

Common Reading Program 2012-13 Essay Competition Writing Prompts

The Common Reading Program is sponsoring an essay competition in conjunction with the Common Reading book, Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. Four scholarship prizes will be awarded for the Spring semester 2013:

First Prize: \$500 scholarship

Second Prize: \$250 scholarship

Third and Fourth Prizes: \$125 scholarships

Essay contest winners and runners-up will be invited to participate in special Common Reading Program events during the spring semester.

Eligibility:

Student must be a first-semester SCSU or SCTCCC student this fall, continuing on for their studies at SCSU in Spring 2013, and they must submit an essay to the Common Reading Program Essay Competition according to the guidelines laid out herein.

Students may choose 1 of the three prompts below:

- A. Skloot begins the book with the following quote from Elie Wiesel: "We must not see any person as an abstraction. Instead, we must see in every person a universe with its own secrets, with its own treasures, with its own sources of anguish, and with some measure of triumph." Analyze the book in light of this quote. Explain the various ways in which both the scientific community and the media are guilty of having viewed Henrietta and her family as abstractions. What are the consequences of this perspective? How is Skloot's different perspective evident in the way she conducted her research and wrote the book?
- B. When Henrietta's story first appeared in the mainstream media in 1976, many viewed it as one of race and racism. Evaluate whether or not you think this is an appropriate way to interpret the story. How do you think public interpretation might have been different if the story had been published at the time of Henrietta's death in 1951? How is it being interpreted now? Analyze the cultural and historic events that have influenced, or would influence, these interpretations.
- C. There is often a tension between religious faith and science. Explore the importance of both religious faith and scientific understanding in the lives of the Lacks family. How does religious faith help frame the Lackses' response to, and interpretation of, the scientific information they receive about HeLa? How does Skloot's attitude toward the relationship between religious faith and science evolve as a result of her relationship with the Lacks family?

To be eligible to win, essays must respond to all aspects of the prompt chosen from the above options.

Selected essays will demonstrate the following standards: Essays should be a maximum of 5 pages, double spaced. They must be free of spelling and grammatical errors. They must be well-written and organized. They will demonstrate a clear engagement with the common reading book and display evidence of a thoughtful engagement with themes introduced by the book.

Submission details:

Submission deadline is: Monday, October 22 at 4 PM.

Late submissions will not be considered.

Submissions must also adhere to the following:

- **Four copies** of the essay must be submitted for blind review. Each copy of the essay should have a title, but be free of all identifying information (i.e., name, tech ID number, and so on).
- Every submission **should include a separate cover sheet** which includes your personal information: Name, Tech ID Number, HuskyNet email address, Local phone number, and Essay Title.
- Submissions should be sent via campus mail or hand delivered to the Common Reading Program, Centennial Hall 208.