

Philosophical Friday Prompts



When we think about concrete subjects like math, vegetables, laws, the government, and school, it is often easy to explain our feelings about them. When we think about abstract concepts, it is often more difficult. Each Friday you will be asked to think about an abstract concept.

Open up your MUSINGS document and get busy! This might be difficult. That's okay. We lean in to doing difficult things. Just keep writing. Your goal is to write for 15 full minutes. As always, writing is never finished. It is simply time to stop. These are drafts. It is okay if they are messy, random, unorganized, and journal-esque. Just write.

Men make history and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better. —Harry S. Truman

Think about the power of leadership. Why is it so important? Who makes a better leader: someone who is loved, or someone who is feared?

"I wondered if that was how forgiveness budded; not with the fanfare of epiphany, but with pain gathering its things, packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night."
-Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." -Mahatma Gandhi

Hosseini claims that forgiveness unassumingly slips away. Gandhi implies that forgiveness is an attribute that takes concentrated effort. Think about forgiveness and examine its role. Is forgiveness necessary for a happy life? Is it unassuming and quiet, or does it require strength? Is forgiveness something that just happens after time? Is it always necessary?

"What we don't understand we can make mean anything."

— Chuck Palahniuk

"What the mind doesn't understand, it worships or fears."

— Alice Walker

"Fear is the main source of superstition, and one of the main sources of cruelty. To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom."

— Bertrand Russell, Unpopular Essays

Think about fear and how it manifests in your life. Think about the connection between fear and what we don't understand. Is there currently, or has there been something in the past, that you have not understood and therefore you feared it? Is there something you used to fear but you don't anymore? Examine that relationship between fear and lack of wisdom.

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Expressing doubt doesn't always mean you lack confidence. It might be that you see nuance.

The presence of certainty can signal the absence of complexity. Conviction can crowd out careful consideration.

The person who talks tentatively has often done the deepest reflection.

Think about doubtfulness in your life. What do you doubt? How do you feel when you are doubtful or skeptical about a situation.

Do you feel like you see complexity of a situation well? What are you sure of? And what are you iffy about?

Speech to the Young: Speech to the
Progress-Toward (Among them Nora and Henry III)
Gwendolyn Brooks

Say to them,
say to the down-keepers,
the sun-slappers,
the self-soilers,
the harmony-hushers,
"Even if you are not ready for day
it cannot always be night."
You will be right.
For that is the hard home-run.

Live not for battles won.
Live not for the-end-of-the-song.
Live in the along.

Identify Brooks' argument
and respond. Do you agree?

Give reasons and evidence
to support your thinking.

"And then it occurs to me. [The older, traditional Asian women] are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English. They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds "joy luck" is not a word, it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation."

— Amy Tan, The Joy Luck Club

Author Amy Tan writes about the conflict between an older generation and a younger generation. Sometimes an older generation's traditions, values, and goals don't match with a younger generation's desires. Consider the role of tradition. Is there value in holding on to traditions? Or, do traditions exist because people are afraid of change? At what point should traditions be honored, and at what point should traditions be abolished? Should a younger generation hold onto traditions to honor their elders? Use evidence from your observations, readings, experience.

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, “There are many ways of moving forward but only one way of standing still.”

Write an essay that argues your position on the value of progress.

Mark Twain once said, “Courage is the resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not the absence of fear.”

Write an essay in which you argue your position on Twain’s claim that “courage is not the absence of fear.”

Walt Disney once said, “The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.”

Write an essay that argues your position on the value of “productivity.”

Jean Jaures once said, “Tradition does not mean to look after the ash but to keep the flame alive.”

Write an essay that argues your position on the value of upholding traditions.

"What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder, because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude."

- From Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance"

Emerson was a Transcendentalist who believed in the power of living wholly from within. He didn't pay much attention to the opinions of the world. The world is powered by passionate people, powerful ideas, and fearless action. What is one strong belief you possess that isn't shared by your closest friends or family? What inspires this belief, and what have you done to actually live it?

If you can't identify that quality in yourself, write about someone you know who lives this way. OR, write about a passion of yours you want to explore, but haven't yet.

In the following excerpt from *Antigone*, by the classical Greek playwright Sophocles, the wise Teiresias observes:

Think: all men make mistakes,
But a good man yields when he
Knows his course is wrong,
And repairs the evil:
The only Crime is pride.

Take some time to think about the implications of the quotation. Then write a carefully reasoned essay that explores the validity of the assertion, using examples from your reading, observation, or experience to develop your position.

Once, when I was ten years old, visiting my dad in Yeoville, I needed batteries for one of my toys. My mom had refused to buy me new batteries because, of course, she thought it as a waste of money, so I snuck out to the shops and shoplifted a pack. A security guard busted me on the way out, pulled me into his office, and called my mom.

"We've caught your son shoplifting batteries," he said. "You need to come and fetch him."

"No," she said. "Take him to jail. If he's going to disobey he needs to learn the consequences."

Then she hung up. The guard looked at me, confused. Eventually he let me go on the assumption that I was some wayward orphan, because what mother would send her ten-year-old child to jail?

-Trevor Noah *Born A Crime*

Think about the relationship between sheltering children from pain and disappointment and allowing children to experience natural consequences. Mr. Noah's mom believed in tough love. Develop a position on parents providing tough love and discipline to their children. Consider the line between free-range parenting and helicopter parenting. Where is that line?

Essayist, YA novelist, podcaster, and YouTuber John Green, in his essay "Humanity's Temporal Range," develops the claim that humans are by far the most interesting thing that ever happened to earth, and that it's easy to forget how wondrous our species is, even in spite of our egoism and propensity toward grandiosity.

What does Green mean? Think about what makes humans so interesting. In what ways are humans more interesting than animals or waterfalls or mountains?

"What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured." - Kurt Vonnegut

"One of the marvelous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn't as individuals. When we pool our strength and share the work and responsibility, we can welcome many people, even those in deep distress, and perhaps help them find self-confidence and inner healing." -Jean Vanier

This week we looked at the power of Woodstock and discussed community. Think about the advantages or disadvantages of building community. Is this something that we crave? Where do you see evidence of that? Do we need a literal community or just the sense of one? What does a community need to do (or have) to be successful?

This right to vote is the basic right without which all others are meaningless. It gives people, people as individuals, control over their own destinies.

-Lyndon Johnson

Democracy is not a spectator sport.

-Marian Wright Edelman

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

-Margaret Mead

Think about the role of democracy. Think about The American Dream. Is democracy part of that American Dream? Do you have a responsibility to vote and be an active member of the democratic process? Is voting a part of patriotism? Is voting a part of freedom? How does democracy impact your life currently, and how will it impact your adult life?

Discuss the extent to which you believe democracy is important.

Discuss the extent to which you plan on being part of the democratic process as an adult.

SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW

is that as a kid, I once worked at a pet store.
I cleaned the cages
of small animals like turtles, hamsters,
rabbits, and hermit crabs.
I watched the hermit crab continue
to grow, molt, shed its skin and scurry across
the bottom of the aquarium to find a new shell.
Which left me afraid for the small creature,
to run around all exposed that way, to have
to live its entire life requiring something else
to feel safe. Perhaps that is when I became afraid
of needing anything beyond myself. Perhaps
that is why, even now, I can want so desperately
to show you all of my skin, but am more afraid
of meeting you, exposed, in open water.

-Clint Smith

Clint Smith's poem examines vulnerability (exposure to the possibility of being attacked, either emotionally or physically).

Think about what vulnerabilities you have. Write about something that someone (teacher, parents, love interest, friends, teammates, pastor, etc) should know about you. My mom should know... My friend Susie should know...

What would you reveal if you weren't scared of being exposed? How does vulnerability express itself in your life?



Reflect on the image. What does it reveal about addiction?

Should we be concerned about the nature of addiction and technology?

How has technological (and other forms of) addiction influenced your life? Are you concerned about it?

We have read an excerpt from Thoreau's *Walden*, Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," and an excerpt from Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance"

All of these texts are full of snippets of knowledge and philosophical thinking.

Today's Philosophical Friday asks you to respond to one or more of the texts. What do you find interesting? What are you skeptical about?

Stuck? Find a snippet from one of the essays and respond to it. Examples:

"Envy is ignorance. Imitation is suicide."

"Trust Thyself: Every heart vibrates to that iron string."

"To be great is to be misunderstood"

"Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong,
but conscience?"

"Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine"

Speaking on the NPR podcast **Hidden Brain**, Gino explains, “[W]e really need to shift our thinking. Rebels are not troublemakers. They’re not outcasts. Rebels are people who break rules that should be broken. They break rules that hold them and others back, and their way of rule-breaking is constructive rather than destructive. It creates positive change.”

For 10 minutes, dive into your thinking regarding rebels/rebellion and rebellious thinking.

Rebels

Civil v aggressive disobedience

Fight for equity/justice/rights

Stereotypes

Conformity in action, physicality, mental

Individualism/free thought/group thought

Education

intelligence

Govt

Philosophical Friday Explosion Instructions

Spend 10 minutes reading your Philosophical Friday entries.

- Underline sentences/phrases/sections that surprise you.
- Put a star next to sentences/phrases/sections that are beautiful.
- Put a question mark next to sentences/phrases/section that you could expand upon.

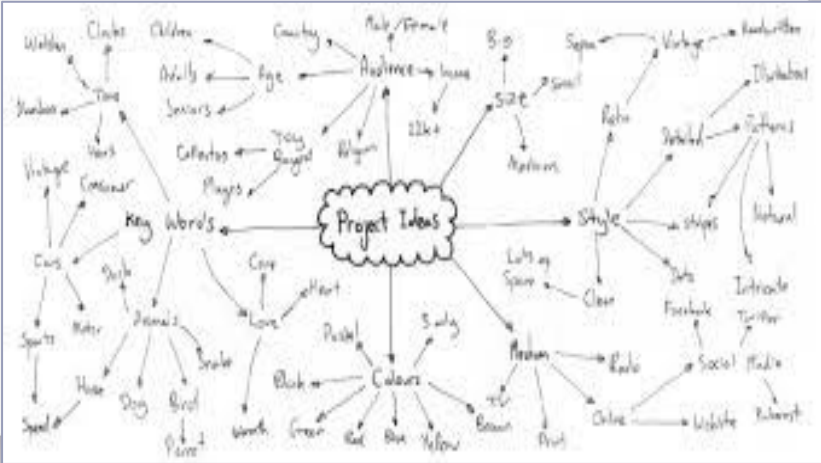
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 - Put a question mark next to sentences/phrases/section that you could expand upon.

Now, choose 3 of your favorite sentences and copy those sentences down on a new page.

Brainstorm those ideas. This might be in images, web, or writing.

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What is it?

EXPLOSION INSTRUCTIONS

You are choosing one of your entries and exploding it into a larger essay that explores the topic.

This is more sophisticated than a journal entry or rant, but it still maintains a conversational tone. It is a piece of writing that is carefully thought out, but doesn't necessarily have all the answers. Instead, it explains your thinking, your reasoning, and your passion for the subject.

Consider what moves you're going to make to communicate your purpose.

How are you going to establish credibility?

What emotional appeals are you going to accomplish?

Selection of ideas/details, organization, diction, syntax, style

Decide what your specific purpose is.

Work through many drafts.

Keep this essay in the first person. Let's not preach from a pulpit.

Take some risks with your writing. Be brave.

The following scoring guide is adapted from Clint Smith's TED TALK

Questions to ask yourself:

What is your exigence?

Who is your intended audience?

What is your attitude toward the subject? What words are going to reveal that?

Personal Essay Mentor Texts

The Noise - Steph Curry MORE
IMPLICIT CALL TO ACTION BASED ON
EXPERIENCE. NONSPECIFIC
EXAMPLES/EVIDENCE.

The Case For Free Range
Parenting PERSUASIVE. A CLEAR CALL
TO ACTION BACKED BY SPECIFIC EVIDENCE.
CAUSE/EFFECT

Moving on From Make Believe
PROCESS NARRATIVE ESSAY. FEELS LIKE A
STORY THAT COMES TO A CONCLUSION.
EXPLORES A TOPIC.

<u>CRITERIA</u>	<i>Very Good A-B</i>	<i>Pretty Good C</i>	<i>Not Yet D, F</i>
Read Critically	Students internalize one of the mentor texts, understand its purpose and use this essay as a mentor text for their own.	Students replicate one of the mentor texts for their own.	Students are unable to fully replicate a mentor text for their own.
Write Consciously	Chronological writing; transitions are utilized effectively to enhance flow. There is a mature control of language	Chronological writing; transitions attempted but there are inconsistencies in flow. The writing is immature. There are inconsistencies in control.	Chronological writing but moments are out of order; no successful attempt at transitions to enhance flow
Speak Clearly	There is a strong, clear purpose throughout essay. Anecdotal evidence enhances the author's purpose.	There is a clear purpose throughout most of the essay. Anecdotal evidence supports the author's purpose.	The essay lacks a purpose and/or evidence to support the purpose.
Tell Your Truth	Voice is unique and compelling. Ideas are insightful. The essay is engaging and interesting. The writing is honest and reflective.	Voice is unique and interesting. Some ideas are basic or cliched. The writing is honest and reflective.	The voice is cliché. Ideas are not genuine; underdeveloped. The writing seems surface level. The writer is simply going through the motions.
Required Elements	Successfully utilizes more than 3 writing moves from class list. Typed, double spaced. There are minimal (very few) errors in grammar or mechanics.	Attempts and/or successfully utilizes 3 writing moves from class list. Typed, double spaced. There are some errors in grammar and/or mechanics, but they do not distract from comprehending the overall piece.	May attempt, but does not successfully utilize writing moves from class list. May or may not be typed, double spaced. There are multiple errors in grammar and/or mechanics that distract from comprehending the overall piece.

