

**Essay 4: The Power of the Word**  
**ENWR100: Introduction to Writing**  
**Instructor: Emily Isaacs**

**Essay Preparation and Assignment**

**Introduction:** This is your last major essay for ENWR100; it is an opportunity to synthesize all the skills you have learned in this class. Our topic is the power of language, and there are many possibilities for you to consider. It is up to you to develop a question on the power of language and which you can address with a strong central claim.

**Warm-Up (in-class):**

For each prompt, write for five minutes, non-stop and without worrying about whether you're saying it right or well.

1. Freewrite about language: does language have power? Do individual words have power?
2. Freewrite about Irving Kristol and Dianne Ravitch, and the topic of censorship
3. Freewrite about Chang-Rae Lee and the role that government can take in resolving residents' disagreements about language use in the public sphere.
4. Freewrite about Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Martha Irvine, and Andi Zeisler and their perspectives on the power of individual words.

**Preparation: Readings**

Review these readings to find ideas that really speak to you powerfully. Take some notes on these ideas – not so much on what the authors say, but about what you think in response to these words.

What You Have Read:

Irving Kristol, "Pornography, Obscenity, and the Case for Censorship."

Dianne Ravitch, "The Language Police"

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "What's in a Name?"

Chang-Rae Lee, "Mute is an English-Only Word"

Martha Irvine, "'Queer ' Evolution: Word Goes Mainstream"

Andi Zeisler, "The B-Word? You Betcha"

**Developing Your Question:**

The best essays are ones that are written in response to a question the writer herself has developed. This is what is wonderful about writing: you get to decide what is the important question to ask and answer! Students who are used to having the question handed out may find developing their own questions difficult, but in the end, it makes writing easier, more fun, and more successful. Below are a

few questions to get you started – try writing on a few of them until you are ready to write your own and start your essay. If you find that you really like one of the printed questions, by all means, take it for yourself.

### **Guidelines for questions:**

Your essay question must be on the topic of the power of language and it must enable the writer to draw upon at least two of the readings for this unit.

### **Starting Questions:**

1. In terms of the social good, is it helpful to hurtful to censor “loaded” words? You can consider this ban as legal or just social (as in, it’s socially unacceptable to use \_\_\_ word in polite society, in school, in front of a judge, in front of parents; so these words or socially censored). Do these social censors help society or hurt society? That is, are they effective and useful rules, or are they silly and irrelevant?
2. How can social groups or classes of people hurt by individual words fight the oppression and negative self-image that this language causes? Refer to readings and also consider other words, and other social groups, for examples of both damaging words and individuals’ or groups’ efforts to counteract the effects of these words.
3. Many of the readings suggest that words are very powerful and that they have “make” make reality, but in classes students often offer the perspective that words are simply the tools that allows people in power and of ill-will to hurt or marginalize others, consciously or unconsciously. Look for evidence in the readings and in the cultures you live in to make the argument that words are not the problem, but that something else (you name it!) is.

### **Paper Rules:**

Once you’ve begun drafting, make sure you have a chance to look through this list to make sure you have incorporated the skills we have been working on this semester and this unit in particular:

1. Comparison/Contrast—Similarities and Differences: Somewhere in your essay use these skills to make useful points about the differences and similarities between authors.
2. Summary and Quotation: Use summary and quotation, including appropriate signal phrase and author introduction, as you need them. You need to draw on two authors’ works, but you can decide whether quote or summaries work best to advance your central claim.
3. MLA In-text citation and MLA Works Cited list: We have practiced this all semester so do each of these appropriately.
4. Strong introduction and conclusion.
5. A paper of at least three pages length, and easily four or five.
6. Excellence proofreading – use all the worksheets and skills from class, instructor comments, and notes from consultants to produce a well-proofread paper.