

### Townie in Context Assignment

#### **Overview**

In *Townie*, Andre Dubus III conveys in rich detail how his identity was shaped by the places he lived, particularly the towns in Massachusetts he grew up in. Since those towns are located in the same part of the state as UMass Lowell, we are going to take this rare opportunity to physically explore the city of Lowell in order to learn more about Lowell and how the city represents itself to the public. You will each then consider the role of a particular place in shaping who you are today. Part I of this assignment asks you to write short response papers about various locations we will be visiting in Lowell. Part II asks that you write your own essay in the spirit of Dubus's memoir, but about a place of your choosing.

#### **Part I: Responses to Lowell (5% of final grade)**

As a class, we will visit several area landmarks and museums in order to understand the history of Lowell and better grasp what it means to be a member of the Lowell community. Potential visits include:

- American Textile History Museum
- Lowell National Historical Park
- Boott Cotton Mills Museum
- Revolving Museum
- Downtown Lowell

For each one of these visits you will write a 1-2 page, double-spaced response about that location (see the formatting requirements on the course guidelines). In your response, you may choose to write about whatever aspect of the visit you wished, though you should always consider the connections between the place we have visited and the section of *Townie* we are currently reading. We will work on note-taking techniques prior to our first visit. Feel free to use the following questions as a starting point (you may focus on just one, use a few of them, or go off in your own direction, as long as your response shares your thoughts and reflections on the particular place):

- What did you notice about how this place was organized and designed? What impression did the physical location leave on you?
- What are the uses of this place? Why? What role does it seem to play within Lowell's past and present?
- What does this place reveal to you about Lowell and what it means to live in the city? How does it contribute to Lowell's identity as a city?
- What surprised you about this place? Did what you learned about this place conform to your current conception of Lowell, or did it challenge or change it in some way?
- How did your visit to this place connect to what you have been learning from *Townie* about life in this area?

Each of your responses should be thoughtful and focused on the place we visited. They are due at the start of the class period following the visit and will be graded according to the same criteria as your other class responses (based on the quality of thought, serious engagement with the course content, originality of expression, and overall effort). Our objective for these responses is to consider the role of place in shaping personal and collective identity by exploring the critical connections between *Townie* and the city of Lowell.

## Part II: Place and Identity Essay (15% of final grade)

Part I allowed you to connect *Townie* and Dubus's personal reflections on the geographic region surrounding Lowell to actual locations in Lowell and elements of Lowell's history. Using *Townie* as a model for your own essay, you will write about a place that has had a significant impact on your identity. We will begin, then, by working through a series of pre-writing exercises that will get you to think of the places that have shaped you. These places might be large (like a state or region), small (a single building such as a church, a school, a workplace, or a home), or somewhere in between (a neighborhood, a town, a city). Once you have selected your place, you will work through a number of activities designed to help you describe this place in rich, memorable detail; narrate meaningful stories that demonstrate your connection to this place; explain the relevant history of this place; and analyze how this place has informed your identity. You will combine these different elements into one essay once you begin drafting; we will then share these drafts through a process of conferencing, workshopping, and peer reviewing. Throughout this process, you should focus on crafting a thesis statement (implicit or explicit) that expresses the meaning of this place in your life.

As you work through the process of writing your essay, you should consider the following objectives for this assignment:

- Identify a location which will serve as a good topic for this paper because it is rich in personal significance and compelling to an audience of outsiders
- Generate content for your paper through the use of rubrics and other writing techniques
- Record careful observation notes about a place and the human interaction that occurs there through first-hand visits, memory, and other forms of information gathering
- Organize the different parts of your essay into a thoughtful, meaningful whole with an underlying logic behind your chosen structure
- Employ narrative structure, sensory description, and specific details to effectively connect to your reader and demonstrate your larger thesis
- Analyze the role a particular place has played in shaping your identity
- Conduct and utilize relevant research to enrich your and your reader's understanding of a place (its history, its significance, its meaning to others, etc.)

Your final drafts will be graded according to the following criteria:

- Richness of details, description, and narratives that bring your place to life
- An organization that is logical and reader-friendly and that best serves your goal of providing us with a comprehensive examination of your chosen place
- Creativity in how you structure the paper and describe your chosen place
- Insight into how a particular place has informed who you are today
- The ability to move beyond the surface elements of observation to understand the deeper significance of a place to yourself and others
- A strong central claim that ties together everything you are saying in the essay
- Polished and confident prose that reflects your voice and careful editing
- Correctly-formatted use of research deployed in service of developing your various points about your chosen place

### Important Due Dates

Essay Topic	Thursday, October 4 <sup>th</sup>
Rough Draft	Tuesday, October 16 <sup>th</sup>
Final Portfolio	Tuesday, October 23 <sup>rd</sup>