

Oakland Unified School District ♦ Process Writing Assessment
9th Grade Expository Essay: Oakland

Introduction

The purpose of this assessment is to capture your best essay writing so that you can show what you do well and give your teachers a chance to learn about their teaching from your writing.

In this activity, you will write an expository essay about Oakland that reflects your distinct point of view. You will read a short passage by Ishmael Reed from his book about Oakland, *Blues City* and you will take a position on whether you agree or disagree with Reed’s portrayal of Oakland. In this kind of writing, it is important to discuss the position the writer takes as a starting point for establishing your own thesis about the topic. The topic of the essay you will write is Oakland. To help you do your best, you will have an opportunity to think, read, and talk before you write.

Getting Started

Before you read one person’s opinion, think about your experiences going to school and/or living in Oakland and talk with a partner to answer these questions:

- What do you like about living in Oakland?
- What do you not like about living in Oakland?
- How does Oakland compare to other cities that you have visited or lived in?
- Can you think of some reasons some people might not want to live in Oakland?

Now, write down some pros and cons about Oakland in the boxes below.

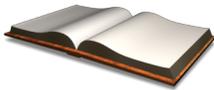
What are Some PROS and CONS about living in Oakland:

PROS/Positives	CONS/Negatives
•	•
•	•
•	•



Share what you wrote down with your classmates. Did you both write similar points?

Reading



Next you will read a model essay written by an OUSD teacher. This model will help you understand the kind of essay writing you will be expected to do. This essay is a response to a short passage about San Francisco. As you read the model essay, look for the author's controlling idea. You may underline and take notes in the margins.

Passage: This passage is about San Francisco being a hard place for homeless people to live.

*“Officially, ten percent of San Franciscans live in poverty, and homelessness is a massive problem in the city with the third highest **median** income in the country. At any given moment, there are more than 6,000 homeless individuals in San Francisco -- and probably more than 8,000. This fact is all the more disturbing considering that San Francisco is ranked the 11th **meanest** city for the homeless in the country by the National Coalition for the Homeless.”*
(David Schalliol, *San Francisco Street Poverty Photo Exhibition*)

Essay in Response to Passage

San Francisco: an Imperfect, yet Wonderful, City

My hometown, San Francisco, happens to be one of the most famous cities in the world. Just as celebrities have their problems discussed and displayed nonstop, the more famous a city is, the more people love to share all the problems they might find. In his description of the San Francisco Street Poverty Photo Exhibition, photographer David Schalliol argues that San Francisco is an unfair city. He points out that “homelessness is a massive problem” in San Francisco, even though the city has “the third highest median income in the country.” He also notes that ten percent of the city's people live in poverty, and that the city is considered one of the meanest places for homeless people. David Schalliol is doing what many people do when they talk about San Francisco; he is pointing out the obvious problems, but not showing the other side of the story. I agree that San Francisco is not fair to all its people, but I do not think the city should be judged by its treatment of the homeless; the city may be divided by wealth, but it is not a city meant only for the wealthy.

If all cities were judged by the way homeless people are treated, every big city would be considered mean, and smaller towns (with few or no homeless people) would be considered friendly. I have never seen a big city without homeless people, nor seen a city where the homeless appear to be comfortable. I have also never seen a big city, including San Francisco, that didn't have expensive restaurants and stores, with rich people spending thousands of dollars inside and giving nothing but dirty looks to the people shivering and starving on the sidewalk outside. All those cities are mean; it is the definition of unfair for the rich to ignore the needs of the poor. San Francisco is no better and no worse than any other American city in this regard.

San Francisco may be unfair to its poorest citizens, but this is also a city in which many of the best things are completely free. You don't need any money to walk through Golden Gate Park, one of the largest and most beautiful city

What is the writer's thesis?

parks in the world. Without a dime in your pocket, you can play just about any sport, take a nap on the lawns, feed the ducks, meditate in the Japanese Tea Garden or wander through the huge Arboretum. Not far from the east end of the park, you can visit the spacious Main Library, which anyone can enter to read books, magazines, or newspaper in comfortable furniture with good lighting. It costs nothing to borrow books, as long as you return them on time. There are no late fees involved in the view from Land's End, where you can stand and look out over the Pacific Ocean, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the Bay. People come from all over the world to see that view for themselves; San Francisco residents—rich or poor—can do the same any day of the week. A city that offers so many pleasures to its residents can't be completely mean.

Clearly, San Francisco could offer more to support the poorest residents, as Schalliol suggests. It is not a city where all people are treated equally. On the other hand, it is a city where everyone can enjoy world-famous beauty, and in which nobody has to pay a fee to enter well-designed public spaces. It's my hometown, and I've never been ashamed to say that.

Thinking, Talking and Planning

Work with a partner to answer the following questions. You will use some of these ideas in your essay, so take notes in the spaces below.

First
paragraph

1. What do you remember first about the reading—what "stood out" for you?	
2. Who is the audience for this piece of writing?	3. Reread the first paragraph. What is the writer's thesis? (Underline it.)
4. What evidence does the writer use in the body paragraphs to support his thesis? (list the evidence and examples the writer uses below)	
Paragraph 2	Paragraph 3
Conclusion	

Understanding Ishmael Reed's Position

Next, you will read and discuss a passage written by Ishmael Reed about Oakland. In his book Blues City, Reed takes readers on a walking tour through Oakland's streets, neighborhoods, and history. He describes the cultural diversity of Oakland and many of the social and political challenges Oakland faces. As you read the passage below, circle any words or phrases that you do not understand or you have questions about.

“...Oakland still hosts one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the country, a calaloo of cultures. In the winter of 2001, in preparation for writing this book, I attended a black cowboy parade, a Kwanzaa celebration, and a powwow. In addition, I visited Yoshi's, Oakland's landmark nightclub located in Jack London Square, and heard a Lakota musician play John Coltrane's "Naima" in traditional Lakota style. **Oakland is a city where identities blur.** Where one encounters hip-hop dances at a festival in Chinatown; where the mistress of ceremonies at a Kwanzaa celebration is a white woman in Yoruba dress; where, perhaps less surprising, about a fifth of the audience at a Native American powwow is black. As if those events weren't enough to reflect the cultural stew, I attended a springtime carnival that celebrated Oshun, a Nigerian "saint." Oshun, daughter of the Yoruba god Olodumare, who made the crossing to Brazil when blacks first arrived there, has become a fashion inspiration to black women in Oakland and elsewhere....On August, 2002, I went to the Chinatown fest and watched Polynesian dancers perform under the watchful eye of a dark-skinned biracial leader named Mahea. Despite the failings of arts middlepersons to serve Oakland's artistic community, writing this book has convinced me that among American cities, **Oakland is unique.** It combines the beauty of the West, the mountains, rivers, and forests, with the gritty naturalism of old northeastern industrial towns. When you watch the crowds of blacks, Asians, and Hispanics coexisting peacefully in the late afternoon on Broadway and Fourteenth, near the Tribune Tower, you get a **glimpse of what the world could look like.**" (Reed, Ishmael. Blues City: A Walk in Oakland. New York: Crown, 2003. pp. 26-27)

1. Take a moment to write down your best idea of what the words below mean. Next, your teacher will facilitate a conversation about the meanings of these words to help you better understand them.

calaloo unique naturalism industrial towns coexisting

2. Now, reread Ishmael Reed's passage and underline any important ideas you can identify. With your partner, take turns explaining Ishmael Reed's passage about Oakland to each other. As your partner talks, write down the important ideas you hear:

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3. What was Reed's main idea about Oakland and what details/evidence does he use to support this idea?

Main Idea		
Evidence	Evidence	Evidence

4. Summarize Ishmael Reed’s argument about Oakland. You may use a quotation from the passage to help summarize his points.

In this excerpted passage from *Blues City*, Ishmael Reed (*maintains, argues, discusses, explains*)....

Thinking, Talking and Planning: Your position
 Discuss Reed’s portrayal of Oakland and discuss both sides of the position with your classmates and write key points in the chart below. Give examples to support your positions.

Agree with Reed	Disagree with Reed
e.g. There is racial harmony in Oakland. My block has many different races of people and everyone gets along and looks out for each other. It’s a real neighborhood.	e.g. There is not racial harmony in Oakland. My block does not have all ethnic groups living there.

Take a stand on the topic. Do you agree or disagree with Reed’s portrayal of Oakland?
 (Circle your position)

Agree

Disagree

Organizing Your Ideas

Thesis Statement	What is the controlling idea about Oakland that you want to write about? Write your main idea about Oakland in the space below. This is your thesis statement. Possible sentence starters: <i>Like Reed portrays, Oakland is a city of....</i> <i>(Un)like Reed demonstrates, Oakland is unique because it.....</i> <i>Contrary to Reed's depiction of Oakland,</i>
Introduction	Begin in an interesting way that leads to the thesis (position) of your essay. Name the book title and author and briefly summarize the author's position. Take a stand on his position and let readers understand the view you are taking. Integrate your thesis statement (see above).
Body Paragraphs contain evidence to Support your thesis	Develop your ideas on the topic using what you know from your reading and life's experiences. You may divide this part of your essay into as many paragraphs as you need to fully present your ideas on the topic. Make your strongest point last.
Conclusion	Conclude with a sense of purpose beyond summary. What ideas do you want to leave your readers with?

Writing Directions for Day 2:

Oakland

Explain Ishmael Reed’s description of Oakland and discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with his portrayal. Support your position by referring to the passage and by providing reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

Writing Reminders:

As you write, keep the following points in mind since you won’t have time to rewrite.

- ___ Begin in an interesting way that leads to your thesis (position) of your essay.
- ___ Choose strong arguments to support your opinion.
- ___ Develop your arguments by including specific references to the reading, explanation, personal experiences, examples, and/or statistics.
- ___ Show in your writing that you know both sides of the issue, and why you disagree with the other point of view.
- ___ Use language and vocabulary that is persuasive, precise, and lively.
- ___ Organize the main sections of your essay into paragraphs so that the reader can follow your ideas.
- ___ End with a confident conclusion that restates your thesis.

After You Write (Editing)

After you write, take time to review the items below. You may make changes right on your paper.

- ___ Give the essay a title. (You can choose your title before or after you write the essay.)
- ___ Check your punctuation. Use capital letters, commas, periods, and quotation marks appropriately.
- ___ Check your spelling.