USU 1010, University Connections: Common Literature Assignment

Introduction

The common literature experience gives incoming students, faculty, staff, and community members a common piece of literature to read and discuss at the same time. The author Kevin Fedarko will be addressing Connections students at the literature convocation on Saturday, August 29.

Kevin Fedarko’s *The Emerald Mile* tells the story of an epically treacherous, record-setting boat trip down the Colorado River in the winter of 1983. In an informative and engaging style, the author provides that account of these events set against a backdrop of history, heritage, controversy, and stewardship related to the West’s most precious natural resource—its water and the system of rivers and reservoirs that makes that water accessible to us all.

The novel raises important questions about land-use, water rights, environmental preservation, and policy, but does so in the spirit of adventure and of excitement. Who are we in connection to the wilderness? What responsibilities do we have for preserving it and for using it efficiently and responsibly? How does nature interact with the human spirit to ennable us and to reshape our value systems? And how do we come to terms with our relatively poor track record of stewardship over the land, especially as we look to the future?

The story of these three men, Captain Kenton Grua and river guides Rudi Petschek and Steve Reynolds, allows us to explore these questions and also engage topics of heroism, enterprise, and the intrepidity of the human spirit in the crucible of nature. These themes resonate with common trials faced by university students as they embark on their own journeys through the academy and through the joys and setbacks of self-discovery and personal growth.

As USU celebrates the YEAR OF WATER, we hope that students find this selection inspiring, thought-provoking, and worthy of new reflection regarding water, wilderness, and our place in the complex, rewarding, and delicately balanced habitat of the West.

Connections Assignment

The common literature assignment is designed to introduce you to college-level writing by having you respond to an essay question. You will also discuss the book with your Connections class.

*Before you read the book:*

**Read the essay questions first.** This will help you think more broadly and critically about the themes in the book and mark quotations that will help you when writing your response. Finish the whole book before answering the question.

**Take notes in your book.** Highlight, annotate, and mark passages as you read. This will help you not only as you respond to the essay question, but also as you participate in class discussions.

**Follow directions and use the template.** Many college students miss points simply because they don’t read and follow directions. For formatting purposes we’ve provided an MLA-format template for you to use for this assignment, and hopefully you will find it useful for future college writing assignments. Find the template at www.usu.edu/connections.

**Respond to your chosen question thoroughly** using examples from the text (both directly quoted and referred to) in support of your answers. You may include your own personal experiences, connections, and reactions to the text. We’re interested in your perspective defended with examples from the text.
Instructions
Choose one of the three following prompts and write a 500-750 word essay in response.

Prompt One

One of the most basic goals of a university education is to teach students to think critically about complex problems. That means being able to analyze a situation with all its nuance, consider various perspectives on it, and then critically think about that information and those perspectives until you come to a greater understanding of your own position. The Emerald Mile considers some controversial and complicated issues around land and water use in the west.

- Find an issue in the book that has two competing (or at least apparently competing) perspectives represented.
- Explain the issue and the differing perspectives on it, using specific examples with citation from the book.
- Explain your own position on the issue and discuss how and why your opinion either did or did not change after considering the different perspectives.
- Whether your opinion changed or not, explain what you see as the value of encountering different perspectives and thinking through them in a serious way.

Prompt Two

The Emerald Mile contains several excellent metaphors for learning. Here are two examples:

1. In a 2014 interview with Adventure Journal, Kevin Fedarko made the following statement: [T]he story of the Emerald Mile sort of touches on these two different subcultures: We are people who define ourselves in terms of technology and science and our ability to control nature. We are also people who are shaped and honed by an extended 250-year-long encounter with raw wilderness. Those are two different aspects of who we are, and we have not reconciled those two things. And stories help illuminate that disconnect in a way that is provocative and revealing (Leonard, 2014).

2. In The Emerald Mile, Fedarko discusses Kenton Grua’s opportunity to “build the sort of life whose arc would probably have taken him far from Vernal and its rivers…” However, Grua’s path was altered through a series of failures, first at not being accepted to The US Naval Academy, and then his dropping out of University of Utah.

Using at least one of the above metaphors, and citing specific examples with citation from the book, compare the book with your path to successful completion of university education. As part of your paper, make sure to include the following:

- Discuss your future experience in the context of having or not having control.
- Discuss how you expect to be shaped and honed by your exposure to higher education.
- Explain how the Big Ideas of Connections (http://www.usu.edu/connections/about/objectives.cfm) relate to the voyage of The Emerald Mile and how will you leverage this knowledge moving forward in your pursuit of education.
Prompt Three

Kenton Grua was an unusual man. He thought about how to construct “a life well lived” with sincere intention. Although Kenton’s life might seem unusual to you, many Grand Canyon river guides live the same type of intentional life filled with adventure, beauty, and purpose. What opportunities and setbacks did Kenton face in his life, and how did he create purpose and meaning? Does the experience of Kenton’s life affect your own perspective about how to make plans about the future of your own life?

Using Kenton Gura’s “life well lived” as a model, and citing specific examples with citation from the book, compare the book with your path to successful completion of university education. As part of your paper, make sure to include the following:

- Discuss your future experience in the context of an intentional search for adventure, beauty, and meaning.
- Discuss how you feel higher education might impact a person’s ability to lead a well-lived life.
- Explain how the Big Ideas of Connections (http://www.usu.edu/connections/about/objectives.cfm) relate to both a path to a well lived life, and to successful completion of higher education.

Submission Instructions

Your assignment should be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point Times or Times New Roman font (template provided at www.usu.edu/connections). Your instructor will use the attached rubric when grading. A good essay:

- Is clear and to the point (no ambiguity or digression).
- Answers all of the questions in the prompt. Make sure you re-read the prompt after you have drafted your paper to make sure you answered every part of the question.
- Uses specific examples from the reading.
- Has good mechanics and grammar.
- Uses the template provided at www.usu.edu/connections for format.
- Does not exceed the required word count of 500-750 words.

Upload your completed assignment* to Canvas by 9 a.m. on Wednesday, August 26. Canvas sections will open a few days prior to Connections at http://canvas.usu.edu.

Academic Integrity and the Student Code

Utah State University expects students to conduct themselves with the foremost level of academic integrity. Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, representing the published or unpublished work of another person as one’s own (including paraphrasing or direct quotation), using materials prepared by another person or agency, and failing to appropriately cite sources. USU utilizes a global plagiarism prevention software to ensure students are submitting original work. This software compares assignment submissions to a large database of papers found online or submitted both locally at USU and throughout the world. For more information, see http://www.usu.edu/studentservices/studentcode/article5.cfm.

Works Cited


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<td>Understanding and Engagement</td>
<td>Thoughtful engagement with the assignment. Shows a thorough understanding of the prompt and considerable intellectual curiosity in the response.</td>
<td>Adequate engagement with the assignment. Shows an effort to write enough to get the grade, but little else, shows minimal personal interest in the response.</td>
<td>Minimal engagement with the assignment. Shows little effort to engage with the writing prompt or to write an effective response. Shows little personal interest in writing a strong response.</td>
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<td>Support</td>
<td>Excellent use of material from the book. Shows thoughtful use and selection of quotes, personal experience, and stories. Connects them smoothly to the main points.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate quotes from book, but may miss on integrating them into the text. Uses personal experience, but may be lacking somewhat in effectiveness.</td>
<td>Often uses generalizations to support points. Uses some quotes and personal experience, but may be irrelevant.</td>
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<td>Organization and Coherence</td>
<td>Uses a logical structure, appropriate to the assignment. Guides the reader through the chain of reasoning or progression of ideas</td>
<td>Shows some logic in organization of ideas. Paragraphs show some coherence to a central idea.</td>
<td>Somewhat lacking in logical organization. Feels random.</td>
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<td>Style/Voice</td>
<td>Enjoyable to read. Interesting. Reveals the writer’s personality. Writing style clearly draws in the reader.</td>
<td>May sometimes be too general or boring. Style is generally clear and focused, but may have awkward or ineffective moments.</td>
<td>Too vague. Rather monotonous. No real sense of the person behind the writing.</td>
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<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>Almost entirely free of spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors.</td>
<td>Some spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors.</td>
<td>Grammar and mechanics get in the way of reader comprehension. Didn’t even bother to spell-check.</td>
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