

Sample Essay X

English 1C

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Contested Territory

In recent years, illegal immigration into the United States at the U.S.-

The author establishes a frame of reference in the first sentence, referencing the cultural context surrounding illegal immigration

Mexico border has become a divisive political topic, resulting in a widening partisan divide as to whose priorities we should privilege: the immigrants' or the nation's. Are we global citizens or American citizens first? Anna Mills'

Here is our grounds for comparison, wherein the author briefly summarizes the two stances on immigration

"Wouldn't We All Cross the Border?" and Saramanda Swigart's "The Weight of the World" offer opposing views on this controversial issue. While Mills considers us global citizens, arguing for compassion toward suffering in our

Essay thesis

reevaluation of immigration policies and practices, Swigart believes we must be American citizens first, pointing out the necessity for a nation to secure its borders and enforce its laws.

Topic sentence resupplies language from the thesis and signals what will be discussed first

As an advocate of compassion, Mills questions the ethics of enforcing immigration laws and argues for empathy with illegal immigrants because, given the same circumstances, many or most of us would make the same choice to cross a border illegally if it meant a chance for a better life for ourselves or our families.

The author puts herself, and by extension the reader, in an illegal immigrant's position: "If I were raising children in an impoverished third-world community plagued by violence, and if I had a chance to get my family to the U.S., I would take it" (Mills). This argument for empathy relies on pathos, appealing to readers' own emotional desires for their families' well-being. However, Mills' argument

Essay supports the summary with quotations selected from the text

links pathos to pragmatism as Mills draws the logical conclusion that, if, given the same circumstances, “many or most of us would make the same choice, we cannot condemn those who choose to immigrate illegally” (Mills). Her argument evokes the Golden Rule; to turn our backs on obvious suffering is to turn our backs on ourselves, and is thus immoral by definition.

While the essay argues for empathy, it limits the scope of its argument from offering a comprehensive vision of what a new or improved immigration policy would consist of, as Mills acknowledges “I don’t have a clear vision yet of what the right border policy would be, and I admit that completely open borders would put our security at risk.” She anticipates the potential counterargument and shares her own concerns for the law and national security, and concludes that any immigration policy must be based on humanitarian values and priorities: “We must find a policy that treats migrants as we would want to be treated—with empathy, respect, and offers of help” (Mills). Thus she is not advocating open borders without regulation. Rather, she asks that policy take the plight of the immigrants into account, calling on us to treat everyone as though they are citizens of the world, having inherently the same rights to dignity and safety as U.S. citizens do.

In contrast, Swigart emphasizes not compassion, but the rule of law and the primacy of national security. Instead of invoking pathos by emphasizing the personal, Swigart emphasizes impersonal and abstract concerns like respect for the law, the priority of secure borders, and the need to consider finite resources. The first point, concerning the rule of law, argues that “If laws can be broken

Discussion of the acknowledged limits on Mills' argument sets the stage for Swigart's counterargument.

This essay is organized text-by-text, though it could easily have been organized point-by-point

"In contrast" is a transitional phrase that signals a divergent point of view

simply because lawbreakers had good intentions, this suggests that obeying the law is merely optional” (Swigart) and concludes that routine circumvention of law without penalty would undermine rule of law more broadly. The second point is similar, but applied to concerns for national security. Although the author acknowledges the sympathetic situation of immigrant families, she argues that “no country should be blamed for wanting to secure its borders or its territory” (Swigart). These first two arguments are presented as self-evident arguments or truisms—essentially, violation of the law undermines the law, and a porous border undermines national security.

The writer examines one of Swigart's points in more detail, just as they examined Mills' points

Swigart's third argument is perhaps more complicated, as she argues that one nation should not be obligated to shoulder the burden of solving other nations' humanitarian or economic crises. “Because a nation's resources are finite,” Swigart argues, “the financial and material burden of taking care of incoming immigrants falls on their host country.” She goes on to cast doubt upon the notion that a single nation can and should solve the whole world's humanitarian problems. Here Swigart highlights the extreme implications of the argument she disagrees with in order to convince readers of its absurdity.

Here the writer moves beyond summarizing and comparing the arguments to assessing their validity. This analysis might be the basis of a response essay.

While both authors make compelling points, there are many assumptions they both make that are left unexamined. For instance, Mills’ essay assumes that there are no alternatives to allowing immigrants with good intentions into the country. For instance, the United States could invest or intervene in countries whose populations are suffering, improving their material conditions and thereby

eliminating the need to immigrate. Likewise, Swigart fails to acknowledge that the United States is in fact the *cause* of some of the world's problems and thus has a responsibility toward the lives it has disrupted; or that studies show the admittance of immigrants, rather than over-taxing the nation's resources actually improves the nation's economy. Both points of view might benefit from a deeper examination of their assumptions.

In the conclusion, the comparison between the two essays leads to a proposal for a way to satisfy the demands of both.

More importantly, the two approaches to immigration might not be in such dramatic conflict as the authors would have us believe. A policy that expands legal immigration to families in desperate need, for instance, while still cracking down on illegal immigration could potentially satisfy both sides of the argument. This is the problem with many partisan issues today. While we spill ink proving the other wrong, we miss opportunities to find common ground on which to build.

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