

Sociology  
Final Exam Reasoning

I have taught high school Sociology and Psychology for the past eight years and recently searched for a rigorous, contemplative, and applicable final exam that was not the stereotypical short response and multiple choice exam. Instead, I wanted to challenge my students' creativity and writing skills to actually teach about sociological theories by telling a story – their story.

I adopted this year's final exam assignment from Trinity University's David Spencer, an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. As Mr. Spencer writes in his assignment introduction, "It was not an easy assignment for students to complete, since it required an unusual combination of intense personal reflection and academic research about a complex and emotionally-charged set of issues..." As with Spencer's students, my students, too, found the assignment both challenging and rewarding and all took the assignment seriously (even those who chose not to have their essays published on line). During their research and writing, students stressed out over whether to put their stories out on the web, wondering if they would offend their parents or anyone else, and generally considered how their lives have been shaped by society and the pressures that come with race, ethnicity, and gender issues. I have continued the project three out of the last five years, and this year continued the option of a traditional exam or the researched paper exam. Unfortunately, only two students decided upon the research paper due to time constraints. Fortunately, the two young ladies accomplished their goal rather well.

In an attempt to allow my students to explore what is known as the Sociological Perspective (defined as: The point of view of sociology that sees general patterns of society in the lives of particular people) and express how societal pressures associated with racial, ethnic, and gender matters have influenced their own lives, students were asked to write an autobiographical essay that reflects upon and analyzes how society has impacted the path of their lives in some substantial way up to this point.

While reading these stories, please remember the writers are not scholars. They are high school students with captivating stories and varying perspectives about their society. Each essay conveys experiences and imparts messages that are personal in regard to how racial and ethnic divisions, as well as gender, transgender, and homosexuality issues affect their lives.

Enjoy,

Mr. Cass