WRITING A POSITION PAPER

Honors English 12
AN ARGUABLE TOPIC

A position paper is an argument based on your opinions and insights into the topic. This means that we need to begin with an arguable point that has some controversy surrounding it.

For example, “reading is an effective way to build vocabulary, writing skills, and logical thinking skills” is not truly an argument. Studies prove this to be true over and over again. This paper would be informational not argumentative.

Claiming that encouraging reading for pleasure in schools is the way to build reading skills IS arguable because we can immediately begin thinking of the questions/points the opposition would say in response. What about academic reading? What about students who don’t enjoy reading? Why not read for pleasure outside of school? How would we make time in the school day for pleasure reading?
AN ARGUABLE TOPIC

Our class topic is broad; you will need to select a more focused topic and then develop your position on that topic. But it is an arguable topic because we can make points for both sides. Your job, once we get to the writing, is to show the superiority of your position. Not to crush your opposition, but to make a clear argument and to defend your position. This means it is necessary to understand your opposition.

Topic: From its conception, critics and admirers have been describing Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton: An American Musical* as revolutionary. While its setting makes this description an irresistible play on words, does the claim stand up to scrutiny? Does *Hamilton* challenge the status quo or does it reinforce traditional ideas?
AN ARGUABLE TOPIC

The first step is to narrow your topic. You may already have an inkling of the direction you would like to go. I’ve tried to use the discussion questions we addressed in class and on Yammer to begin making connections and sparking your thoughts. Below is a list of potential topics you can address to answer the question “is Hamilton truly revolutionary?” Once we start writing, you will work on narrowing your position even further by defining your position. I use the labels in parentheses later.

The portrayal of America’s birth and its founding fathers (history)
The portrayal of women and men and their roles/expectations (gender)
The portrayal of race and slavery (race)
The portrayal of immigrants and America as an immigrant nation (immigrants)
AN ARGUABLE TOPIC

This week will be all about selecting a topic by becoming familiar with some of the arguments that historians have made regarding the ideas in *Hamilton*. We have already read one article, “From Ron Chernow’s *Alexander Hamilton* to *Hamilton: An American Musical.*” The additional articles are saved as files on our class Teams page.

Your task this week will be to read 3 articles of your choosing and to work on understanding the main arguments of the articles. Select your 3 articles based on the potential topics you are considering.

To hold you accountable for this task, I will ask you to post responses to each article. Each post is worth 10 points. More coming about the expectations for these posts.
AN ARGUABLE TOPIC

This week we are in the reading and understanding stages. This is the part where we would read and then discuss the articles in our class time. You are free to do the following to bolster your understanding of the articles:

• Look up words and references to help you understand the contents. You know, active reading and annotation.

• Partner up to read articles together. Obviously, you won’t be physically together (remember that crazy world where we got to go places and see one another?!?!), but you can talk about the articles in any forum you like.

• Read each other’s posts about the articles you are reading.

• Ask questions about the articles.
READINGS: CHOOSE 3

“Can We Get Back to Politics? Please” (history)
“Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Hamilton” (race)
“The Greatest City in the World?” (race)
“Remember . . . I’m Your Man” (gender)
“Hamilton as Founders Chic: A Neo-Federalist, Antislavery Usable Past?” (history, race, immigrants, gender by a stretch)
“Reckoning with America’s Racial Past, Present, and Future in Hamilton” (race, gender by a stretch)
“Who Tells Your Story? Hamilton as a People’s History” (all)
“Hamilton: A New American Civic Myth” (all)
READINGS: CHOOSE 3

What’s the point of the readings?

• To use these articles as a model of taking a position/writing an argument (obviously, ours will not be as in depth!)

• To allow us to join in the conversation about Hamilton because we aren’t the only ones thinking about these topic

• To learn more about what credible writers are saying about Hamilton and our 4 topics (which may reinforce or challenge our positions)

• To enable is to use references to the articles in our position papers
I am still working on my rubric, but here is an overview. It’s good to know where you are headed. And, you can see that reading the articles is important.

• Make a clear, logical, developed argument (thesis, organization, CLEW paragraphs)
• Address the opposition
• Incorporate references to at least 2 songs from the musical (note “at least” here)
• Incorporate references (note the plural there) to at least one article (note “at least” here)
• Use MLA style to set up the document and to cite sources
• Avoid logical fallacies and biased, unfair, unethical language and claims
THIS WEEK’S GOALS

• Pick your topic (history, race, gender, immigrants)

• Read and understand the articles so you can use them in your paper
  The more you put into this task, the more you will take out!
  Earn those 30 points this week by posting to our class Teams “Hamilton Articles” channel in the Notes section. Instructions on the next 3 slides.

• Start articulating your position on the topic
POSTING TO NOTES IN MICROSOFT TEAMS

• Draft your post in Word first; post when you are done drafting. When multiple people are working at Notes at the same time, we can interfere with each other’s success. Drafting outside of Notes should help manage this overlap.

• Start your post with your name. Skip spaces between the last post and your post.

• Consider using a color other than black to distinguish your post from those around it. I’ll use black; you pick your signature colors : )

• Don’t delete each other’s stuff! Remember the power of control Z to fix accidents. This is another bonus to drafting in Word first. You can go back to the original work if something happens!
What should I post? For each article, please post once. Include the following:

• Your name.

• 4 points: A significant quotation from the article. Unless it is outrageously long, type it out. If it is outrageously long, type the first sentence, use a 4-dot ellipsis, and type the last sentence. Provide an MLA-style citation: (Romano 297).

• 6 points: A brief explanation for your choice. What idea does it evoke? How might you use it in your position paper? What implications does it have? If you are having trouble with this step, summarize or paraphrase the quotation. This part of the post should be about 100-150 words. (This slide has 113 words total.)
I also created 4 note pages to brainstorm ideas that are the “traditional ideas” about the founding of America, men’s and women’s roles/expectations, race and slavery, and immigrants.

If we are arguing that *Hamilton* challenges or reinforces these ideas, we should probably know what those ideas are.

Anyone can post (I think anonymously?) here. No grading here. I’ll throw some stuff in as we go through next week.