The Value of Life

Reading selections for this module:

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet.* Act III, Sc. 1: Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy.

Armstrong, Lance, with Sally Jenkins. Excerpt from *It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life.* New York: Putnam, 2000. 1–5.

Ripley, Amanda. "What Is a Life Worth?" *Time* 11 Feb. 2002.

The Life and Health Insurance Foundation for Education. LIFE. "The Human Life Value Calculator" <http://www.lifeline.org/build/human_life_value_calculator/index.php?pt=lfhlvc&m=1>.

The assignment sequence you're about to begin will ask you to read several different texts, each of which addresses the issue of how life is valued. As you will see, the texts provide very different ways of thinking about how we can, do, and should value life.

Reading Rhetorically

Prereading

Activity 1

Getting Ready to Read

Before you read what others say about the value of life, take a few minutes to respond in writing to the following quickwrite prompt:

What does being alive mean to you? How do you assign value to life? What makes life challenging? What makes it worth living? Describe a few examples that help to show your thinking about how people should value life.

Activity 2

Introducing Key Concepts

This activity will help you build your understanding of the many meanings suggested by the concept of "life." Use the model below to explore the ways in which society defines "life" in various contexts.

Activity 2 (Continued)

Concept: *Life*

Example sentence:

Synonyms:

Contexts:

Examples:

Non-examples:

Text 1—Hamlet's Soliloquy

Activity 3

Surveying the Text

The first text you will read is the famous "To be, or not to be" speech from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark,* which was published in 1604 under the title *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*. That speech is a soliloquy, a convention used by playwrights to allow the audience to hear the thoughts of a character. Take a few moments to look over the text, and then answer the following questions:

- What prior experiences have you had reading plays?
- What did you notice about the page format and annotations?
- What did you notice about the text structure?

Activity 4

Making Predictions and Asking Questions

When approaching a new text, you should always try to draw on your prior experiences to help you predict what the text might be about. The following questions will help you to do so:

- What is a tragedy? What themes and outcomes would you expect to find in a tragedy?
- What do you know about the language in plays written by Shakespeare? What have you done in the past to help yourself read Shakespeare effectively?
- The soliloquy here begins with a famous quotation: "To be, or not to be—that is the question." What do you think is "the question" Hamlet is asking? How do you think he might answer it?

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Activity 5

Introducing Key Vocabulary

Shakespeare's texts are often difficult because he uses words that are no longer in frequent use, even though they were common when he wrote his plays. Several words in the soliloquy fit into this category. You will see in the text that some words are marked with an asterisk (*); a definition or synonym is provided to the right of the line for those words.

Polar Opposites

An important rhetorical device Shakespeare uses in Hamlet's soliloquy is antithesis, or a balance of opposites. Hamlet explores a series of oppositional relationships in his speech, beginning with the question of "to be, or not to be." For this vocabulary activity, you will explore some of these antithetical relationships by brainstorming antonyms for the terms listed below.

Term	Antonym
1. oppression	
2. action	
3. endurance	
4. mystery	
5. life	

Word Families

List as many words as possible that are related to the following five concepts from Hamlet's soliloquy: action, thought, suffering, mortality, and fear. You may include synonyms directly from the text along with any other words you believe are related to the concept. Word families are not simply lists of synonyms; they may include any sets of words that frequently appear together. For example, "brackish" and "water" are part of the same word family.

Example:

Resolution: end (line 5), consummation (line 8), will (line 25), decision, outcome, and result

1. action:
2. thought:
3. suffering:
4. mortality:
5. fear:

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Reading

Activity 6

First Reading

Read the soliloquy from *Hamlet.* Although it is quite short, it packs much meaning into its 33 lines. You may need to read it more than once before you feel you have a good grasp on the ideas it contains.

Background

At this point in the play, Hamlet feels that he is in a crisis. His father died a few months earlier under mysterious circumstances. Hamlet discovers that his father was secretly murdered—by Hamlet's uncle, Claudius. Making things even worse, Claudius then marries Hamlet's mother. Hamlet does not know what to do about this knowledge. He wonders whether he can trust anyone or if perhaps he is going crazy.

As you first read the text, focus on what you see as the "big picture" Hamlet describes. Based on this first reading, would you say that Hamlet is an optimist or a pessimist? What are your reasons for thinking so?

Activity 7

Rereading the Text and Looking Closely at Language

Strategic Marking of the Text

Because this series of texts focuses on the way people value life, you will now need to take a second look at the soliloquy. This time, read the text with a yellow highlighter or colored pencil (or devise some other way of marking the text in a unique and easily recognizable way), marking the places in the text where Hamlet describes what it means to be alive.

> **Example:** In lines two and three, Hamlet describes life as "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," so you could highlight that phrase as an example of what Hamlet thinks it means "to be."

Characterizing the Text

Take a look at the parts of the soliloquy you have highlighted and compare them with a classmate's markings. Find a few examples that you both have marked and mark the examples with a "+" or "–" to indicate whether the examples show a positive (+) outlook on life or a negative (–) one. For the example above—"the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune"—you would mark a "–" because it compares being alive to being under attack. After you have marked several such examples, reflect on the question asked earlier: At this moment, does it seem as if Hamlet is an optimist or a pessimist?

Paraphrasing the Text

Continuing to work with your partner, choose three of your samples and paraphrase them. "Paraphrasing" means putting the ideas of

another writer into your own words. Again using the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" example, a paraphrase might sound something like this: "Hamlet compares being alive to having fate shoot arrows at him." As you paraphrase, pay attention to the style used by Shakespeare to convey his ideas. What is the difference between having Hamlet say that life is like "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" and having him just say, "Life isn't very pleasant"? What are the effects of Shakespeare's stylistic choices as a writer?

Postreading

Activity 8

Thinking Critically

We identified the genre earlier as a drama, but more specifically, this is a soliloquy. As noted earlier, a soliloquy is a dramatic convention that allows a character to speak aloud his or her thoughts. From your reading of the soliloquy, answer the following questions:

- Does the soliloquy form seem to favor the expression of emotion (pathos) or logic (logos)? Explain why you think so.
- Does Hamlet's soliloquy use emotion (pathos) to create a specific effect on the reader? If so, describe how emotion is used.
- Does Hamlet's soliloquy use logic (logos) to create a specific effect on the reader? If so, describe how the logic is used.
- When Hamlet speaks his soliloquy, he is in crisis. How do his circumstances position Hamlet to speak with authority (ethos) about the value of life? Does Hamlet seem to be speaking about his life in particular or about the quality of life in general?
- As careful readers, we are of course aware that it is not really Hamlet speaking, but a character created by Shakespeare. Does Shakespeare seem like someone whose opinions and attitudes are worth considering? Why?

Activity 9

Charting Multiple Texts

Take a look at the chart constructed for this assignment. It is a "graphic organizer"—a fancy name for something that helps you keep track of various pieces of information and the relationships among those pieces. Because the chart is rather small and you will be doing a lot of writing on it, you might want to get a larger piece of paper and create your own chart. The chart will prove useful in the writing assignment you will complete at the end of this module.

Directions: As you look down the side of the chart, you will see that it asks you for information about the different texts you will be reading in this assignment:

- Title
- Author
- Genre

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Activity 9 (Continued)

The title and author are self-explanatory. “Genre” means “type,” so you are asked to describe the type of writing. For this first text, you would put “Drama” or “Play” as the genre.

Across the top of the chart are the ideas you will be tracking as you read the texts in this module. They are presented in the form of questions:

- What is the text’s big issue?
  - This asks you to identify the “main idea” of the text.
- What claim does the text make?
  - This asks you to identify the writer’s perspective on the main idea.
- What are examples or quotes from the text?
  - This is where you would put examples given by the writer to help the reader understand his or her claim. The quotes and paraphrases you worked on earlier will fit well here. Be sure to include page or line numbers (or both) to identify where you found the quote or idea.
- What do you think about the text’s claim?
  - In this box, you will explain your response to the text’s claim, including to what extent (if any) you agree with it.
- What are your examples?
  - Give a few examples from your own experiences that help explain your response to the text’s claim.
- How does this text connect to other texts?
  - If you see a similarity to another text, make note of it here. Connections can be made even among texts that have very different claims.

Take a few moments to fill in the chart for Hamlet’s soliloquy. The final box on making connections may be left blank for the moment.

Text 2—*It's Not About the Bike*

Prereading

Activity 10

Surveying the Text

The second text is an excerpt from *It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life* by Lance Armstrong with Sally Jenkins. The excerpt you will read is from the book's opening chapter. Prior to reading, try to answer the questions below. They are designed to help you activate your schema, which is a technical term that means you generate some prior knowledge so you will be ready to read and comprehend more actively.

- What do you know about Lance Armstrong? If you do not know anything about him, try doing a quick Internet search and see what comes up.
- What is the significance of the fact that the book was written by Armstrong *with* Sally Jenkins?
- What kind of text—what genre—do you think this book is?

Activity 11

Making Predictions and Asking Questions

The following questions will help you make specific predictions about the content of Armstrong's text:

- What topics do you think Armstrong might talk about that are related to the issue of how society values life?
- Do you think Armstrong's claim about the value of life will agree with Hamlet's or not?

Activity 12

Introducing Key Vocabulary

Although the excerpt from Armstrong's autobiography is generally an easy, straightforward text to read, there are a few vocabulary words you might want to review prior to reading. When you run into those words during your reading of the text, note the context of each word and write a "best guess" synonym for it. Your teacher may want you to compare your work with your classmates.

- expire
- poignant
- demise
- cadence
- marbled
- acrid
- puckered
- catheter

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Activity 12 (Continued)

- constitution
- articulate

Which sets or pairs of words are related to each other? Which words refer to death? Which words refer to the body? Do you think you might encounter additional word families in this excerpt? Which ones?

Reading

Activity 13

First Reading

Read the text by Armstrong. As you read, pay attention to the way Armstrong talks about the value of life. As you did with Hamlet, try to determine whether Armstrong appears to be generally pessimistic or optimistic in this passage. In addition, answer this question: Does Armstrong also present an argument about the value of death?

Activity 14

Rereading the Text and Looking Closely at Language

Strategic Marking of the Text

First Highlighting: As you did with the Shakespeare text, you will mark Armstrong's text. This time, use an orange-colored highlighter or colored pencil (or devise some other method of marking the text differently than you marked the soliloquy). Highlight the sentences, phrases, or words Armstrong uses to describe what he thinks it means to be alive.

Characterizing the Text

Once you have highlighted Armstrong's text, compare what you have selected to highlight with the choices a classmate has made. Then, working with your partner, mark some of the commonly highlighted parts with a "+" or "–" sign to indicate whether each quote shows a generally positive or negative outlook on life. Discussing the results with your partner, decide how you would answer this question about Armstrong's outlook on life: Is he an optimist or a pessimist?

Strategic Marking of the Text

Second Highlighting: Go through the text once more, this time with a yellow highlighter. Imagine that you are reading Armstrong's text from Hamlet's perspective. Highlight any passages that Hamlet would find particularly interesting or compelling. Some of these may be the same words you have already highlighted, while others will be new.

Connecting the Texts—The Mock Interview

Armstrong and Hamlet, in their respective texts, provide quite different perspectives on the meaning and value of life. Working with your partner, envision a scenario in which Hamlet somehow would have the opportunity to interview Armstrong and vice versa. One of you should write out a series of at least five questions that Hamlet would ask Armstrong, while the other writes five questions for Armstrong to ask Hamlet.

Activity 14 (Continued)

When the questions are finished, take on the personas of these two and conduct the interviews. Be sure to give answers that are in keeping with the points of view provided in the two texts. After conducting the mock interviews, discuss the relative viewpoints of the characters. How well would they get along with one another? How would each respond to the arguments made by the other?

Here are some sample interview questions:

- How do you feel you have been treated by other people?
- Are you afraid of death?
- Are there any benefits to suffering?
- How do you approach challenges?

Postreading

Activity 15

Thinking Critically

Armstrong's text is an autobiography. As with the soliloquy we examined earlier, the form of this writing has an effect on how it is read and understood. The questions below will help you assess Armstrong's text.

- An autobiography is a form of nonfiction—a text that tells the "truth." Do you think Armstrong is being truthful in his account of his life? Explain your reasoning.
- Armstrong's autobiography is written "with" Sally Jenkins. What role do you think Jenkins played in the writing of the text? How does her participation in the creation of the text influence your interpretation of Armstrong's story? In other words, how does the combination of Armstrong and Jenkins as authors affect the "ethos" of the text?
- Do you think Armstrong's story has an impact on the reader because of its use of logic (logos) or emotion (pathos) or both?
- Unlike Hamlet, Armstrong is not in the midst of his crisis when he writes his story; instead, he writes about his experiences in hindsight. Does that have an impact on Armstrong's ability to make his ideas and story compelling to the reader? Explain your reasoning.

Activity 16

Charting Multiple Texts

Make an entry in your chart for the Armstrong text. Fill it out as you did with the soliloquy. When you reach the entry for "How does this text connect to other texts?", briefly describe the ways in which Armstrong responds to or challenges the assertions Shakespeare makes in his soliloquy for Hamlet.

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Text 3—"What Is a Life Worth?"

Prereading

Activity 17

Surveying the Text

The article "What Is a Life Worth?" comes from the February 12, 2002, issue of *Time* magazine. Take a look at its form and length. How much time do you think it will take to read this piece? Have you read anything from *Time* magazine? What do you know about that publication? What kinds of articles are commonly included in it? What types of people do you think compose the magazine's primary readership?

Activity 18

Making Predictions and Asking Questions

This article includes the following subtitle: "To compensate families of the victims of Sept. 11, the government has invented a way to measure blood and loss in cash. A look at the wrenching calculus."

- What predictions can you make about the article's content from this subtitle?
- What connections do you think you might see between this article and the previous two texts you have read?
- The first two texts took first-person perspectives on the subject. Do you anticipate that this article will continue in that vein, or will it be different? Why do you think so?

Activity 19

Introducing Key Vocabulary

Below, you will find three groupings of vocabulary words taken from "What Is a Life Worth?" The first group consists of words related to the legal and financial aspects of the article. The second list contains terms that convey information with particular emotional connotations. The final set of words is made up of terms that are used to describe the workings of the governmental plan to compensate 9/11 family victims. Working alone or with a partner, look over each list of words and provide a brief definition for the words you do not know well. Pay particular attention to the ways in which the words connect to one another (e.g., people *litigate*, or sue, because they want somebody to *compensate* them for a loss).

Financial and legal terms

- compensate
- litigation
- commodify
- valuation
- discretion

Activity 19 (Continued)

- liability
- beneficiary
- tort
- allocation
- disparity

Emotion-laden words

- squeamish
- garish
- gall
- traumatize
- callous
- inconsolable
- indignant
- balk
- deteriorate

Descriptive terms

- rhetorical
- Rorschach test
- artillery
- analogy
- solidarity
- orchestrated
- concoct
- mechanism

Reading

Activity 20

First Reading

As you read "What Is a Life Worth?" for the first time, look for the main issues and the various stances people take in response to those issues. Be sure to also look for connections to the idea of valuing life and to what was previously said about valuing life by Shakespeare and Armstrong.

How is "life" defined in this text? For example, does "life" refer to a human body, a soul, human experience, existence, or quality of life? Does this definition include a person's personal life and professional or working life?

Activity 21

Rereading the Text

Strategic Marking of the Text

Choose two highlighter or pencil colors and revisit the text of the article on 9/11. The two colors will be used to mark two different aspects of the article. With the first color, highlight the words, phrases, and sentences from the article that describe valuing life in *legal* and

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Activity 21 (Continued)

financial terms. With the second color, highlight the words, phrases, and sentences that describe valuing life in *human* and *emotional* terms.

Summarizing the Text

Using the sections you highlighted in the previous step, write a summary of the article's descriptions of how life is valued and people's responses to that valuing of life. Your summary should include only the most important ideas and must be limited to six sentences. If your teacher allows, you may want to work on this summary with a partner.

Connecting the Texts

With a partner, read the summary you wrote in the previous step. One of you should read the summary from the perspective of Hamlet; the other should take on the persona of Armstrong. Discuss with your partner how each would probably react to the way that "What Is a Life Worth?" describes the value of life.

- Would Hamlet agree with any of the ideas presented in the article? If so, which ones?
- Would Armstrong agree with any of the ideas in the article? If so, which ones?
- Would Armstrong and Hamlet be in agreement at all in the way they might interpret this article's ideas? If so, how?

Postreading

Activity 22

Thinking Critically

The previous two texts (the soliloquy and the autobiographical excerpt) both provide very personal approaches to the idea of valuing life. The current text, though, is an article from a respected national news magazine. The following questions will help you work through some of the implications of the text's structure and features on the interpretation and understanding of the text:

- Most news articles such as "What Is a Life Worth?" try to take an objective, unbiased approach. Would you agree that this text is unbiased, or do you think it favors one perspective? Explain your answer.
- What kinds of evidence does Ripley, the author of the article, use to get across the key ideas and issues associated with the compensation of 9/11 victims and their families? Are any specific types of evidence more compelling to you as a reader? Less compelling?
- How accurate do you think the information in the article is? In other words, do you think *Time* magazine and Ripley are to be trusted? Why or why not?
- Does the article use logic, emotion, or both to make an impact on the reader? If so, describe how. Compare that use to the way logic and emotion are used by Shakespeare, Armstrong, or both.

Activity 23

Charting Multiple Texts

Make a third entry on your chart for "What Is a Life Worth?" Feel free to use the highlighting, summarizing, connections, and critical thinking work you did previously as a way to fill out the chart.

Text 4—"Human Life Value Calculator"

Prereading

Activity 24

Surveying the Text

This text comes from an Internet resource called the "Life and Health Insurance Foundation for Education." Viewing the actual Web site is certainly preferable to looking at the printed text; the Web site's human life value calculator is available for examination at http://www.life-line.org/life_how_human.html.

- If your classroom has computer access, visit the Web site. Click around and look at the types of information available on the site as well as information about the organization that publishes the site. What appears to be the purpose of the site? How is the site organized?
- If you do not have Internet access, simply scan the text and take inventory of its attributes. What type of text does it appear to be? What are the features of the text, including the presence of such things as headings and graphs?
- This text comes from an Internet site whose domain name ends in ".org" instead of the more common ".com." Do you know what this ending to the site's address signifies?

Activity 25

Making Predictions and Asking Questions

This text is quite different from the previous three texts. It is not personal or narrative, as the first two texts were, nor is it an informative text designed for a general audience. Instead, as you probably noticed when surveying the text, it is an interactive site, asking the reader to provide data to input and generating specific information based on the particular data provided by the user. The Web-based pages are called the "Human Life Value Calculator." Answer the following questions on the basis of what you know so far before you begin to read:

- What do you think might be the purpose of a text like this?
- Who might use this text?
- Since this text claims to calculate human life value, do you anticipate that this will have the most connections to Hamlet's soliloquy, Armstrong's autobiography, or Ripley's *Time* article? Why?

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Activity 26

Introducing Key Vocabulary

The vocabulary terms listed below come from the Web site text. Many of these terms are similar to those in the list of legal and financial terms from "What Is a Life Worth?" In the same way that finding connections among ideas in different texts helps us to better understand those ideas, finding connections among vocabulary words helps us to better understand those words. As you find definitions for the terms below, try to include a similar term from the previous vocabulary lists.

- assess
- incur
- expenditure
- consumption
- fringe benefits
- contribution

Reading

Activity 27

First Reading

Read through the text, noting the way that a life's value is determined by the Human Life Value Calculator. Pay particular attention to the data input, which reflects a twenty-year-old single mother working in a service industry. If you have access to the Web site itself, you can choose a variety of data inputs to see how the results vary. Try providing different age, gender, occupation, and income information, and then examine the effect on the results. As you make sense of the calculator and its workings, make note of any connections you see to the previous texts we have read.

Activity 28

Rereading the Text

Strategic Marking of the Text

This activity is a variation on the kind of highlighting you did with the *Time* magazine article. Once again, you will be using two colors to mark the text for two different aspects. This time, however, you will be using the highlighter colors to indicate your own responses to the ideas within the text. With one color, highlight the parts of the text with which you find yourself in agreement. Use the other color to highlight the parts of the text that you either disagree with or that raise questions for you.

Responding to the Text

Look over the highlighting you did in the previous step. Write a brief response—no more than eight sentences—to the Human Life Value Calculator Web site. The response should describe what the Web site asserts about human life's value and your reactions to those assertions. Remember, your response doesn't have to be in complete agreement or disagreement with the text; you might agree with some aspects and disagree with others.

Postreading

Activity 29

Thinking Critically

- The Web site text you have been studying differs structurally (that is, in the way it is put together) from the prior texts. Make a list of several of the differences between this text and the others.
- Unlike the other texts, the Human Life Value Calculator has no single identified author. Does the lack of a named author affect your level of belief in the text's ideas and purpose? How can you find out more about the text and whose interests it represents?
- Did this text produce in you an emotional response of any sort? If so, briefly describe it.
- Consider the charts that the calculator produces. How well do you understand the meaning of these charts? How do the three charts differ? Does the use of all of the numbers within the charts seem to make a logical argument about the value of life?

Activity 30

Charting Multiple Texts

As you did with the previous texts, fill out a chart entry for the Web site. To facilitate this task, you may refer, as needed, to the highlighting you have done, your responses, and the questions (above) you just answered.

Connecting Reading and Writing

Activity 31

Writing to Learn

Many of the activities you have completed so far have involved writing. These kinds of informal writing assignments are part of a process called "writing to learn." You have been using writing, in essence, as a way for you to understand and interpret the texts you have been reading. Such informal writing is also a useful tool for helping you get ready to do more formal writing, as with the writing assignment you'll find below. To help you construct a claim for your essay as you work on this assignment, be sure to revisit the informal writing you have done. The chart, in particular, will help you to synthesize information for your paper.

Activity 32

Using the Words of Others

When you write anything in response to a text you have read, you will have to describe for your reader what the original text says. This can be done through direct quotations (saying precisely what the original author said), paraphrasing (providing a specific idea from the text,

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Activity 32 (Continued)

but putting it in your own words), and summarizing (providing the primary ideas from the text in a generalized form). The activities you have already completed have asked you to find quotations, provide paraphrases, and write summaries, so you should be well prepared for using the words of Shakespeare, Armstrong, Ripley, and the makers of the human life value calculator within your formal essay.

When you use any method for representing the ideas from another text in your own writing, you must provide a citation. Your teacher will probably already have described for you the type of citation you need to use for this class, so be sure to follow those instructions carefully. Remember, even when you are summarizing and paraphrasing, you still must attribute the ideas to the original writer.

Writing Rhetorically

Prewriting

Activity 33

Reading the Assignment

As you read the assignment below, make note of the type of writing you are required to complete, the sources you may need to describe and discuss in your writing, and the audience for your writing.

Writing Assignment

So far in this assignment sequence, we have heard a number of different voices giving insights into the value of life. Hamlet's soliloquy offers an emotional, metaphor-laden glimpse into the thinking of a young man contemplating suicide. Lance Armstrong's autobiography uses storytelling from a first-person perspective to get across how the famed cyclist thinks about life. Amanda Ripley's article from *Time* magazine provides insight into the problems involved in translating the concept of valuing life from abstract terms into actual dollars and cents. The Human Life Value Calculator establishes specific criteria for assigning monetary value to a person's life.

You might not fully agree or disagree with any of the texts' essential claims about the value of life. This makes your voice an important contribution to this discussion about how we should value human life. Where do your ideas fit into the terrain mapped by the other texts we have read? Is it right to assign dollar values to a person's life? Do suffering and illness impact how we should value life? Assume that the audience for your piece consists of intelligent citizens interested in this issue—the same types of people, for instance, who would read *Time* magazine.

Activity 33 (Continued)

As you write your essay, think about the different ways the authors we have read make their points about valuing life. Depending on the points you are trying to make, you might want to use some metaphors for life, as Hamlet does, or tell some stories the way Armstrong does. You may choose to include some words from people you interview, as Ripley does in her article, or you might even choose to establish some criteria for how human life should be calculated in monetary terms. As you construct your essay, make conscious choices about the ways you can represent your ideas to your reader.

How should our society assign value to human life?

Be sure to refer to and cite the readings. You may also use examples from your personal experience or observations.

Analyzing the Assignment

A "Do/What Chart" is a strategy you can use to clarify directions. To create a "Do/What Chart," draw a T-graph in your notes, labeling one side "Do" and the other side "What." Then list verbs from the prompt in the "Do" column and the objects of those verbs in the "What" column.

Do	What

Activity 34

Getting Ready to Write

Revisit the chart you made while reading the texts. Pay particular attention to the column that asks about your opinion of each text's claims. This will help you to determine where your ideas fit within the "conversation" about valuing life that takes place in the texts we read. Try writing sentences that fill in these blanks as a way of determining your own position.

- "I agree most with the ideas in _____ because _____."
- "I agree least with the ideas in _____ because _____."

Activity 35

Formulating a Working Thesis

Your essay's thesis is the primary claim that you will be making about valuing life. There are several attributes of claims that form the basis of successful essays. A good claim is:

- **Clear.** Your reader should easily understand your essay's claim.
- **Compelling.** The claim should be interesting to your reader and should make the reader want to read your entire paper.

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Activity 35 (Continued)

- **Complex.** A claim that is too simple will not engage your reader and won't contribute significantly to the "conversation" about the topic.
- **Contestable.** Any claim that no one would disagree with is unlikely to be of interest to your reader.

Try writing a few claims for your essay. It might be helpful to think of your claim as a response to a specific question whose answer matters to the essay's audience. For instance, your claim should try to answer the question, "How should people value life in contemporary American society?" Your claim could take the form of a sentence that combines both an **assertion**—a statement of your opinion—and a **rationale**—a generalized reason in support of the assertion. Here are a couple of examples of claims that take this form:

- Schools should put more money into academics than into athletics because the primary goal of a school is to educate students, not to train athletes.
- The *Star Wars* films remain popular because they show the classic tale of an individual's triumph over oppression.

Put your claim into this assertion-rationale form, and you will be ready to begin drafting your essay.

Writing

Activity 36

Composing a Draft

Every writer's process for crafting a paper's first draft is unique. Some prefer to write an entire paper at a single sitting; others carefully plan the paper with outlines or maps prior to writing. The importance of a paper's first draft is that it provides an opportunity for you to shape your ideas into a coherent, written form.

Activity 37

Organizing the Essay

There are as many ways of organizing an essay as there are writers. Even so, essays will always have a beginning, middle, and end.

- The beginning—which may be one or more paragraphs long—sets up the essay's central question and claim.
- The middle of the essay provides ideas and evidence for the claim you are making. The evidence you provide may come in a number of forms, including quotations from the texts we have read and examples from your own life and experience. The chart you have completed may be helpful in this regard.
- The end is where you reach conclusions about the question and argue that your claim is the most reasonable way of answering the question.

STUDENT VERSION

Activity 38

Developing the Content

Read the following guidelines about developing support for your essay and discuss them with your classmates.

- Body paragraphs give evidence in the form of examples, illustrations, statistics, and so forth and analyze the meaning of the evidence.
- Each body paragraph is usually directly related to the question that the claim is attempting to answer.
- No set number of paragraphs make up an essay.

Revising and Editing

Activity 39

Revising the Draft

Revising your essay means looking at it again. Revision is often difficult because as writers, we know what we are trying to say; our essays, therefore, make sense to us. In order to revise effectively, we have to be able to look at our writing from a new perspective. Having classmates or others read our work provides new viewpoints that can lead us to revise effectively. Remember that the point is not for the readers to "fix" your essay; the readers' job is simply to give you feedback about how they read and made sense of your essay. As the writer, you are in charge of responding to what your readers tell you about the essay and doing the work necessary to make it more reader-friendly and effective.

Your teacher may provide you with some activities for revising your essay. Some suggestions for ways to look at your essay that will provide you with feedback are listed below:

- Put your draft aside for a few days, and then reread it. This allows you to develop some "critical distance" from the essay and usually makes it easier to see places that may need some revision.
- Ask a classmate to read the essay with a few highlighters or colored pencils. They can use red to signify places where you used powerful words, green for ideas that need to "grow" a little more, and so forth.
- Have a couple of classmates read your essay out loud together while you overhear their conversation about the essay. As they stop and discuss various parts of the paper, pay attention to what they say. Their reactions may give you very good insights into how to revise your paper.

STUDENT VERSION

Activity 40

Editing the Draft

Editing is often confused with revising, but editing has more to do with making your essay "clean"—that is, free of errors—while revising is about making your ideas come through as clearly as possible. Of course, editing may happen all through the process of writing, but the editing stage of writing comes when your essay is nearly in its finished form. Editing your paper is like giving a car a nice tune-up and polish before a car show; it lets the paper really shine. Here are some ideas for editing your paper:

- Read your paper aloud. This will help you identify places where a sentence doesn't sound quite right or spots where you might need to adjust punctuation or word choice.
- Ask a classmate or parent to read the paper and make suggestions about sentence construction, punctuation, verb tenses, and spelling.
- Run the essay through the computer's spelling and grammar check. Make sure to look carefully at the suggestions made by the computer and ask someone you trust—a teacher, classmate, or parent—if you have doubts. Computers often suggest the wrong word for misspellings (if you misspell "definitely" by writing "definately," for example, the computer will probably suggest that the correct spelling is "defiantly"), so pay close attention.

Activity 41

Reflecting on the Writing

After your essay is finished, reflect on the processes you went through to write the paper. Answer the following questions:

- How helpful did you find the highlighting, charting, and question-answering activities?
- How much was your writing affected by having kept notes in the charts?
- How helpful were the prewriting and revising activities?
- What did you learn from reading and writing in this assignment module?
- Which strategies will you use again when you are asked to read and write assignments like this one in the future?

Charting Multiple Texts

Text Information	What is the text's big issue?	What claim does the text make?	What are the examples/quotes from the text?	What do you think about the text's claim?	What are your examples?	How does this text connect to other texts?
Title: Author: Genre:						
Title: Author: Genre:						
Title: Author: Genre:						
Title: Author: Genre:						