



Albert Einstein High School
English Department
Summer Reading Assignment
English 12A

This summer, you will have a reading assignment designed to help you maintain the critical thinking and analysis skills you have developed during the past year. You will be reading two essays and taking 15 Cornell Notes for each essay while you read. :

- "What is an American?" by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur
- "Hair" by Malcolm X

Many of you used Cornell Notes to complete your English 11A summer reading assignment last year. You may also have used Cornell Notes during the year in your English 11 classes. It is important for you to understand that the purpose of Cornell Notes is to **analyze and extend** the meaning of texts, not to simply **explain or summarize** them.

See the examples below:

Correct

"And so I went back to the store, not to prove to him that I could, but to prove it to myself." (46)	The protagonist has been fearful of the store owner in the past because the store owner has shown that he is a racist and is prejudiced against the protagonist. However, since their last encounter, the protagonist has developed a lot of self-confidence since then so he no longer fears going into the store. He wants to prove to himself that he can do it.
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Incorrect

"And so I went back to the store, not to prove to him that I could, but to prove it to myself." (46)	He's going to the store to get some groceries for his mother.
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This assignment will be due the 2nd day of school. No exceptions. Additionally, you will be asked to complete an in-school timed writing assignment on the aforementioned texts.

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur: What Is an American?

What attachment can a poor European emigrant have for a country where he had nothing? The knowledge of the language, the love of a few kindred as poor as himself, were the only cords that tied him: his country is now that which gives him land, bread, protection, and consequences: *Ubi panis ibi patria*, ["where there is bread, there is my country"] is the motto of all emigrants. What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the descendant of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. *He* is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great *Alma Mater*. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigour, and industry which began long since in the east; they will finish the great circle. The Americans were once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared, and which will hereafter become distinct by the power of the different climates they inhabit. The American ought therefore to love this country much better than that wherein either he or his forefathers were born. Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labour; his labour is founded on the basis of nature, *self-interest*; can it want a stronger allurements? Wives and children, who before in vain demanded of him a morsel of bread, now, fat and frolicsome, gladly help their father to clear those fields whence exuberant crops are to arise to feed and to clothe them all; without any part being claimed, either by a despotic prince, a rich abbot, or a mighty lord. Here religion demands but little of him; a small voluntary salary to the minister and gratitude to God; can he refuse these? The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence.-This is an American....

“Hair” (from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*) - Malcolm X with Alex Haley

Shorty soon decided that my hair was finally long enough to be conked. He had promised to school me in how to beat the barbershops’ three- and four-dollar price by making up congolene and then conking ourselves.

I took the little list of ingredients he had printed out for me and went to a grocery store, where I got a can of Red Devil lye, two eggs, and two medium-sized white potatoes. Then at a drugstore near the poolroom, I asked for a large jar of Vaseline, a large bar of soap, a large-toothed comb and a fine-toothed comb, one of those rubber hoses with a metal sprayhead, a rubber apron, and a pair of gloves.

“Going to lay on that first conk?” the drugstore man asked me. I proudly told him, grinning, “Right!”

Shorty paid six dollars a week for a room in his cousin’s shabby apartment. His cousin wasn’t at home. “It’s like the pad’s mine, he spends so much time with his woman,” Shorty said. “Now, you watch me—”

2

He peeled the potatoes and thin-sliced them into a quart-sized Mason fruit jar, then started stirring them with a wooden spoon as he gradually poured in a little over half the can of lye. “Never use a metal spoon; the lye will turn it black,” he told me.

A jellylike, starchy-looking glop resulted from the lye and potatoes, and Shorty broke in the two eggs, stirring real fast—his own conk and dark face bent down close. The congolene turned pale yellowish. “Feel the jar,” Shorty said. I cupped my hand against the outside and snatched it away. “Damn right, it’s hot, that’s the lye,” he said. “So you know it’s going to burn when I comb it in—it burns bad. But the longer you can stand it, the straighter the hair.”

He made me sit down, and he tied the string of the new rubber apron tightly around my neck and combed up my bush of hair. Then, from the big Vaseline jar, he took a handful and massaged it hard all through my hair and into the scalp. He also thickly Vaselined my neck, ears, and forehead. “When I get to washing out your head, be sure to tell me anywhere you feel any little stinging,” Shorty warned me, washing his hands, then pulling on the rubber gloves and tying on his own rubber apron. “You always got to remember that any congolene left in burns a sore into your head.”

3

The congolene just felt warm when Shorty started combing it in. But then my head caught fire.

I gritted my teeth and tried to pull the sides of the kitchen table together. The comb felt as if it was raking my skin off.

My eyes watered, my nose was running. I couldn’t stand it any longer; I bolted to the washbasin. I was cursing Shorty with every name I could think of when he got the spray going and started soap-lathering my head.

He lathered and spray-rinsed, lathered and spray-rinsed, maybe ten or twelve times, each time gradually closing the hot-water faucet, until the rinse was cold, and that helped some.

“You feel any stinging spots?”

“No,” I managed to say. My knees were trembling.

“Sit back down, then. I think we got it all out OK.”

4

The flame came back as Shorty, with a thick towel, started drying my head, rubbing hard. “Easy, man, easy!” I kept shouting.

“The first time’s always worst. You get used to it better before long. You took it real good, homeboy. You got a good conk.”

When Shorty let me stand up and see in the mirror, my hair hung down in limp, damp strings. My scalp still flamed, but not as badly; I could bear it. He draped the towel around my shoulders, over my rubber apron, and began again Vaselining my hair.

I could feel him combing, straight back, first the big comb, then the fine-toothed one.

Then he was using a razor, very delicately, on the back of my neck. Then, finally, shaping the sideburns.

5

My first view in the mirror blotted out the hurting. I’d seen some pretty conks, but when it’s the first time, on your own head, the transformation, after the lifetime of kinks, is staggering.

The mirror reflected Shorty behind me. We both were grinning and sweating. And on top of my head was this thick, smooth sheen of shining red hair—real red—as straight as any white man’s.

How ridiculous I was! Stupid enough to stand there simply lost in admiration of my hair now looking “white,” reflected in the mirror in Shorty’s room. I vowed that I’d never again be without a conk, and I never was for many years.

This was my first really big step toward self-degradation: when I endured all of that pain, literally burning my flesh to have it look like a white man’s hair. I had joined that multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that the black people are “inferior”—and white people “superior”—that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look “pretty” by white standards.