

EN 151

Essay Assignment Sheet

Objective:

The purpose of this assignment is to develop your analytical and critical thinking through the process of *making your own argument*. You will do so by addressing an issue from one of the works we've read to this point in the semester: *Austerlitz*, *Jim the Boy*, or *Columbine*.

Assignment:

For this essay, you will choose a prompt and devise an **argumentative thesis**. Answering the prompt's questions, one by one, is not an acceptable strategy for success on this paper. They are meant only to help you develop your thesis—a clear statement of how you are adding to the conversation about the work rather than noticing what would be obvious to anyone who closely reads the text—which will then be supported with evidence from the text as well as clear, convincing analysis of those quotations.

Here are the prompts:

1. To what effect does Sebald use photographs in *Austerlitz*? How do the photographs function beyond their face value?
2. What can be made of Austerlitz's fascination with particular types of architecture? In what ways do his study interests parallel his buried history?
3. In just one year, both Jim and the United States experienced tremendous change. How does Tony Earley incorporate the evolving society into Jim's story? Think about education, the economy, electricity, transportation, race relations, and polio. What will Jim experience as society evolves that his uncles and mother never did? How will his adult world differ from theirs?
4. In *Jim the Boy*, both the setting and Jim's life have a simple quality, yet through each flows a more complicated undercurrent. How do the setting and era reflect Jim's character?
5. After the attack at Columbine happened, how quickly did the major myths appear? How soon were they accepted as fact? What evidence did the media have for the conclusions about why Columbine happened in the first week? How about in the first year? Five years? When did the definitive evidence come to light? Has modern reporting of school shootings improved, remained the same, or become worse?
6. Who is responsible for what happened: just the killers, or others, too? Which characters had reason to feel guilty? Who do you think still feels guilty now?