

First Writing Assignment

Preparation: Read the chapter on pages 16-21 of the packet; write Reading Notes; brainstorm and “freewrite” in class, talk with others, and fastwrite an “idea draft” before making it reader-friendly. (Conventions of spelling, punctuation, and grammar matter.)

Due Date: Wednesday, February 14 at the start of class.

Length: 3-4 typed, double-spaced pages. Bring 3 copies. STAPLE; name at top right.

Audience: A magazine (*Atlantic Monthly*) or web audience (*Culture Shock*).

Purpose: To use Rodriguez’s story to evaluate his or your own formation through education; focus on his techniques of discovery, creation, or revelation of himself. Pay attention to the balance of inner and outer focus.

Topic: Focus on Rodriguez’s contrast of his formal education with his family life. You might analyze his focus on study as a costly way of re-shaping his life. Or, you might consider how much power he assigns to inner and external forces, family and society, himself, and environment in creating his identity. Or, do you suspect that loneliness as much as self-loathing motivated Rodriguez to write? Consider that without education and exposure to literature, he probably wouldn’t have formulated his thoughts as he does; what difference does the ability to write well make?

OR

Describe your experiences in studying or developing skills that distinguish you from those in your family, social group, or community so much that you alter your identity or even risk losing part of it. Did your achievements gain or cost you much? Why? Do you find Rodriguez’s essay applicable to your experience coming to MIT, for example, in that it alienates you from some people but aligns you with others more like yourself? (Do you “celebrate nerd-power,” as one button proclaims?) What other identities do you have? Which ones protect you from feeling too geeky, for example, or offset geekiness? Basically, analyze the combination (conflicts) of identities or senses of yourself that you have. Examples: math genius and dancing fool, caretaker and Martha Stewart wannabe, responsible older sibling and academic adventurer.

OR

Combine the two suggestions above, using Rodriguez as a springboard to your own ideas.