him through he wants to showcase that he is still reminding tall as a African-American and America’s president. Like Dilman states “But I also know this -- something more may be finally won” from this it means not winning the trial but himself. Dilman is seen here blossoming into a Man which relates back to the title of the story. Unlike Dilman, Piri also went through a sense of change of accepting himself as a black individual in society. Though Piri is not as specific into what changes he wants to make it is still clear that he is accepting his color. Piri finally grasps the concept that despite his Puerto Rican heritage he will always be viewed as a black individual due to his complexion while Dilman knows that his color affected the way he is treated. Though now towards the ending of the story Dilman is actually starting to accept and embrace himself as a Black man in a corrupted society. In today’s world similarly people had to go through these hardships in accepting oneself. For example, while there are some people who are not as embracing into accepting gay people due to society mindset that were only allowed to be attractive to the opposite gender. Despite society labels, there are many gays who are actually trying to accept themselves

regardless of what others say. Accepting yourself shows society it needs to undergo a change into acceptance as well. As a humans if change is needed to be done all that needs is one voice to make anything possible. With downgrading yourself it shows that society is right that you are flawed in every aspect of liking the same sex. With this being said, gays are beginning to be more open with themselves and with others in which they were not able to do before. This is a big change for many who were too shy to come out and tell others in expressing who they really are. Furthermore, accepting yourself broadens the perspective of life.

Gaining self-acceptance in oneself shows the progress of a long fought battle. Usually people undergo a sense of change within oneself when they experience something life changing. As a result of Piri's jail sentence of fifteen years he eventually starts to seek change emotionally and mentally about his views of life. While in prison he looks into a new religion which was the religion of Islam. Piri is Catholic but he found Islam is more for him. He started to accept himself as a dark-skinned man within this new found religion that he seek in jail as well. With all these behavioral changes the parole board finally saw his good behavior and gave Piri Parole. Piri was excited for this change and told a fellow prisoner about him leaving. On page 306, in the last paragraph it states, "I smiled at him and though, Jesus, buddy, you don't know how right you are. I aint ever gonna be the same. I'm changed all right." Piri Thomas showcases the idea of tone through the use of Piri's attitude. The tone is filled with optimistic views about change within himself and how he views the world now. The words of "I ain't ever gonna be the same. I'm changed all right" shows the acceptance of change that he is embracing and the new inner confidence he is embarking on. Piri is now seeing life in a more positive light rather than negative which he has struggled with throughout the book. Although Piri finds acceptance within in himself he is not clear on the changes he progressed through. Though, it is clear from everything that has happened to him that one of the true aspects of his life he has realized and embarked on was his color, Piri is always weary about his skin color and seen how his color affects him everywhere he goes. Above all, he finally learns the true meaning of being a person of color. Piri learns despite being any nationality you are only truly judged on your complexion. He especially learn this the hard way during his court sentence, it helped him realize that he

is sent to prison because of the labels of society not even the crime he has done. Piri's words of, "I aint ever gonna be the same. I'm changed all right" can be inferred from the lessons he learns as being a dark-skinned individual in a corrupted society. In comparison to Piri, Dilman is able to accept change within himself rather than oppose it as well. Both characters are able to find themselves in a society that always put them down for being dark-skinned. They both go through major life changing events to accepting they cannot change being dark-skinned instead to embrace who they are.

Like both of these protagonists, many people today goes this process of acceptance as well. There are people who are not content with who they are because of society views. Many people are self conscious of who they are especially when they see a celebrity because celebrities are idolized to be the perfect unflawed human beings. When people start to compare themselves to others they point out the qualities they do not have and this is how an individual devalues themselves. Just like the protagonists in the book, never try to degrade or live up to other expectations because you will never accept yourself. Once you find acceptance in yourself, you begin to grow out of your flaws and focus on the more positive than the negative. Thus, acceptance within oneself is the key to success for any individual's path.

In the end, society can shape an individual life for the worse or for the better. In The Man and Down These Mean Streets, the authors try to prove that true growth is indeed found within oneself not from others. This is because others can have an effect of making an individual feel as if they are lesser than what they really are. In other words, others seek out people lesser than them due to a sense of dominance they find within themselves. Like the relationship between Piri and his father, he is allowing his father to make him feel as he is valued less than what he is due to his color. While for Dilman, even though the situation with Miller is not face to face it still showcases the process of being judged by someone else because they feel they are better for their skin color. Another reason why true growth is found within oneself, is because everyone may not guide you into the right direction. Like In Down These Mean Streets, Piri gets into a huge mess in going to jail just because he wanted to follow someone else's perspective of life. Likewise for Dilman, who knows allowing Eaton to remove him from his presidency is allowing him to change his own mindset to match Eaton's. Dilman clearly

does not want to do this because he knows this whole situation is due to his color. All in all, accepting yourself is the key to success in life. As stated before, the key to life is to not worry about others instead to focus on bettering oneself despite all the flaws. Similarly to what society views Piri and Dilman flaws which is being dark-skinned. Overtime, both these protagonists overtime were able to brushed aside these flaws and accepted themselves for who they are. This is shown in both author's' use of external conflict that showcases the characters feelings, how others affects them, and the growth they took to acceptance. Overall, the lesson in accepting oneself is important because everyone came into this world independent without the help of others. We are all born with flaws and as human beings we should learn how to gradually accept these flaws and not allow others to use the flaws against each other. As flawed human beings accepting ourselves is apart of life it is how we view the world and how the world view us.

Works Cited

Thomas, Piri. *Down These Mean Streets*. New York, Knopf, 1967.

Wallace, Irving. *The Man*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc, 1999. Print.