

**AP English Language and Composition (Practice Synthesis Essay)**

**Reading Time: 20 minutes**

**Suggested Writing Time: 90 minutes**

**Directions:** The following prompt is based on the accompanying six sources.

This question requires you to integrate a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. *Refer to the sources to support your position; avoid mere paraphrase or summary. Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument.*

**Introduction:** Complacency in a “short-cut” society has increased dramatically over the last decade. Do today’s students take the easy way out instead of a more traditional academic approach? Do students rely too heavily on outside resources rather than persevering independently? Is this generation in danger of not being able to think for themselves?

**Assignment:** Read the following sources (including any introductory information) carefully. Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three sources to support your position taken in the essay. Take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that students of this generation are becoming complacent in a “short-cut” society? You may do secondary research to support your argument, but be sure to cite them properly.

Refer to the sources as Source A, Source B, etc; titles are included for your convenience.

Source A (The Onion)

Source B (McPherson)

Source C (Williams)

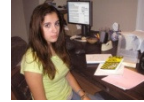
Source D (Gamerman)

Source E (Cliff Notes Ads)

Source F (Grimes)

Source A

*Girl Moved to Tears by Of Mice and Men Cliff Notes September 18, 2008*



*The following passage about the UVA student reading the Cliffs Notes instead of reading the book written by Nobel winner John Steinbeck was first published in The Onion, a satirical social commentary on-line periodical.*

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA—In what she described as "the most emotional moment" of her academic life, University of Virginia sophomore communications major Grace Weaver sobbed openly upon concluding Steinbeck's seminal work of American fiction *Of Mice And Men's* Cliffs Notes early last week.

"This book has changed me in a way that only great literature summaries can," said Weaver, who was so shaken by the experience that she requested an extension on her English 229 essay. "The humanity displayed in the Character Flowchart really stirred something in me. And Lennie's childlike innocence was beautifully captured through the simple, ranch-hand slang words like 'mentally handicapped' and 'retarded.'"

Added Weaver: "I never wanted the synopsis to end."

Weaver, who formed an "instant connection" with Lennie's character-description paragraph, said she began to suspect the novel might end tragically after reading the fourth sentence which suggested the gentle giant's strength and fascination with soft things would "lead to his untimely demise."

"I was amazed at how attached to him I had become just from the critical commentary," said Weaver, still clutching the yellow-and-black-striped study guide. "When I got to the last sentence—'George shoots Lennie in the head,'—it seemed so abrupt. But I found out later that the 'ephemeral nature of life' is a major theme of the novel."

Weaver was assigned *Of Mice And Men*—a novel scholars have called "a masterpiece of austere prose" and "the most skillful example of American naturalism under 110 pages"—as part of her early twentieth-century fiction course, and purchased the Cliffs Notes from a cardboard rack at her local Barnes & Noble. John Whittier-Ferguson, her professor for the class, told reporters this was not the first time one of his students has expressed interest in the novel's plot summary.

"It's one of those universal American stories," said Ferguson after being informed of Weaver's choice to read the Cliffs Notes instead of the pocket-sized novel. "I look forward to skimming her essay on the importance of following your dreams and randomly assigning it a grade.

Though she completed the two-page brief synopsis in one sitting, Weaver said she felt strangely drawn into the plot overview and continued on, exploring the more fleshed-out chapter summaries.

"There's something to be said for putting in that extra time with a good story," Weaver said. "You just get more out of it. I'm also going to try to find that book about rabbits that George was always reading to Lennie, so that I can really understand that important allusion."

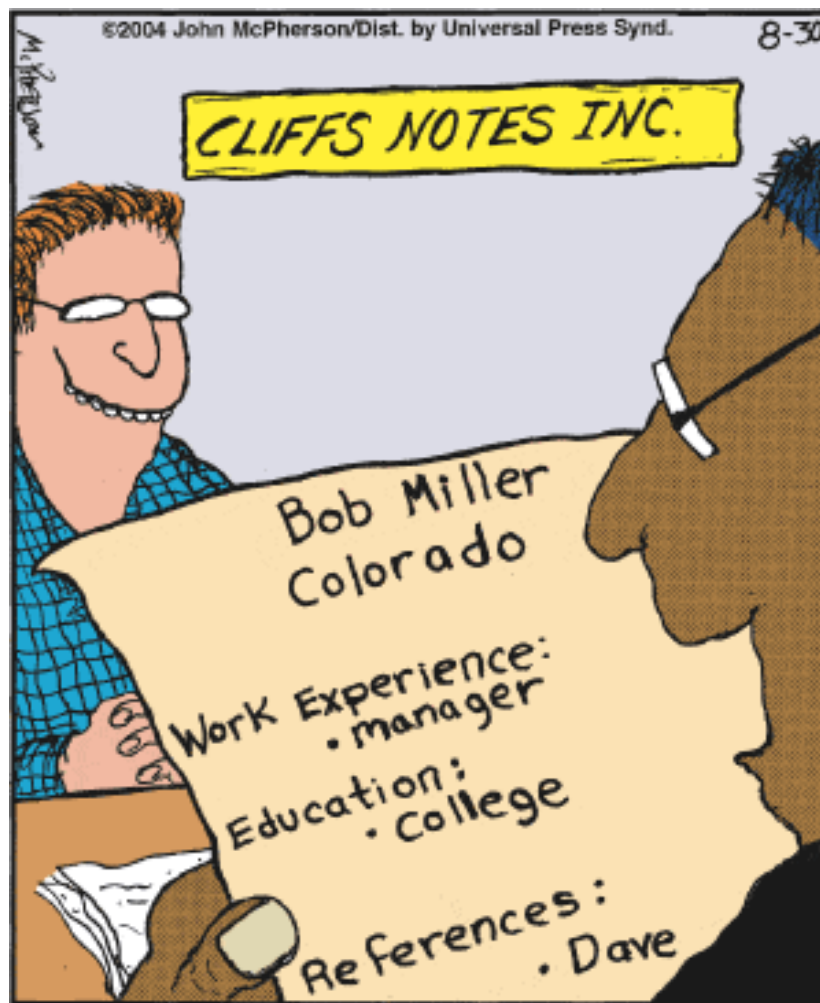
Within an hour of completing the cliffs notes, Weaver was already telling friends and classmates that Steinbeck was her favorite author, as well as reciting select quotations from the "Important Quotations" section for their benefit.

"When I read those quotes, found out which characters they were attributed to, and inferred their context from the chapter outlines to piece together their significance, I was just blown away," said a teary-eyed Weaver. "And the way Steinbeck wove the theme of hands all the way through the section entitled 'Hands'—he definitely deserved to win that Nobel Prize."

Weaver's roommate, Giulia Crenshaw, has already borrowed the dog-eared, highlighted summary of the classic Depression-era saga, and is expecting to enjoy reading what Weaver described as "a really sad story about two brothers who love to farm."

"I loved this book so much, I'm going to read all of Steinbeck's Cliffs Notes," said Weaver. "But first I'm going to go to the library to check out the original version *Of Mice And Men* starring John Malkovich and Gary Sinise."

Source B



"VERY impressive resume, Mr. Miller!"

## Source C

Williams, Blanche. "The Cliff Notes Information Age." *Nia Online*. 2009. Nia Enterprises. 1 Jul 2009  
<<http://www.niaonline.com/ggmsblog/?p=692>>.

The following article details the way in which cliff notes have affected society.

Critical thinking has become a lost art form filled with media's attempt to persuade us to sidetrack our ability to come to a conclusion, based on the facts.

The majority of our lives have become soundbites and pundit or network-based propaganda. While propaganda often has facts or fragments of truth interspersed, it is designed to further a particular entity. You must always consider the source!

As kids, we often repeated information we "heard," regardless of its truth. We simply passed it on to those willing to listen or those unaware of its impact. As educated adults, we are supposed to have learned how to take information at face value until we, ourselves, have the opportunity to dissect or discern its validity.

News media nowadays, tells you something enough times and enough ways that you will then begin to believe it. By the time you hear or read something and try to fully comprehend the message, the ticker at the bottom of the page has moved you to the next thought. Overwhelming citizens with constant information is considered a form of mind control. We have to become better stewards of information by challenging ourselves to read more, research more and give less status to those who read teleprompters or simply give a limited perspective.

Ask "where's the beef?" Where's the meat of the issue? I don't just want the so-called "juicy details," I want the meat! I want to see all sides, not just one or two perspectives.

How many issues that our nation is facing today, do you fully understand? How many ways do you get your information? Who's voice do you trust? Are you seeking the facts or do you just need a sprinkle of pundits and a taste of op-eds? Are you seeking to be informed or entertained in this age of sensationalized and "soap-opera" news?

We are so programmed to someone giving us the answers that its hypocritical and disingenuous for us to ask our kids to think for themselves and not cheat their way through life. The cable networks are proud participants in this "Cliff Notes" Information Age. Remember when you didn't want or have the time to read the complete book in school? You used the Cliff Notes to get the summary. You may have passed the test but never fully comprehended the entire story, because you didn't read it for yourself.

Is it media's fault? No. It's ours. We, the African-American community, don't even have a major cable network, like BET or TVOne, that will invest in news from our perspective. Entertainment rules. If it doesn't "make money" they won't do it. This is a sad commentary! But we seem to just be "happy" to have something. In this case, something is nothing at all. Demand gives way to more supply and unfortunately to our detriment!

We have to learn to read and know more for ourselves about the world around us. We went through the past 8 years with blinders on to the demise of our economy, our integrity, and to a large part, our future. We didn't fight hard enough for our ideals and our rights. But in 2009, we have a president that speaks for transparency after years of secrecy. But here's the kicker...are we willing to take advantage of our constitutional rights to know what is going on under our noses? Are we willing to speak out, do the work, decipher the information, and make the tough decisions?

I am, are you?

Hand, are you?

#### Source D

Gamerman, Ellen. "Legalized Cheating." *The Wall Street Journal* (2006): Print.

*The following article was taken from The Wall Street Journal and addresses cheating in the school system.*

It was a situation every middle-schooler dreads. Bonnie Pitzer was cruising through a vocabulary test until she hit the word "desolated" -- and drew a blank. But instead of panicking, she quietly searched the Internet for the definition.

At most schools, looking up test answers online would be considered cheating. But at Mill Creek Middle School in Kent, Wash., some teachers now encourage such tactics. "We can do basically anything on our computers," says the 13-year-old, who took home an A on the test.

In a wireless age where kids can access the Internet's vast store of information from their cellphones and PDAs, schools have been wrestling with how to stem the tide of high-tech cheating. Now, some educators say they have the answer: Change the rules and make it legal. In doing so, they're permitting all kinds of behavior that had been considered off-limits just a few years ago.

The move, which includes some of the country's top institutions, reflects a broader debate about what skills are necessary in today's world -- and how schools should teach them. The real-world strengths of intelligent surfing and analysis, some educators argue, are now just as important as rote memorization. The old rules still reign in most places, but an increasing number of schools are adjusting them. This includes not only letting kids use the Internet during tests, but in the most extreme cases, allowing them to text message notes or beam each other definitions on vocabulary drills. Schools say they in no way consider this cheating because they're explicitly changing the rules to allow it.

In Ohio, students at Cincinnati Country Day can take their laptops into some tests and search online Cliffs Notes. At Ensign Intermediate School in Newport Beach, Calif., seventh-graders are looking at each other's hand-held computers to get answers on their science drills. And in San Diego, high-schoolers can roam free on the Internet during English exams.

The same logic is being applied even when laptops aren't in the classroom. In Philadelphia, school officials are considering letting kids retake tests, even if it gives them an opportunity to go home and Google topics they saw on the first test. "What we've got to teach kids are the tools to access that information," says Gregory Thornton, the school district's chief academic officer. "'Cheating' is not the word anymore."

The changes -- and the debate they're prompting -- are not unlike the upheaval caused when calculators became available in the early 1970s. Back then, teachers grappled with letting kids use the new machines or requiring long lines of division by hand. Though initially banned, calculators were eventually embraced in classrooms and, since 1994, have even been allowed in the SAT.

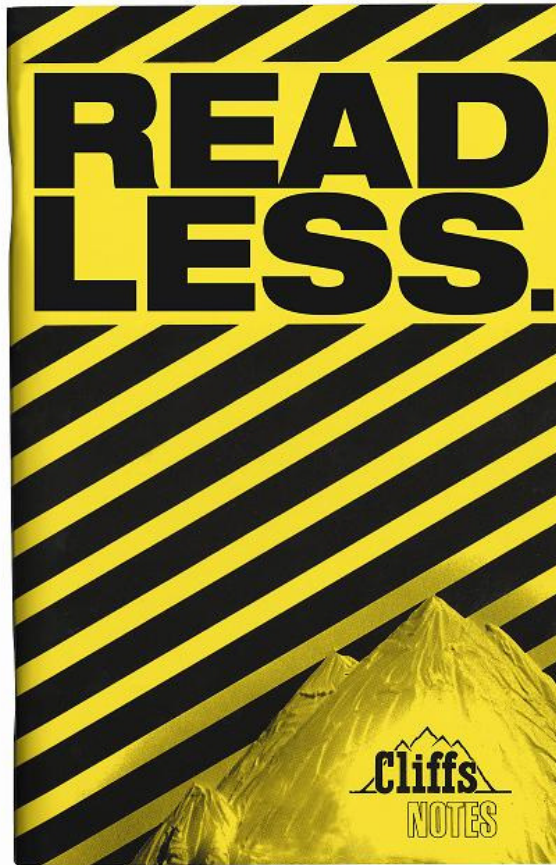
Of course, open-book exams have long been a fixture at some schools. But access to the Internet provides a far vaster trove of information than simply having a textbook nearby. And the degree of collaboration that technology is allowing flies in the face of some deeply entrenched teaching methods.

Grabbing test answers off the Internet is a "crutch," says Charles Alexander, academic dean at the elite Groton School in Massachusetts. In the college world, where admissions officers keep profiles of secondary schools and consider applicants based on the rigor of their training, there are differing opinions. "This is the way the world works," says Harvard Director of Admissions Marlyn McGrath Lewis, adding that whether a student was allowed to search the Internet for help on a high-school English exam wouldn't affect his or her application.

Source E

"Cliff Notes Ads." *Harvest*. 2009. Harvest Marketing. 1 Jul 2009  
<[http://harvestmkt.com/The\\_Work\\_\\_Cliffs\\_Notes.html](http://harvestmkt.com/The_Work__Cliffs_Notes.html)>.

*This graphic was taken from Harvest's web page featuring college students creations of simple, impactful ads.*



Source F

Grimes, Ginger. "Spark Notes Suck!" *The Antioch High School Times* 13(2008): Print.

*The following is an editorial from a high school newspaper emphasizing the effects of using outside sources for help.*

To the Editor:

I am getting fed up with the use of "Spark Notes" instead of reading books. I read every novel that's assigned to us no matter how hard it is. Then, I look around the classroom and see the yellow and black mini-books stuck hidden-away inside the pages of our hard cover essential literature.

It's just not fair. The good students do all the work while the lazy kids reap the same benefits, especially when our teachers seem to pull multiple choice questions from "homework-helpers" that they themselves have "Googled". The only thing that this reveals about a student's intelligence is how technologically savvy they are in the Internet age.

"Google" searches help to find information in milliseconds, but it does not replace the kind of learning that takes place from the physical, educational texts assigned to us. To me, these kids taking the easy way out and "borrowing" thoughts and information from other sources to get by have a doomed future. After all, there are no Cliff Notes in the business world.