Lies My Teacher Told Me: Essay Assignment

THE BOOK:

Hopefully you’ve signed up for AP U.S. History because you have some interest in topics from U.S. history. Before we begin our study, you will read a critique of U.S. history classes in James Loewen’s Lies My Teacher Told Me. You may purchase this book (available widely on Amazon or at other book sellers), borrow it from a library, or read it free (in its entirety) online by typing in “Lies My Teacher Told Me pdf” to your search browser. You can download the Google Doc of the entire book to your computer and/or print it out to read.

***Note: reading someone else’s summary of the book in place of completing the reading on your own is academically dishonest. There is no academically acceptable shortcut for reading the book on your own. See the chart below for details on what chapters you are required to read to prepare to write this three-page essay.

THE PROBLEM:

Our situation is this: American history is full of fantastic and important stories. These stories have the power to spellbind audiences…. These same stories show what America has been about and are directly related to our present society. American audiences, even young ones, need and want to know about their national past. Yet they sleep through the classes that present it.

What has gone wrong?


THE ESSAY:

Your Essay’s Central Question:

What is wrong with the way typical American history courses are taught? What are the consequences of teaching history this way?

[You will use the book Lies My Teacher Told Me by James Loewen as the basis for your conclusions.]

Introductory Paragraph: As in every essay you’ll write for APUSH this year, start by providing your reader with relevant context for understanding the themes you’ll cover in your essay. In this case, provide your own explanation for why you think students study U.S. history in American high schools. You may carry a rather cynical line of reasoning, or you may be more optimistic about the role and purpose of a sound historical education.
Then transition to your thesis statement that directly answers the essay’s central question.

*Tip:* Attempt to show a nuanced understanding that goes beyond the clichéd answer. Just proving that students will be bored, for example, is not enough.

**Body Paragraphs:** Choose the THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS that have “gone wrong” with the teaching of U.S. history and the consequences that result from doing so. Each should be the topic of its own body paragraph. Start each body paragraph with a clear topic sentence that acts as a mini-thesis statement for the body paragraph. Find approximately THREE specific pieces of evidence to support the paragraph’s argument from Loewen’s book (can be direct quotes or paraphrasing the author’s ideas). The best essays will use evidence from multiple chapters in a single body paragraph. Be sure to include citations for EACH piece of evidence you use from the book so that your teachers can quickly find and verify your evidence.

*Tip:* As a rule of thumb, don’t overuse quotes as evidence – choose direct quotes that have some eloquent turn of phrase that you feel is particularly powerful rather than quoting a mundane statement that could easily have been paraphrased with no loss of meaning. When you use a direct quote, use your writing skills to seamlessly incorporate the quote into your body paragraph as a piece of evidence, following with relevant analysis to explain how it helps to prove your thesis.

**Conclusion Paragraph:** End your essay by applying the lessons of the book to your experiences in history courses, including a thoughtful prediction about how the information from this book will impact your approach to A.P. United States history this year. Avoid overly simplistic clichéd conclusions such as “I plan to really question everything I study.” Don’t be generic – show us that you’ve really thought about this and can apply the message to your reality.

**Tips for Writing in Social Studies Classes:**

1. Use APA or MLA-formatted citations For a great resource on the proper way to use citations, please refer to: http://www.citationmachine.net/

2. Each body paragraph should start with a clear topic sentence that acts as a mini-thesis for the paragraph. Follow with approximately three pieces of specific evidence from the book to prove your point (can be direct quotes or paraphrasing of information). Balance evidence and analysis (ie, approximately one sentence of specific evidence with one sentence of meaningful analysis).

3. Use past-tense throughout your essay.

**WARNING ABOUT ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** Your essay should be written based solely on your own reading of *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, as well as your own understanding of its main themes. There is no need to complete any further research or use other sources to be able to write this essay. To ensure that you complete this essay with full academic honesty and avoid any possibility of plagiarism, carefully follow each of these requirements:
1. **You should read all the required parts of the book ON YOUR OWN.**
   a. You should NOT “split the reading” with a friend and share summaries or notes in place of YOUR OWN reading.
   b. You should NOT seek out summaries or analysis of the book on the internet in place of YOUR OWN reading. There is no academically accepted short cut to doing all the reading on your own.

2. While it’s fine to discuss the main themes and details of the book with a friend in order to enhance your understanding after you’ve finished reading, **this is NOT a collaborative assignment.** For example, you should NOT be working with any other person to select common themes, quotes or other details from the reading to incorporate into your essay.

3. **NEVER HAND OVER, POST, or EMAIL YOUR NOTES or ESSAY to any other person.** Always keep control of your own work. A persuasive friend who asks you to send your essay so they can “better understand what to do” or they “want to give you feedback” may copy your general outline, quotes/evidence and/or analysis and present it as his/her own. You will BOTH be responsible for the plagiarism, even if this was not your intent in sharing your work.

**Your academic integrity is established in APUSH starting with this essay.** Students caught being academically dishonest will receive a zero on this first assignment, in addition to having a parent-teacher conference scheduled to discuss your actions. We may deem your offense to be so severe that it warrants notifying your other teachers of the circumstances. Your character, honesty and integrity carry over to all your classes, and your other teachers have a right to know about all relevant academic behaviors. You will lose your teacher’s trust right from day one, and this isn’t something you can easily earn back. **You can avoid this by simply completing the work on your own, and keeping control of your notes/essay after you’ve finished.**

You will upload your essay to turnitin.com, an anti-plagiarism website, once school starts. Further instructions will be provided.

**If you have any questions about how to proceed with this assignment, about the content of the required reading or anything related, please contact Mr. Rust or Mrs. Irwin over the summer with your questions. We’ll be happy to help.**