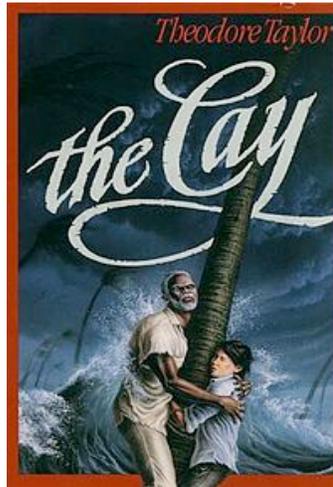


Language Arts 6 Performance Task



Student Guide

Name _____

SPORTS HERO: AIMEE MULLINS

by Claudia Herrera Hudson

Through her sheer presence and unrelenting spirit, Aimee Mullins is challenging the definitions of physical beauty and ability. In doing so, she is not only celebrating her own achievements, but more so, celebrating her ability to defy conventional public mindset, simply through her honest, open personality, and her incredible talent.

Born in 1976 in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and growing up between Pennsylvania and County Clare, Ireland, Aimee Mullins has overcome challenges from day one. She was born with fibular hemimelia, a limb anomaly wherein there is partial or total absence of the fibula (shin) bones. She had both legs amputated below the knee when she was only a year old. (Without her legs, she could still learn to walk with artificial ones. With her legs, she would have been confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life.) Her amazing spirit and drive helped compensate for the portion of her body she was missing.

Despite her physical limitations, she pushed herself physically and mentally to succeed. In high school she participated in numerous sports, including softball and skiing.



Aimee Mullins from Prosthetics in Athletics
(http://www.lhup.edu/y Ingram/Prosthetics/prosthetics_in_athletics-Title%20Page.htm)

compete in NCAA Division I track and field.

While in high school, she heard about a track meet for people with disabilities, and was actually bothered by the idea, as she felt the athletes were limiting themselves by defining themselves by their disabilities. She was accustomed to competing against 'able-bodied' athletes in other sports, and initially was reluctant to join the alternative meet. Never one to turn down an opportunity, though, she signed up for the meet, not expecting much of an actual challenge even though she had never run competitively.

[Aimee Mullins](#)

She was surprised upon arriving, when she realized that she was the only athlete wearing wooden legs. The rest of the athletes had on metal, shock-absorbant legs that she didn't even know existed. Not to mention that all the other athletes had at least one normal leg. Instead of deterring her determination, though, it forced her to push herself harder to succeed. And succeed she did – she not only won, she also broke a national record in doing so. She decided to enter the long jump competition next, an event that double amputees were technically 'not supposed' to enter. A year later, she broke the world record in it.

She attended Georgetown University, where she continued to compete against 'able-bodied' athletes by becoming the first disabled athlete to

Mullins decided to work towards competing in the 1996 Paralympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia. To do so, she obtained her first pair of sprinting legs with which she hoped to break the time she needed for Paralympic placement. Instead, her greatest fear came true – her leg began to slip off, and consequently, she lost because of it. Her coach pushed her to compete in the 200-meter, forcing her to face her biggest fear and to realize that true bravery is not the absence of fear, but the ability to conquer it.

She not only broke the time, she also swept the Paralympic trials a month later, running so fast that she was placed with arm amputees at the following meet instead, without being told. She finished last, and though she was upset, it didn't stop her. She set Paralympic records in Atlanta for the 100 and 200-meter dash and in the long jump.

The following year she was named USA Track and Field's Disabled Athlete of the Year, and the National Association of Women in Education's 1997 Woman of Distinction.

Never one to be boxed-in physically or mentally, she excelled in other areas as well. While at Georgetown she was also selected for the prestigious Foreign Affairs internship program, the only woman amongst 250 men, and the youngest person to obtain Pentagon security clearance. She graduated in 1998 from Georgetown's School of Foreign Service with a double major in History and Diplomacy.



[Mullins competing](#)

Mullins has since set her sights towards Hollywood. She has already had a few roles on television and in movies, and she has been featured in numerous magazines and books. In 2002 she starred in Matthew Barney's cult-favorite 'Cremaster 3,' playing a cheetah woman, ironic in that her own sprinting legs were designed after the super-swift animal.

In 1999 she was a runway model for British fashion designer Alexander McQueen's London show. He designed incredibly intricate wooden legs for her that appeared to be long brown boots. They were so convincing, in fact, that the media had no idea they were prosthetics, and when they found out the next morning, it was the talk of the town (some praising the designer, others criticizing him).

She remains active in sports and served as 2005's President-elect of the Women's Sports Foundation, a 'charitable educational organization dedicated to advancing the lives of girls and women through sports and physical activity.'

With a personality as vibrant as her talents, she also works to reach out to the community, to help others recognize their own potential and talents, despite what obstacles they may have to overcome. She serves as a motivational speaker, is on the board of directors of Just One Break, and co-founded HOPE (Helping Others Perform with Excellence) to aid disabled people wanting to train and compete in sports.

She has received numerous accolades both on and off the field for her work. She has been included in Irish America's "Top 100 Irish Americans" list several times, was included in *Esquire's* "Women We Love" 1998 issue, was named one of *Jane* magazine's "10 Gutsiest Women" in 1999, and the following year was featured as one of the greatest American women in the 20th century in an exhibit at the Women's Museum in Dallas. *People Magazine* honored her beauty by selecting her as one of their "50 Most Beautiful People in the World," and in 2001 *Sports Illustrated* named her one of the "Coolest Girls in Sports."

Both a record-breaking Paralympic athlete and a fashion icon/Hollywood-star in the making, Mullins has the amazing ability to constantly redefine herself. She is just as comfortable in high heels and gowns as she is in running shorts and sneakers, wearing both with the unbridled confidence of one that is truly gorgeous both inside and out.

You are now going to listen to a speech by Aimee Mullins. Before listening, reflect upon what you think about the following:

1. What do you think of when you hear the word “disability”?
2. How can words or names can be powerful in both positive and negative ways?
3. Why do people and characters change over time?
4. What does this quote mean to you?
~“What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger” (Friedrich Nietzsche)
5. How can adversity be an opportunity?

Important vocabulary

- transformation

- adapt

- survival

- theme

- conflict

- adversity

- disability

During the speech...

Aimee Mullins eloquently discusses the gifts she has been given from her adversity. Remember, she was born with out fibulae (shin bones) and is now an accomplished athlete, a runner no less! As she talks about her life, there are two central ideas you should focus on as you take notes: **the power of words** and **the human ability to adapt**. As you listen write down quotes, ideas, or facts she shares on either side of your t-chart that you will find at the end of the speech transcript. Be prepared to share your notes after the speech.

Watch Aimee Mullin's TED Talk "The Opportunity of Adversity" at:
https://www.ted.com/talks/aimee_mullins_the_opportunity_of_adversity?language=en

Following is the transcript of the talk if you would like to follow along:

"I'd like to share with you a discovery that I made a few months ago while writing an article for Italian Wired. I always keep my thesaurus handy whenever I'm writing anything, but I'd already finished editing the piece, and I realized that I had never once in my life looked up the word "disabled" to see what I'd find.

Let me read you the entry. "Disabled, adjective: crippled, helpless, useless, wrecked, stalled, maimed, wounded, mangled, lame, mutilated, run-down, worn-out, weakened, impotent, castrated, paralyzed, handicapped, senile, decrepit, laid-up, done-up, done-for, done-in cracked-up, counted-out; see also hurt, useless and weak. Antonyms, healthy, strong, capable." I was reading this list out loud to a friend and at first was laughing, it was so ludicrous, but I'd just gotten past "mangled," and my voice broke, and I had to stop and collect myself from the emotional shock and impact that the assault from these words unleashed.

You know, of course, this is my raggedy old thesaurus so I'm thinking this must be an ancient print date, right? But, in fact, the print date was the early 1980s, when I would have been starting primary school and forming an understanding of myself outside the family unit and as related to the other kids and the world around me. And, needless to say, thank God I wasn't using a thesaurus back then. I mean, from this entry, it would seem that I was born into a world that perceived someone like me to have nothing positive whatsoever going for them, when in fact, today I'm celebrated for the opportunities and adventures my life has procured.

So, I immediately went to look up the 2009 online edition, expecting to find a revision worth noting. Here's the updated version of this entry. Unfortunately, it's not much better. I find the last two words under "Near Antonyms," particularly unsettling: "whole" and "wholesome."

So, it's not just about the words. It's what we believe about people when we name them with these words. It's about the values behind the words, and how we construct those values. Our language affects our thinking and how we view the world and how we view other people. In fact, many ancient societies, including the Greeks and the Romans, believed that to utter a curse verbally was so powerful, because to say the thing out loud brought it into existence. So, what reality do we want to call into existence: a person who is limited, or a person who's empowered? By casually doing something as simple as naming a person, a child, we might be putting lids and casting shadows on their power. Wouldn't we want to open doors for them instead?

One such person who opened doors for me was my childhood doctor at the A.I. duPont Institute in Wilmington, Delaware. His name was Dr. Pizzutillo, an Italian American, whose name, apparently, was too difficult for most Americans to pronounce, so he went by Dr. P. And Dr. P always wore really colorful bow ties and had the very perfect disposition to work with children.

I loved almost everything about my time spent at this hospital, with the exception of my physical therapy sessions. I had to do what seemed like innumerable repetitions of exercises with these

thick, elastic bands — different colors, you know — to help build up my leg muscles, and I hated these bands more than anything — I hated them, had names for them. I hated them. And, you know, I was already bargaining, as a five year-old child, with Dr. P to try to get out of doing these exercises, unsuccessfully, of course. And, one day, he came in to my session — exhaustive and unforgiving, these sessions — and he said to me, “Wow. Aimee, you are such a strong and powerful little girl, I think you’re going to break one of those bands. When you do break it, I’m going to give you a hundred bucks.”

Now, of course, this was a simple ploy on Dr. P’s part to get me to do the exercises I didn’t want to do before the prospect of being the richest five-year-old in the second floor ward, but what he effectively did for me was reshape an awful daily occurrence into a new and promising experience for me. And I have to wonder today to what extent his vision and his declaration of me as a strong and powerful little girl shaped my own view of myself as an inherently strong, powerful and athletic person well into the future.

This is an example of how adults in positions of power can ignite the power of a child. But, in the previous instances of those thesaurus entries, our language isn’t allowing us to evolve into the reality that we would all want, the possibility of an individual to see themselves as capable. Our language hasn’t caught up with the changes in our society, many of which have been brought about by technology. Certainly, from a medical standpoint, my legs, laser surgery for vision impairment, titanium knees and hip replacements for aging bodies that are allowing people to more fully engage with their abilities, and move beyond the limits that nature has imposed on them — not to mention social networking platforms allow people to self-identify, to claim their own descriptions of themselves, so they can go align with global groups of their own choosing. So, perhaps technology is revealing more clearly to us now what has always been a truth: that everyone has something rare and powerful to offer our society, and that the human ability to adapt is our greatest asset.

The human ability to adapt, it’s an interesting thing, because people have continually wanted to talk to me about overcoming adversity, and I’m going to make an admission: This phrase never sat right with me, and I always felt uneasy trying to answer people’s questions about it, and I think I’m starting to figure out why. Implicit in this phrase of “overcoming adversity” is the idea that success, or happiness, is about emerging on the other side of a challenging experience unscathed or unmarked by the experience, as if my successes in life have come about from an ability to sidestep or circumnavigate the presumed pitfalls of a life with prosthetics, or what other people perceive as my disability. But, in fact, we are changed. We are marked, of course, by a challenge, whether physically, emotionally or both. And I’m going to suggest that this is a good thing. Adversity isn’t an obstacle that we need to get around in order to resume living our life. It’s part of our life. And I tend to think of it like my shadow. Sometimes I see a lot of it, sometimes there’s very little, but it’s always with me. And, certainly, I’m not trying to diminish the impact, the weight, of a person’s struggle.

There is adversity and challenge in life, and it’s all very real and relative to every single person, but the question isn’t whether or not you’re going to meet adversity, but how you’re going to meet it. So, our responsibility is not simply shielding those we care for from adversity, but preparing them to meet it well. And we do a disservice to our kids when we make them feel that

they're not equipped to adapt. There's an important difference and distinction between the objective medical fact of my being an amputee and the subjective societal opinion of whether or not I'm disabled. And, truthfully, the only real and consistent disability I've had to confront is the world ever thinking that I could be described by those definitions.

In our desire to protect those we care about by giving them the cold, hard truth about their medical prognosis, or, indeed, a prognosis on the expected quality of their life, we have to make sure that we don't put the first brick in a wall that will actually disable someone. Perhaps the existing model of only looking at what is broken in you and how do we fix it, serves to be more disabling to the individual than the pathology itself.

By not treating the wholeness of a person, by not acknowledging their potency, we are creating another ill on top of whatever natural struggle they might have. We are effectively grading someone's worth to our community. So we need to see through the pathology and into the range of human capability. And, most importantly, there's a partnership between those perceived deficiencies and our greatest creative ability. So it's not about devaluing, or negating, these more trying times as something we want to avoid or sweep under the rug, but instead to find those opportunities wrapped in the adversity. So maybe the idea I want to put out there is not so much overcoming adversity as it is opening ourselves up to it, embracing it, grappling with it, to use a wrestling term, maybe even dancing with it. And, perhaps, if we see adversity as natural, consistent and useful, we're less burdened by the presence of it.

This year we celebrate the 200th birthday of Charles Darwin, and it was 150 years ago, when writing about evolution, that Darwin illustrated, I think, a truth about the human character. To paraphrase: It's not the strongest of the species that survives, nor is it the most intelligent that survives; it is the one that is most adaptable to change. Conflict is the genesis of creation. From Darwin's work, amongst others, we can recognize that the human ability to survive and flourish is driven by the struggle of the human spirit through conflict into transformation. So, again, transformation, adaptation, is our greatest human skill. And, perhaps, until we're tested, we don't know what we're made of. Maybe that's what adversity gives us: a sense of self, a sense of our own power. So, we can give ourselves a gift. We can re-imagine adversity as something more than just tough times. Maybe we can see it as change. Adversity is just change that we haven't adapted ourselves to yet.

I think the greatest adversity that we've created for ourselves is this idea of normalcy. Now, who's normal? There's no normal. There's common, there's typical. If we can change this paradigm from one of achieving normalcy to one of possibility — or potency, to be even a little bit more dangerous — we can release the power of so many more children, and invite them to engage their rare and valuable abilities with the community.

Anthropologists tell us that the one thing we as humans have always required of our community members is to be of use, to be able to contribute. There's evidence that Neanderthals, 60,000 years ago, carried their elderly and those with serious physical injury, and perhaps it's because the life experience of survival of these people proved of value to the community. They didn't view these people as broken and useless; they were seen as rare and valuable.

A few years ago, I was in a food market in the town where I grew up in that red zone in northeastern Pennsylvania, and I was standing over a bushel of tomatoes. It was summertime: I had shorts on. I hear this guy, his voice behind me say, “Well, if it isn’t Aimee Mullins.” And I turn around, and it’s this older man. I have no idea who he is.

And I said, “I’m sorry, sir, have we met? I don’t remember meeting you.”

He said, “Well, you wouldn’t remember meeting me. I mean, when we met I was delivering you from your mother’s womb.” (Laughter) Oh, that guy. And, but of course, actually, it did click.

This man was Dr. Kean, a man that I had only known about through my mother’s stories of that day, because, of course, typical fashion, I arrived late for my birthday by two weeks. And so my mother’s prenatal physician had gone on vacation, so the man who delivered me was a complete stranger to my parents. And, because I was born without the fibula bones, and had feet turned in, and a few toes in this foot and a few toes in that, he had to be the bearer — this stranger had to be the bearer of bad news.

He said to me, “I had to give this prognosis to your parents that you would never walk, and you would never have the kind of mobility that other kids have or any kind of life of independence, and you’ve been making liar out of me ever since.” (Laughter) (Applause)

The extraordinary thing is that he said he had saved newspaper clippings throughout my whole childhood, whether winning a second grade spelling bee, marching with the Girl Scouts, you know, the Halloween parade, winning my college scholarship, or any of my sports victories, and he was using it, and integrating it into teaching resident students, med students from Hahnemann Medical School and Hershey Medical School. And he called this part of the course the X Factor, the potential of the human will. No prognosis can account for how powerful this could be as a determinant in the quality of someone’s life. And Dr. Kean went on to tell me, he said, “In my experience, unless repeatedly told otherwise, and even if given a modicum of support, if left to their own devices, a child will achieve.”

See, Dr. Kean made that shift in thinking. He understood that there’s a difference between the medical condition and what someone might do with it. And there’s been a shift in my thinking over time, in that, if you had asked me at 15 years old, if I would have traded prosthetics for flesh-and-bone legs, I wouldn’t have hesitated for a second. I aspired to that kind of normalcy back then. But if you ask me today, I’m not so sure. And it’s because of the experiences I’ve had with them, not in spite of the experiences I’ve had with them. And perhaps this shift in me has happened because I’ve been exposed to more people who have opened doors for me than those who have put lids and cast shadows on me.

See, all you really need is one person to show you the epiphany of your own power, and you’re off. If you can hand somebody the key to their own power — the human spirit is so receptive — if you can do that and open a door for someone at a crucial moment, you are educating them in the best sense. You’re teaching them to open doors for themselves. In fact, the exact meaning of the word “educate” comes from the root word “educē.” It means “to bring forth what is within, to bring out potential.” So again, which potential do we want to bring out?

There was a case study done in 1960s Britain, when they were moving from grammar schools to comprehensive schools. It's called the streaming trials. We call it "tracking" here in the States. It's separating students from A, B, C, D and so on. And the "A students" get the tougher curriculum, the best teachers, etc. Well, they took, over a three-month period, D-level students, gave them A's, told them they were "A's," told them they were bright, and at the end of this three-month period, they were performing at A-level.

And, of course, the heartbreaking, flip side of this study, is that they took the "A students" and told them they were "D's." And that's what happened at the end of that three-month period. Those who were still around in school, besides the people who had dropped out. A crucial part of this case study was that the teachers were duped too. The teachers didn't know a switch had been made. They were simply told, "These are the 'A-students,' these are the 'D-students.'" And that's how they went about teaching them and treating them.

So, I think that the only true disability is a crushed spirit, a spirit that's been crushed doesn't have hope, it doesn't see beauty, it no longer has our natural, childlike curiosity and our innate ability to imagine. If instead, we can bolster a human spirit to keep hope, to see beauty in themselves and others, to be curious and imaginative, then we are truly using our power well. When a spirit has those qualities, we are able to create new realities and new ways of being.

I'd like to leave you with a poem by a fourteenth-century Persian poet named Hafiz that my friend, Jacques Dembois told me about, and the poem is called "The God Who Only Knows Four Words": "Every child has known God, not the God of names, not the God of don'ts, but the God who only knows four words and keeps repeating them, saying, 'Come dance with me. Come, dance with me. Come, dance with me.'"

Thank you.

-Aimee Mullins (2009)
TED Talks

Notes: “The Opportunity of Adversity”

Central Idea: the power of words	Central Idea: the human ability to adapt

After the speech: Making textual connections

Answer the following questions about the central ideas. You will be connecting two texts: the speech and your novel (*Freak the Mighty*, *Holes*, or *The Cay*).

1. Read this excerpt from the speech:

“So, it’s not just about the words. It’s what we believe about people when we name them with these words. It’s about the values behind the words, and how we construct those values. Our language affects our thinking and how we view the world and how we view other people. In fact, many ancient societies, including the Greeks and the Romans, believed that to utter a curse verbally was so powerful, because to say the thing out loud brought it into existence. So, what reality do we want to call into existence: a person who is limited, or a person who’s empowered? By casually doing something as simple as naming a person, a child, we might be putting lids and casting shadows on their power. Wouldn’t we want to open doors for them instead?”

(A) What is Aimee Mullins’ main idea about words and names?

(B) Think about the protagonist in your novel. Think about the words or names used to identify this character. How did this name or word affect the character? Did the name empower the character? Explain.

2. Read this excerpt from the speech:

“We are marked, of course, by a challenge, whether physically, emotionally or both. And I’m going to suggest that this is a good thing. Adversity isn’t an obstacle that we need to get around in order to resume living our life. It’s part of our life. And I tend to think of it like my shadow. Sometimes I see a lot of it, sometimes there’s very little, but it’s always with me. And, certainly, I’m not trying to diminish the impact, the weight, of a person’s struggle. There is adversity and challenge in life, and it’s all very real and relative to every single person, but the question isn’t whether or not you’re going to meet adversity, but how you’re going to meet it.”

Explain how this quote from the speech relates to a main character in your book (Phillip and/or Timothy).

3. Read this excerpt from the speech:

“So, I think that the only true disability is a crushed spirit, a spirit that’s been crushed doesn’t have hope, it doesn’t see beauty, it no longer has our natural, childlike curiosity and our innate ability to imagine. If instead, we can bolster a human spirit to keep hope, to see beauty in themselves and others, to be curious and imaginative, then we are truly using our power well. When a spirit has those qualities, we are able to create new realities and new ways of being.”

Explain how this quote relates to a main character in your book (Phillip and/or Timothy)

The Essay

Speech: “The Opportunity of Adversity” Aimee Mullens

Novel: *The Cay*

Student Directions

Write an essay about how people and characters must “adapt, or change, in order to survive.” Cite evidence from **both** texts to support your points.

You are encouraged to use the notes and graphic organizers you made from the speech and notes/past assignments from the novel as you write your essay.

PROMPT

Charles Darwin said, “It’s not the strongest or the smartest who survive – it’s the ones who are able to **adapt**.”

Based on the **central ideas** of the speech and the theme of transformation in the book, write an essay that compares and contrasts how people and characters **adapt** and the importance it plays in their own survival. Make sure include examples and **citations** as **evidence** from both the speech and the novel to support your **claims**.

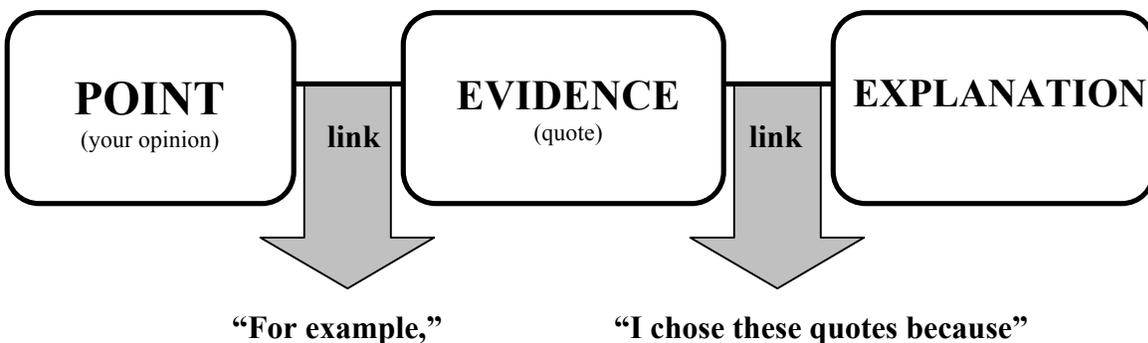
adapt = able to change

central idea = main idea

citation = words copied directly from a text

evidence = ideas that support your thinking

claims = your opinion/point sentence



Body Paragraph #1: What does Aimee Mullins say about transformation (adapting in order to survive)?

Point Sentence (my opinion/answer to the question)

Quote #1 (evidence that supports the point)

For example, “ _____

_____.”

Explanation Sentences (explain HOW these quotes support your point sentence; be specific)

I chose this quote because _____

Body Paragraph #2: What does the author of *The Cay* say about transformation (adapting in order to survive)?

Point Sentence (my opinion/answer to the question)

Quote #1 (evidence that supports the point)

For example, “ _____

_____.”

Quote #2 (evidence that supports the point)

Also, “ _____

_____.”

Explanation Sentences (explain HOW these quotes support your point sentence; be specific)

I chose these quotes because _____

Body Paragraph #3: How is the message about survival similar in both the speech AND the novel?

Point Sentence (my opinion/answer to the question)

Quote #1 (evidence that supports the point)

For example, “ _____

_____.”

Quote #2 (evidence that supports the point)

Also, “ _____

_____.”

Explanation Sentences (explain HOW these quotes support your point sentence; be specific)

I chose these quotes because _____

Introduction Paragraph

1. Hook Sentence: rhetorical (catchy, thought-provoking) question related to the theme “survival”

2. Explain what the concept of **survival** means to you.

3. **Introduce the text titles and authors** (The Cay by Theodore Taylor and “The Opportunity of Adversity” by Aimee Mullins) and communicate the idea that even though these two texts are very different, they both share the common theme about transformation, or changing, in order to survive.

Conclusion Paragraph

1. **Remind the reader** about how two very different texts can share a common theme.

2. **Discuss how your thinking has changed** after reading and thinking about the speech and the novel. Perhaps, your thinking has gone through a transformation after reading these texts. Think about the power of words/names and the power of the human ability to adapt. This should be at least two sentences.

3. End with a “lasting impression” (a quote related to the theme or another rhetorical question). Your goal here is to leave the reader thinking about your essay.

Example “survival” quotes:

Our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change. ~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

That which does not kill me makes me stronger. ~ Friedrich Nietzsche

“Man can live about forty days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air, but only for one second without hope.” ~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Now, put all the pieces together in a formal written essay. The essay should be double-spaced and typed on the computer (size 12 font) or neatly handwritten on lined paper.