

This I Believe is an international project
engaging people in writing, sharing, and discussing the core values
and beliefs that guide their daily lives.



Insightful. Inspiring. What do you believe?



www.thisibelieve.org

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“This I Believe” Introductory Essay Assignment
Sophomore Comp & Lit

Assignment: Write an approximately **500 word essay** explaining something that **YOU** believe in and hold to be true. I hope by listening to several examples from the National Public Radio series, you’ll come to see the wide range such statements can take. The purpose of this assignment is to allow us to get to know one another by writing something true for each of us, as well as help me get to know you as a writer.

Due:

- Brainstorm – _____ (15 points)
- 1st Draft – _____ (20 points)
- 2nd Draft – _____ (20 points)
- Final – _____ (75 points)
- Presentation – _____ (25 points)

Guidelines:

- Limited to 500 words
- Tell a story that illustrates how your (not your parents, your friends, or anyone other than you) personal belief was shaped
- Refrain from writing an opinion piece about public issues. This piece needs to be about your belief and not an editorial on a current event/issue
- Tell us about what you do believe and not what you do not believe
- Proofread your essay – no dead words, no passive sentence structure, descriptive details, etc.

Final Packet Turn-In Order:

- 1. Final Draft**
- 2. Grading rubric**
- 3. all other drafts from most recent to the least recent**
- 4. workshop feedback forms**
- 5. brainstorming sheet**

This I Believe Essay-Writing Guidelines from NPR

We invite you to contribute to this project by writing and submitting your own statement of personal belief. We understand how challenging this is—it requires such intimacy that no one else can do it for you. To guide you through this process, we offer these suggestions:

Tell a story: Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life. Consider moments when belief was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work, and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching—it can even be funny—but it should be *real*. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and the shaping of your beliefs.

Be brief: Your statement should be between 350 and 500 words. That’s about three minutes when read aloud at your natural pace.

Name your belief: If you can’t name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Also, rather than writing a list, consider focusing on one core belief, because three minutes is a very short time.

Be positive: Please avoid preaching or editorializing. Tell us what you do believe, not what you don’t believe. Avoid speaking in the editorial “we.” Make your essay about you; speak in the first person.

Be personal: Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. We recommend you read your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.

For this project, we are also guided by the original *This I Believe series* and the [producers’ invitation](#) to those who wrote essays in the 1950s. Their advice holds up well and we are abiding by it. Please consider it carefully in writing your piece.

In introducing the original series, host Edward R. Murrow said, “Never has the need for personal philosophies of this kind been so urgent.” We would argue that the need is as great now as it was 50 years ago. We are eager for your contribution.

Do What You Love

by Tony Hawk

Tony Hawk got his first skateboard when he was 9 years old. Five years later, he turned pro. Hawk's autobiography and video games have been best sellers, while his foundation has funded skate-park construction in low-income communities across America.

I believe that people should take pride in what they do, even if it is scorned or misunderstood by the public at large.

I have been a professional skateboarder for 24 years. For much of that time, the activity that paid my rent and gave me my greatest joy was tagged with many labels, most of which were ugly. It was a kids' fad, a waste of time, a dangerous pursuit, a crime.

When I was about 17, three years after I turned pro, my high school "careers" teacher scolded me in front of the entire class about jumping ahead in my workbook. He told me that I would never make it in the workplace if I didn't follow directions explicitly. He said I'd never make a living as a skateboarder, so it seemed to him that my future was bleak.

Even during those dark years, I never stopped riding my skateboard and never stopped progressing as a skater. There have been many, many times when I've been frustrated because I can't land a maneuver. I've come to realize that the only way to master something is to keep it at -- despite the bloody knees, despite the twisted ankles, despite the mocking crowds.

Skateboarding has gained mainstream recognition in recent years, but it still has negative stereotypes. The pro skaters I know are responsible members of society. Many of them are fathers, homeowners, world travelers and successful entrepreneurs. Their hairdos and tattoos are simply part of our culture, even when they raise eyebrows during PTA meetings.

So here I am, 38 years old, a husband and father of three, with a lengthy list of responsibilities and obligations. And although I have many job titles -- CEO, Executive Producer, Senior Consultant, Foundation Chairman, Bad Actor -- the one I am most proud of is "Professional Skateboarder." It's the one I write on surveys and customs forms, even though I often end up in a secondary security checkpoint.

My youngest son's pre-school class was recently asked what their dads do for work. The responses were things like, "My dad sells money" and "My dad figures stuff out." My son said, "I've never seen my dad do work."

It's true. Skateboarding doesn't seem like real work, but I'm proud of what I do. My parents never once questioned the practicality behind my passion, even when I had to scrape together gas money and regarded dinner at Taco Bell as a big night out.

I hope to pass on the same lesson to my children someday. Find the thing you love. My oldest son is an avid skater and he's really gifted for a 13-year-old, but there's a lot of pressure on

him. He used to skate for endorsements, but now he brushes all that stuff aside. He just skates for fun and that's good enough for me.

You might not make it to the top, but if you are doing what you love, there is much more happiness there than being rich or famous.

Remembering All the Boys

by Elvia Bautista

Elvia Bautista, 22, lives in Santa Rosa, Calif., where she works as a caregiver for the elderly and mentally handicapped. A high school dropout, Bautista now speaks to young people about the dangers of gang life.

I believe that everyone deserves flowers on their grave.

When I go to the cemetery to visit my brother, it makes me sad to see graves -- just the cold stones -- and no flowers on them.

They look lonely, like nobody loves them. I believe this is the worst thing in the world -- that loneliness. No one to visit you and brush off the dust from your name and cover you with color. A grave without any flowers looks like the person has been forgotten. And then what was the point of even living -- to be forgotten?

Almost every day my brother's grave has something new on it: Flowers from me, or candles from the Dollar Store or an image of the Virgin Maria or shot glasses. There's even some little Homies, these little toys that look like gangsters.

Once my brother's homies even put a bunch of marijuana on there for him -- I think my mother took it away. I think she also took away the blue rag someone put there for him one day.

Sometimes, when I bring flowers, I fix the flowers on the graves around my brother's grave. Some of the headstones have birthdates near my brother's; they are young, too. But many of them, if they have any little toys or things on them, those are red.

All around my brother are boys who grew up to like red, making them the enemies of my brother. My brother was 16 when he was shot by someone who liked red, who killed him because he liked blue. And when I go to the cemetery I put flowers on the graves of the boys who liked red, too.

Sometimes I go to the cemetery with one of my best friends, who had a crush on a boy who liked red, who was killed at 18 by someone who liked blue. And we will go together and bring a big bunch of flowers, enough for both of these boys whose families are actually even from the same state in Mexico.

There is no one but me and a few of my friends who go to both graves. Some people think it's a bad idea. Some people think it's heroic.

I think they're both being silly. I don't go to try and disrespect some special rules or stop any kind of war. I go because I believe that no matter where you came from or what you believed in, when you die, you want flowers on your grave and people who visit you and remember you that way.

I'm not any kind of traitor or any kind of hero. I am the sister of Rogelio Bautista, and I say his name so you will hear it and be one more person that remembers him. I want everyone to remember all the boys, red and blue, in my cemetery. When we remember, we put flowers on their graves.

Mysterious Connections that Link Us Together

by Azar Nafisi

Iranian-born writer Azar Nafisi was fired from the University of Tehran for refusing to wear a veil. Her book, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, is based on the years she secretly taught literature to female students in her home. Nafisi now works at the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies.

I believe in empathy. I believe in the kind of empathy that is created through imagination and through intimate, personal relationships. I am a writer and a teacher, so much of my time is spent interpreting stories and connecting to other individuals. It is the urge to know more about ourselves and others that creates empathy. Through imagination and our desire for rapport, we transcend our limitations, freshen our eyes, and are able to look at ourselves and the world through a new and alternative lens.

Whenever I think of the word empathy, I think of a small boy named Huckleberry Finn contemplating his friend and runaway slave, Jim. Huck asks himself whether he should give Jim up or not. Huck was told in Sunday school that people who let slaves go free go to "everlasting fire." But then, Huck says he imagines he and Jim in "the day and nighttime, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing." Huck remembers Jim and their friendship and warmth. He imagines Jim not as a slave but as a human being and he decides that, "alright, then, I'll go to hell."

What Huck rejects is not religion but an attitude of self-righteousness and inflexibility. I remember this particular scene out of *Huck Finn* so vividly today, because I associate it with a difficult time in my own life. In the early 1980s when I taught at the University of Tehran, I, like many others, was expelled. I was very surprised to discover that my staunchest allies were two students who were very active at the University's powerful Muslim Students' Association. These young men and I had engaged in very passionate and heated arguments. I had fiercely opposed their ideological stances. But that didn't stop them from defending me. When I ran into one of them after my expulsion, I thanked him for his support. "We are not as rigid as you imagine us to be Professor Nafisi," he responded. "Remember your own lectures on *Huck Finn*? Let's just say, he is not the only one who can risk going to hell!"

This experience in my life reinforces my belief in the mysterious connections that link individuals to each other despite their vast differences. No amount of political correctness can make us empathize with a child left orphaned in Darfur or a woman taken to a football stadium in Kabul and shot to death because she is improperly dressed. Only curiosity about the fate of others, the ability to put ourselves in their shoes, and the will to enter their world through the magic of imagination, creates this shock of recognition. Without this empathy there can be no genuine dialogue, and we as individuals and nations will remain isolated and alien, segregated and fragmented.

I believe that it is only through empathy, that the pain experienced by an Algerian woman, a North Korean dissident, a Rwandan child or an Iraqi prisoner, becomes real to me and not just passing news. And it is at times like this when I ask myself, am I prepared -- like Huck Finn -- to give up Sunday school heaven for the kind of hell that Huck chose?

I Believe Personal Narrative Grading Rubric - Self-Grade

Name: _____ Hour: _____

Paper Title: _____

Grading Category	Points Earned	Points Possible
MLA format		10
A show stopping title		5
Order of turn in packet: final draft 2nd draft 1st draft packet we used for Writer's Workshop Brainstorm Sheet		5
A personal narrative that explains the individual's personal life philosophy based on personal events they have experienced		25
Specific details using show not tell		10
Belief statement that works with your personality and content of your paper		10
Grammar		10
Presentation		25

I Believe Personal Narrative Grading Rubric - TEACHER-Grade

Name: _____

Hour: _____

Paper Title: _____

Grading Category	Points Earned	Points Possible
MLA format		10
A show stopping title		5
Order of turn in packet: final draft 2nd draft 1st draft packet we used for Writer's Workshop Brainstorm Sheet		5
A personal narrative that explains the individual's personal life philosophy based on personal events they have experienced		25
Specific details using show not tell		10
Belief statement that works with your personality and content of your paper		10
Grammar		10
Presentation		25

Deductions	
Dead & Forbidden Words	
capitalization errors	
apostrophe and other punctuations	

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