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## Self As Reader:

I've never enjoyed reading like many of my friends and family members. It has always felt like a chore, especially when it was assigned for school. The readings in school have typically been long and tedious to read. It became increasingly more difficult to sit down to read once the literature became more complex. Because of this, I struggled with zoning out and not comprehending the text. Whenever that happens, I have to go back and reread what I already read. As a result, I am a slow reader that struggles to get into books. However, if I start reading a book I'm interested in, I won't stop reading until I finish. I'm more of a visual learner, so things like books have always been hard for me to get into. The way I process information makes watching movies easier to get invested in because I can see and hear everything that is happening. Because of this, I have always watched the movie version of a book before I even considered reading. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, I had only seen the Harry Potter movies, but I heard the books were better. So, I started reading the books and instantly got hooked.

When I was a kid, I read a lot of books. I really enjoyed the Diary of a Wimpy Kid books and the Magic Treehouse books. I would only check out those books from the library. I read them during my free time and during class. However, I tended to reread these books instead of trying to find new ones. Because of this, my reading habits didn't evolve much and I was stuck with books I already read.

Despite my general struggles with reading, I've always been really interested in history. The only books in highschool that I enjoyed reading were ones related to history. I find it easier to enjoy books

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when I'm interested in the topic so it doesn't feel like a chore. Due to this, books related to history were easy to read and never felt like a chore to me.

Out of the few books I have actually read, one of them stands out to me the most. There was a tv series based on Stephen Hawkings "11/22/63", which was about trying to prevent the assassination of President Kennedy, that I really enjoyed watching. Because of that, I bought the book off Amazon and shortly after I started reading it. It was summer at the time, so I had a lot of free time. That being said, I read the 800 page book in about 4 days. I was able to do this probably because the book was based on US history and I enjoyed the tv show.

Part of the reason I don't read as much in my free time anymore is that in highschool, I was super busy. I played basketball and baseball, which took up a lot of time. Also, I worked 20 hours a week at Hy-Vee. Usually it felt like I had no time to myself and whenever I was home, I was too tired to do anything, let alone try to read a book. This lack of free time resulted in me having to prioritize which hobbies I wanted to do, which meant reading ended up on the backburner, resulting in any interest in reading to fade.

In highschool one of my teachers allowed us to use audiobooks instead of actually reading. So I decided to try it and I found out that I preferred them more. This is because it made it easier to not zone out and process the information. Because of this, it made getting through the books way easier and made me look forward to what happened next in the book. This ultimately made me comprehend the books better and got me better grades on the assignments we had to do.

In conclusion, although I've always struggled to enjoy reading, I've found that using audiobooks and choosing books on topics I'm interested in, like history, allows me to find enjoyment in literature.

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## MWA1: Confessions of a Close Reader

### A Degree in Privilege:

In "Is This Kansas?" by Eula Biss, she describes the privilege and entitlement that takes place within universities. Through short anecdotes, irony, imagery, and juxtaposition, Biss highlights how these unsettling double standards and privileges that take place within universities reflect broader inequalities that people must deal with daily in society. As a result, it causes the reader to question the safety and privilege that are often taken for granted.

From the outside, college campuses are typically seen as a fun and enjoyable place where kids mature and grow into adults. However, within college campuses, the whole culture is flawed. Through her use of vivid imagery, she recalls some of the reckless behavior that is common within university culture, describing students wandering around half-naked and drunk, as if it were a normal thing to do. This behavior ranged from "car crashes" to "alcohol poisoning" (Biss 131), suggesting that the absence of consequences is rooted in privilege. This behavior was pardoned, particularly when white students were involved. Biss suggests this is because the people responsible for holding them accountable see the students as "the quickly dying sparks of [their] former selves" (Biss 132), which shields them from the consequences that students of color might face. This nostalgic view allows for very dangerous things like, date rapes and DUI's to be swept under the rug. Through disturbing imagery, Biss challenges the reader to recognize how this lack of accountability creates a culture where serious consequences are rare, allowing harmful behaviors to continue. Through Biss's personal anecdotes, she forces the reader to confront how through privilege, destructive behavior is excused within university

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culture, which ultimately represents broader societal inequalities, like in the way white students get shielded from consequences, while students of color don't have the same leniency.

Biss challenges the common expectation that college student's reckless behavior will end after graduation, and they enter the real world. Although society seems to think that college is a temporary phase of carelessness, a diploma does not automatically change their mindsets. The privilege shielding students during their college years can persist beyond graduation. Biss recounts an incident in which she attempted to shut down a weekday party. Weirdly enough, she found a grown man "suspended upside down" while siphoning beer into another man's mouth (Biss 133). This shocking anecdote, involving fully grown adults, reveals that the reckless mindset that was excused in college does not simply disappear with a diploma. By sharing this anecdote, Biss emphasizes that privilege continues to shield adults from accountability, suggesting that the societal inequalities within university culture extend into adulthood.

In the workforce, there are certain power dynamics where lower-level employees are treated as lesser valued people. This gives privilege to the higher-ups in companies. Biss highlights how the same privilege is embedded within the classroom. Through her experience as a graduate instructor, Biss describes how "students were subjects of this education, which was acted out upon them. They either absorbed it or did not," (Biss 135), showing how the education system does not prioritize students' individuality. Biss reflects that the "philosophy of education" seemed to "not only to encourage but to depend on the quiet resignation of the students." (Biss 135). The students, especially the ones that do not benefit from privilege, are expected to accept the circumstances without question. Biss shows this through a short anecdote where she recalls her time as a graduate student. She felt "distasteful" towards the education she was immersed in,

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she often found herself “impatient” and “argumentative” (Biss 135). So, like an adult, she wrote letters to the English department hoping to improve things. However, this angered the people in power, who called her a “presumptuous young lady”. All of a sudden it clicked for her. She was not seen as someone whose opinion was respected, but as a child who was out of their place. Despite being a graduate student, they viewed her as inferior and expected her to comply. By showing how students are expected to acquiesce in the education system, Biss critiques the way privilege operates in the classroom. The favoritism towards positions of power while silencing certain groups reflects broader societal issues, where the privilege shapes people's experiences in society.

A majority of people form their opinions based on what they hear on the news. Because of this, the media plays a huge role in shaping public perception of privileged behavior. In Biss’s rhetoric class, her students were intrigued to find out that she previously lived in New York City. Biss’s recounting of her experience in Iowa City starkly contrasts with the expected dangers of New York City, which her students perceived. Big cities like New York City have a reputation for being dangerous and full of crime. So, her students asked her many questions about it, like “where [she] worked” and “where [she] lived”, but also “if [she] had been scared” and if “men had harassed [her] on the street” (Biss 136). They were surprised to find out that Iowa City made her feel far more unsafe than New York City ever did. In Iowa City, she regularly talked to the police, could not sleep because of loud parties, was harassed on the street, and even had her apartment broken into multiple times. Her students’ shock at her feeling safer in New York City than in Iowa City shows the irony in their perception about privilege and danger. Through Biss’s anecdote and irony, it forces the reader to think about their own perceptions shaped by the media,

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and how these perceptions can excuse reckless behavior while ignoring the dangers people without privilege have to face. This stark contrast between expectation and reality highlights the inconsistency within the media that creates a false sense of safety. These mixed perceptions factor into broader societal inequalities, where the actions of certain groups of people are either pardoned or ignored based on their status.

Racism and privilege are not only prevalent within universities, but it is also a serious issue that takes place in every level of society. Although laws may have changed since the Civil Rights Movement, racial inequalities still continue in society. Through Biss's anecdotes about university culture, she forces readers to confront the unsettling truth that the privilege within universities reflects broader inequalities in society. For example, mistreatment seen in the criminal justice system, housing, and education. The inconsistencies in the criminal justice system, where certain groups of people get different consequences for the same behavior based on their race or who their parents are. Biss's personal anecdotes reveal how power and privilege structure lives way beyond the college years. This creates the notion that if someone grew up with little money, or is of a certain skin color, they are inferior to people with privilege. This creates a cycle of inequality that starts when they are a child.

In reading "Is This Kansas", I found Biss's critique of privilege in the classroom and in society relevant to my own experiences. Her arguments of how privilege works in university culture reminded me of moments where I have seen people with power avoid severe consequences. For example, I know someone whose father is very wealthy and powerful. This person was involved in a very tragic car crash that resulted in someone's death, yet they received nothing more than a slap on the wrist. This tragic incident is a clear example of how privilege

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can shield people from severe consequences, just as Biss describes. Biss's essay really opened my eyes to how prevalent privilege is within society. The way some people can advance in life just because of the color of their skin or who their parents are, really rubs me the wrong way. Overall, my experience with this essay has made me realize the inequalities people have to face and confront the hard truth that people are treated differently based on their privilege.

## Midterm:

### Prompt 2:

In the opening lines of "Is This Kansas" Biss uses imagery to show a complex emotional response to the town and the people in it. Biss describes a scene where "The girls were wearing nothing but white towels and high heels". Her description of the girl's behavior blurs the line between youthful innocence and adulthood. Additionally, the metaphor comparing the girls to "flocks of white pelicans" highlights her strange appeal to the girl's herd mentality. The metaphor suggests that Biss was intrigued by the girls, but also felt alienated within the town. The word "pelicans" connects to the girl's outfits because pelicans are often related to nature and freedom, and the girl's unusual outfits show the freedom people have. However, this highlights Biss's discomfort with the rituals of the town. As Biss stood "on the sidewalk to stare", her feeling of detachment became clear. She describes the girls as an "animated swarm" that creates a feeling of liveliness with potential chaos, which suggests that the community runs on a set of

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norms that she finds strange and confusing. The phrase “rituals of that town” implies that there are established behaviors and actions that are acceptable within this community. Biss struggles to understand this which is shown through her repeated emphasis of her alienation. The more time she spends within the town, the more foreign it becomes. This highlights her feelings of isolation and detachment in the town. Her repeated emphasis of her isolation evokes sympathy because it reflects the universal experience of feeling detached within a community, whether it's your school, your workplace, your friend group or even your family, it is something sad and something no one wants to feel. The phrase “sun silvering off their wings” uses imagery to create a beautiful image. The sunlight reflecting off the girls' wings represents elegance and beauty. However, there is a difference between appearance and reality. The purpose of the imagery is to highlight the fact that although the girls may appear lively and carefree, their actions and experiences lack meaningful connection.

Overall, Biss's opening statements create a sense of uncertainty and disconnect towards the town and its people. She showed a lack of support and approval for the town and the people in it. Through Biss's selection of words, she created images that represented the discomfort she felt towards the town. Additionally, her opening statement showed the ways societal rituals can cause the lack of meaningful and genuine connection.

## **Prompt 5:**



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At my reading, I will have Eula Biss, Amanda Gorman, and Arthur Miller speak about their work. They will talk about themes of resiliency.

Resiliency:

In *The Crucible*, Miller goes into detail on the significance of standing up to corruption when it compromises your personal integrity. Personal integrity is very powerful and it is crucial to stay true to yourself even when in dire circumstances. In the story, John Proctor's decision to not fabricate a confession, while knowing it would ultimately lead to his death. This decision highlights the importance of never abandoning your morals, as opposed to living with a damaged reputation. Additionally, in Eula Biss's "Is This Kansas", she explored how privilege showed the resilience needed to overcome the inequalities faced by students of color. Despite being looked down upon by people in positions of power, people had to keep fighting otherwise they would not be able to succeed. Also, in Amanda Gorman's "An Ode We Owe", she explained how the goal is not to be the generation that only tries, but is the type that leads to a society where people are driven by human conviction and creates a legacy. Then she explained how change is hard but with hope, we are brave enough to conquer it.

Questions:

To Arthur Miller:

- In "The Crucible", you see people face immense pressure to conform to society and most people end up conforming. How do you see this theme reflect modern issues within our society, and what lessons can we learn from these characters' mistakes?

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To Amanda Gorman:

- In “An Ode We Ode”, you questioned how one is expected to do good while all this bad is happening around them. How can you inspire people with hope when most people are too afraid to defer from societal norms?

To Eula Biss:

- In “Is This Kansas”, you mentioned how during your time as a graduate student you were seen as someone whose opinion was not respected, and how defeated it made you feel. Within society, how can people whose opinions aren't respected keep motivation to work hard and thrive in society?

For All Authors:

- Each of you addresses the concept of identity in relation to community. How do you believe personal identity can influence and transform a community?

### **Why These Authors Should Be Together:**

Eula Biss, Amanda Gorman, and Arthur Miller are united by their exploration of societal expectations and the resiliency needed for people to thrive. Each author forces readers to reflect on their roles within their communities and what we owe to each other. By bringing these authors together, it will create an opportunity for people to learn how to be resilient and keep working hard even when facing hardships.

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## MWA2: Critical Personal Analysis:

### Swipe Left For Danger:

The dynamics in Margot and Robert's relationship left me with a productive discomfort because it caused me to reflect on how digital interactions often overshadow in-person interactions in modern relationships, which can lead to misunderstandings or inaccurate perceptions. This tension between the digital and physical world reveals deeper challenges of vulnerability and trust in modern dating. This discomfort was unsettling because it showed how false perceptions could potentially lead to uncomfortable and dangerous situations. Ultimately, it forced me to confront the risks we take when we rely too heavily on digital interactions to form connections.

My initial reaction to Margot and Robert's interactions was a mix of discomfort and frustration. I watched Margot navigate through her own feelings with uncertainty and constantly questioning her perception of Robert based on his strange behavior. The detailed portrayal of Margot's thoughts, particularly her hesitation and self-doubt, increased my frustration but also increased my empathy for her. I saw her struggle with the same concerns that many people deal with in modern dating by wondering what someone's intentions are and who they truly are behind a screen. However, this discomfort was productive as it made me reflect on the risks of developing connections with people through digital interactions. How often do people, like

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Margot, create idealized versions of people when we meet them online, only to find those versions don't match with reality?

The one scene that struck me the most was when Margot started to resent Robert while at his house, but then she felt backed into a corner because she wasn't able to communicate her discomfort to him. Roupenian writes this so expertly from Margot's perspective, which caused me to empathize with Margot's reluctance to confront her doubts. It brought up questions about how often people (women, in this case, especially) find themselves in this situation and feel compelled not to speak up to avoid awkwardness or escalating the situation. Why do social pressures around politeness often leave people (particularly women) feeling trapped in uncomfortable situations? I realize my discomfort came from Margot's helplessness during this scene and a recognition of the risks that come with misjudging someone's intentions.

Another element of Margot and Robert's dynamic that intensified my discomfort was the imbalance of power in their interactions. Margot is presented as a young, uncertain college student, while Robert is older, more reserved, and socially awkward, yet his presence holds a weight that Margot feels compelled to accommodate. This dynamic is reflective of a larger societal issue in which women are often taught to prioritize others' comfort over their own safety. Margot's internal conflict—her desire to avoid an awkward situation versus her growing sense of unease—felt painfully familiar and highlighted the silent, often invisible pressures women face in similar circumstances. Roupenian uses this dynamic to expose the ways power imbalances, even subtle ones, can influence decision-making in intimate situations. For me, this reinforced

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how important it is to not only recognize these pressures but to challenge them in both literature and real life.

Another aspect of Margot and Robert's relationship that increasingly unsettled me was the power imbalance. Margot is an obviously young, bright-eyed college student. Robert is older and socially awkward, yet he's still the one in control of the situation, and Margot feels compelled to accommodate. This dynamic represents a broader cultural issue where women are often taught to prioritize others' comfort over their own safety. When Margot has an internal struggle because she's in an uncomfortable situation where she has to decide between an awkward situation that could potentially be dangerous versus her growing sense of unease. This makes me feel uncomfortable because I know it happens far too often, and even worse, behind closed doors, and women are put in such a vulnerable position. Thus, Roupenian needs this scenario to showcase that even with the slightest power dynamics can influence decision-making in intimate situations. For me, this reinforced how important it is to recognize these pressures.

Looking back on my reaction to reading Margot's story, I felt discomfort as she quickly got attached to the idea of Robert, which later turned into reluctance. This was mainly because her early interactions with Robert were primarily through technology, and once they interacted in person, her perception of Robert quickly changed. As Roupenian writes, "She still didn't know much about him, because they never talked about anything personal" (Roupenian 3), which suggests that Margot's perception of Robert was purely based on surface-level interactions that felt exciting yet vague. My discomfort grew as I realized how easily we can create false

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perceptions of people when interactions are mainly through digital means rather than in-person interactions that give a better understanding of a person's character. Margot is the ultimate cautionary tale of how first impressions can create dangerously inaccurate perceptions and how easily people can fall victim to them.

However, if Roupenian had Margot try to express her discomfort or convey her hesitation to Robert, I would have felt differently. This lack of communication (while realistic) highlights the vulnerabilities that come with avoiding confrontation, leaving Margot in an unbalanced and uncomfortable position.

In this alternate scene, Margot expresses her hesitation and discomfort directly to Robert before they leave for his house. After he suggests going back to his place, Margot hesitates and explains that she's feeling uncertain. Robert is surprised by this, but he still listens to her concerns. Instead of ignoring her discomfort or trying to convince her, he reassures her by saying, "I want you to feel comfortable. We don't have to go anywhere you're not ready for." They both agree to end the night and go separate ways with some level of respect for each other, rather than tension and resentment. This interaction would represent an ideal version of what open communication could achieve in modern dating, which is a shift from manipulation to mutual understanding and respect.

If the story included a scene like this, my emotional response to the story would've been less uncomfortable because Margot wouldn't have been in a situation where she wasn't in control. This alternate scene highlights the difficulties of trying to communicate your feelings

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while also trying to be nice. This is a struggle that is common in modern dating. Additionally, this scene gives the reader a different view of the relationship dynamics between Robert and Margot. It highlights Margot's ability to face tough situations and removes the pressure for her to hide her feelings of discomfort. Furthermore, this alternate scene would've left me with a feeling of empowerment and relief. Also, it would make Robert's character more complex. By having him respect her boundaries, the reader's view of him would shift from a creepy guy into a more considerate guy. This shift would change the story's main critique of modern dating culture into a more hopeful scenario where both people are given space to communicate openly—a stark contrast to the often unspoken misunderstandings that characterize digital dating.

Ultimately, while the original story shows the risks of miscommunication in modern dating, my alternate scene shows an optimistic version. By writing this alternate scene, I was able to reflect deeper on how societal pressures and norms impact modern-day relationships and how they could be navigated more safely.

## Community Event Reflection:

### **Reflection on the Community Event:**

Voting Day For my community event, I voted in the 2024 election in person at Cedar Hills Community Church, which was in my hometown. After my classes on Election Day, my parents picked me up and drove me back to my hometown so I could vote, which is something I find great importance in. While at the event, I saw volunteers that were present to assist with registration and explain ballot measures. There was a diverse group of people at the event, including people of different ages and ethnicities. Also, there were first-time voters like myself,

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and also experienced voters, like my parents. It was cool to see how an event can bring a diverse group of people who share different beliefs together. In relation to our course themes, it shows the importance of coming together as a community with collective action. It highlighted the importance of informed participation. We owe to each other to be well informed, be respectful to each other despite different beliefs, and to participate in elections. One insight I took away from this event is the sense of community I felt while there. I did not feel any pressure to vote a certain way. Even though voting can feel like a situation where you have to keep your beliefs to yourself or you'll be insulted, this even showed me how it's actually very communal. Overall, attending this event showed me that people of every background are able to come together and create an environment where everybody's beliefs will be respected.

## Course Reflection:

As the semester comes to a close and by reflecting on the ways my reading, writing and interpretation skills, I have realized how far I've come. I take pride in where I was and where I stand now. I was an ineffective reader coming into this course; even prior to this course, I'd hardly connected to much text. The majority of assigned reading in my previous schooling was, in my opinion, excruciatingly boring. Yet, through the structure and assignments of this course, I would have to actually read to get through, and with the multiple movies, it required effective reading and writing to survive. Additionally, I had to try to get out of my comfort zone and participate in class discussions. If I had to choose one of the biggest lessons of learning this semester, it would be the idea of critical analysis. For example, in MWA1, I had to do a close reading



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of Eula Biss' "Is This Kansas?" which required me to do a lot of critical analysis. An analysis not only of her written words but also of the greater variables of privilege, power, and societal norms. I've come to understand that literature is a reflection on some of the greatest social inequalities, and by assessing these texts, I can come to conclusions that extend far beyond the page. Furthermore, Biss's arguments forced me to think critically about the ways privilege operated in my own university and society.

Additionally, through the Critical Personal Analysis, I learned a lot about myself relative to a greater world and literature and how it applies to contemporary social issues and society. For example, when analyzing Margot and Robert's relationship in Kristen Roupenian's "Cat Person," I was forced to reflect on the dangers of modern dating, acknowledging how digital interactions can create false perceptions of people and can put people in a situation where people tend to fail to respond in the moment to how they feel. Additionally, social pressures have people (mostly women) in situations reserved for vulnerability collectively calmer than speaking their truths. Thus, it was challenging to write my emotional response for this analysis, but ultimately liberating to express thoughts and feelings that are usually left unspoken.

This class also made me realize how much a story and perspective can do. People can read the same text and have completely different interpretations of what they just read. This is something I previously did not fully comprehend and now I am more understanding. Every assignment provided a chance to give my opinion to topics, making the process of writing so much more fun.

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Ultimately, it's been a life-changing semester. I'm a better reader, better writer, and better critical thinker. The skills and knowledge I've gained in this course will translate nearly everywhere else in my academic and personal life. But I've also walked away from this course with a renewed sense of reading for enjoyment.