**THE HANDMAID’S TALE   
Critical Analysis Essay**

This essay will be completed in-class, typed, and **submitted to TurnItIn.com by the end of the period on:  
 Wed, Sept. 26th: Periods 5/7 & 9/11 | Thurs, Sept. 27th: Periods 2/4 & 10/12**

Students will respond to key ideas and themes from the novel *The Handmaid’s* Tale in a **five paragraph essay**. Responses should be in distinct and intentionally organized paragraphs, and should include direct evidence from the novel to support your answer. In the entire essay you should **use at least six specific examples (evidence)** from the book (two per paragraph), and be sure to **explain/connect each example clearly (commentary) to your main argument (thesis)**. Use direct quotations, and paraphrase only where necessary. Introduction and conclusion paragraphs should be kept concise and focused.

On the date in which the essays are due, students will have one full class period to finish and submit their work.

The following items are **acceptable** to have with you during the in-class essay worktime:

* A Chromebook or personal laptop
* This prompt paper and any notes written on it
* ONE separate page of notes/evidence/outline
* A hard copy of *The Handmaid’s Tale*

The following materials **may NOT be used** during the in-class essay worktime:

* Other personal technology (phones, headphones, etc.)
* Classroom notebooks
* Previous handouts or quizzes/tests

Your essay will be scored using the following rubric:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Student | Critical Analysis Essay: *The Handmaid’s Tale*  English 12 :: Fall 2018 :: Stoll |
| *Your essay should have included the following components; any missing components have been bolded* | |
| ***Form:*** | ***Content:*** |
| * Clear topic sentences develop / connect main argument and evidence | * A strong, direct main argument (thesis) fully answers the prompt |
| * At least 3 pieces of evidence are integrated, direct quotations from the original text | * All evidence is relevant and is used to make valid connections |
| * Essay properly meets MLA format standards (including margins, spacing, and citation) | * Unique and varied commentary expands upon a clearly developed main argument |
| **Score for FORM: \_\_** | **Score for CONTENT: \_\_** |
| **Notes:** | |

**Reminders:**

BEFORE YOU TURN IN YOUR ESSAY:  
Please proofread and edit to the best of your ability for fragments, run-ons, and any other major errors in syntax or grammar that could affect the meanings of your arguments. Excessive errors in spelling (more than 3 per page) or grammar (esp. regarding Vitamin-G topics like parallel structure) can result in a full point reduction in ES3: Form.

*GOOD LUCK!  
---Stoll*

**The Handmaid’s Tale: In-Class Essay**

Please **respond to ONE of the prompts in a five-paragraph essay.** Please clearly mark which prompts you are responding to at the start of your response.

**Prompt A: Speculative Fiction**

Atwood herself in interviews describe the world of *The Handmaid’s Tale* not as Science Fiction, but as Speculative Fiction. She makes this distinction in an effort to root a fictional and futurist story in a very realistic and/or plausible place and time. What are the implications of reading this novel from the perspective of “Spec Fic” instead of “Sci Fi”? How does this perspective change the tone of the story overall? Use specific moments from the story and details about the establishment of Gilead to show how Atwood tried to make the book seem like something that could actually happen. Discuss why Atwood did this, and what messages she wants her readers to walk away with.

**Prompt B: The Politics of Control**

Gilead was established with very clear social roles built around gender, the military, and government structures. While on the surface the men may have more power in general, it becomes clear that systems were put in place so that the women would control women, that men would control men, and that the commanders might not have as much control as it appears. Who, ultimately, has the most power in Gilead, and why? Examine the power structures put in place in Gilead, and compare the various roles, using specific instances from the novel.

**Prompt C: An Unreliable Narrator**

In describing the first secret meeting between herself and Commander Fred, Offred tells us that her narrative is merely a “reconstruction” of events. In the final chapter called Historical Notes, we also learn that Offred did not record events in real time, but rather recorded via cassette tape weeks or even months after events occurred. Can Offred still be considered a reliable narrator? Do we trust her, and how do we know she was trying to be as honest in her story telling as possible? Use specific instances from the novel to prove that she was telling events “after the fact”, and to analyze how this affected her ability to be a reliable narrator.

**Prompt D: The Rhetoric of Control**

Much of the power that the government of Gilead has over its citizens starts with persuasion. Public executions, brainwashing, and propaganda are just some of the tactics of persuasion that the government uses to keep firm control of its citizens. How does the government use rhetoric to control citizens in all roles? Examine the power of rhetoric in Gilead, and analyze the ways in which the government is able to persuade its citizens to conform to the social structures of Gilead using appeals to ethos, pathos and/or logos.