The 2013 First-Year Reading Experience Essay Contest

Tracy Kidder’s book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, chronicles Dr. Paul Farmer’s inspiring vocation as a medical doctor who provides quality health care to some of the world’s poorest citizens. Exemplifying the Haitian proverb “Beyond mountains there are mountains,” Farmer’s work brings about hopeful change in the face of persistent obstacles.

As part of the events and activities surrounding the First-Year Reading Experience, we invite first-year students to submit 750-1250 word essays in one or both of the following categories: (1) the scholarly/analytical essay or (2) the personal reflection essay. A cash prize of $250 will be awarded to the writer of the best, most compelling essay in each category; the essays themselves (with the authors’ permission) will be posted to the First-Year Reading Experience webpage. Students are limited to one entry per category.

**The DEADLINE for entries is TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2013.**

**Category 1: The Scholarly/Analytical Essay**

Submit a critical essay in response to your reading of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. A successful essay will engage the book’s themes and/or contexts in a meaningful way, will advance a critical argument that may be grounded in any disciplinary perspective, and will move the discussion beyond mere summary of the book. The winning essay must directly analyze the book in a critical, clear way and must present a coherent and compelling argument that provides insight into some significant aspect of the book.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA**

The primary evaluation criterion will be the intellectual engagement of the student writer with the ideas presented in *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. The essay also will be judged on the originality of the writing, the clarity of presentation, the attentiveness and logic of its argument, and the cohesiveness of its structure. Essays should be carefully edited and proofread.

The committee will be guided by a rubric based on the following criteria:

- **Comprehension:** The essay reflects a thorough and nuanced understanding of the book.
- **Organization:** The essay follows a logical, coherent, and easily understood progression that builds toward some unified idea. Evidence supports the essay’s main point(s) and is adeptly woven into the argument.
- **Development:** The student’s ideas are clearly explained and developed through examples and critical analysis of the book, ultimately advancing a meaningful argument.
- **Insight:** The essay presents an inquiry into the book that moves beyond mere summary and offers other readers a unique insight into and understanding of the book.
- **Language Use:** The writer displays skill in word choice and sentence structure, using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

**Category 2: The Personal Reflection Essay**

Submit a reflective essay analyzing your experience as a reader of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, answering the following question: how has your experience reading this book caused you to reflect on your own life?

For example, your essay might:

- explore a personal experience that illustrates the Haitian proverb “Beyond mountains there are mountains,” and consider how this experience compares to Dr. Farmer’s work.
• reflect on your own education in light of Rudolf Virchow’s belief that “[m]edical education does not exist to provide students with a way of making a living, but to insure the health of the community” (61).
• describe how the book has inspired you, challenged you, or provoked you.
• describe a social problem that you have observed, and explain why this social problem deserves the kind of attention Dr. Farmer has given to infectious disease among the world’s poor.

A successful essay will develop a specific, distinctive claim that defines the nature and importance of your reading experience and will demonstrate this claim through a meaningful discussion of your personal experience. Your essay should move beyond mere reportage in that it should demonstrate the impact of the book on a specific reader.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The primary evaluation criterion will be the intellectual engagement of the student writer with the ideas presented in Mountains Beyond Mountains. The committee will especially value personal reflective essays with a compelling and specific discussion of the reading experience, essays with an engaging and distinctive voice, essays that contain a reflective and instructive dimension, and essays that demonstrate the writer is invested in exploration and contemplation. Essays should be carefully edited and proofread.

The committee will be guided by a rubric based on the following criteria:

- **Comprehension:** The essay reflects a thorough and nuanced understanding of the book.
- **Originality and creativity:** The writer is resourceful and creative in conducting the discussion; the writer reveals a flexible, open, exploratory sensibility, and is not afraid to take chances.
- **Development:** The student’s ideas are clearly explained and developed through a coherent and easily understood progression; ideas ultimately advance a meaningful point about the individual reading experience.
- **Insight:** The writer not only describes the reading experience, but also strengthens that discussion with insight, reflection, and interpretation regarding the impact of that experience.
- **Personal voice:** The writer exhibits a distinctive sense of voice in managing and presenting the material.
- **Language Use:** The writer displays skill in word choice and sentence structure, using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS FOR ALL ESSAYS:

Both categories share the following submission requirements:

- The contest is open to all first-year students enrolled for the first time at The University of Montana—Missoula, beginning in Autumn, 2013.
- Essays must be new compositions written specifically for the 2013 Essay Contest.
- Submissions should be limited to one entry per category.
- The essay should be from 750 to 1250 words in length.
- Essays should be given a title. Below the essay title, on a separate line, please indicate whether the essay is a “Scholarly/Analytical Essay” or a “Personal Reflection Essay.”
- The student’s name should not appear on the essay. Attach a separate sheet with a brief biography (100 words maximum), the word count, and the appropriate contact information: name, active email address, phone number.

How to submit an essay:

- Send the essay as an e-mail attachment (in Word document format) to kelly.webster@umontana.edu. Please type “First-Year Reading Experience Essay Contest” in the message subject line. Each author will receive a confirmation email, indicating that the essay has been received.

Contact Information: Kelly Webster, Director of The Writing Center; 243-2470; kelly.webster@umontana.edu