

**BUILD A
PERSONAL
RESPONSE TO
TEXT**

THINKING LIKE A
DIPLOMA EXAMINER

BUILD A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO TEXT: THINKING LIKE A DIPLOMA EXAMINER

I. GENERATE A LIST OF THEME WORDS THAT APPLY TO THE GREAT GATSBY:

- i.e. Abandonment, Faith, Loneliness, Failure, Life, Work, etc.*

II. CREATE A DIPLOMA EXAM TOPIC (SEE PAGE 8):

- What do these texts suggest about [insert topic here]? Support your idea(s) with reference to one or more of the texts presented and previous knowledge and/or experience.*

III. SELECT AN EXCERPT FROM THE GREAT GATSBY (SEE PAGES 5-6):

- Must be two pages in length*
- Must clearly make reference to your theme.*

IV. FIND A POEM THAT RELATES TO (FURTHER DEVELOPS) YOUR THEME (SEE PAGE 4):

- Should be no longer than a page in length but may be more than one column long.*
- Must clearly make reference to your theme.*
- Be sure to cite copyright information (source).*

V. DECIDE ON A VISUAL THAT CONNECTS TO (FURTHER AMPLIFIES) YOUR THEME (SEE PAGE 7):

- Should be a photograph or painting rather than a cartoon or comic image.*
- Must clearly make reference to your theme.*
- Be sure to cite copyright information (source).*

VI. WRITE A BRIEF BLURB EXPLAINING / LINKING YOUR THREE SOURCES (SEE PAGE 8):

- One sentence per source to introduce context to your readers.*
- Be sure to address titles correctly.*

VII. WRITE A RATIONALE FOR YOUR SELECTION OF POEM / EXCERPT / VISUAL:

- A paragraph per source.*
- Consider the notions of SAY, MEAN, and MATTER.*

VIII. ANALYZE YOUR POEM:

- Use the instructions from “The Broken Tower” poem activity ([A Streetcar Named Desire](#)) as a guide.*
- Should be no more than a page in length—quality not quantity.*

IX. POLISH! POLISH! POLISH!

- Use past Diploma exams as models for font choices, page layout, and word selections.*
- Be sure to address titles correctly.*
- Cite all sources.*
- Proof-read your response.*
- Total package will be 8 pages in length.*
- Should follow this structure:*

PAGE 1	PAGE 2	PAGE 3	PAGE 4	PAGE 5	PAGE 6	PAGE 7	PAGE 8
COVER PAGE	EXCEPT	EXCEPT	POEM	VISUAL	INSTRUCTIONS	RATIONALE	POEM ANALYSIS

PERSONAL RESPONSE TO TEXTS ASSIGNMENT

Suggested time: approximately 45 to 60 minutes

Carefully read and consider the texts on pages 1 to 4, and then complete the assignment that follows.

THE JACKHAMMER SYNDROME

Once I wanted things so badly
they tended to heat up while I looked at them
glowing cherry red and disappeared
thus it was common on the streets
of my hometown twenty
years ago to hear young ladies utter
cries of dismay as their coiffures started
smoking and they vanished like rainbows
while I stared fixed and lasciviously
They say if you wish hard enough long
enough you'll get what you wish for
I maintain the opposite or nearly
one alternates wanting and not-wanting
at unpredictable intervals which
might be called the jackhammer syndrome
For example
I play pool with my brother-in-law
and nearly always lose at first
until finally I don't give a damn
then start to win
The balls jostle in genetic pairs
drop dead
true in side pockets and caroms click
like new false teeth in orbit with a steak
I play like a blind mathematician
give the ball underspin curves
straight from my draughtsman brain
and realize I'm winning by god winning
fifty mounted horsemen in the red desert
draw swords and swear fealty
my spaceship darts with unerring skill
among excreta of constipated planets

which turn out to be radium in fact
I can do anything
and encounter myself in the past thinking
of hide-and-seek and run-sheep-run
in my old hometown
where the kid was pretty funny
He will not know me now no
one does there
among those dream-circumstances
but patches of emotion hover still
on the streets where I lost all my battles
But I retain the memory of winning
close to my vest as a belly button
which is one advantage of total recall
and totally recall swimming
across a river meeting a girl halfway
along the wet footpath and going
on together to the other
side for an hour doing
nothing dizzily balanced
on the moment managing
to outwit myself carefully
not looking at her
There are moments of such elation
in a man's life it's like being struck
alive on the street by the first
god one meets at an intersection
whom one must believe in a second
time after twenty years of atheism
You press the stomach of your business
suit flat and stride on into the sunset
pretending to be serious

Al Purdy

from THE ORCHID THIEF

John Laroche is a tall guy, skinny as a stick, pale-eyed, slouch-shouldered, and sharply handsome, in spite of the fact that he is missing all his front teeth. He has the posture of al dente spaghetti and the nervous intensity of someone who plays a lot of video games. Laroche is thirty-six years old. Until recently he was employed by the Seminole Tribe of Florida, setting up a plant nursery and an orchid-propagation laboratory on the tribe's reservation in Hollywood, Florida.

Laroche strikes many people as eccentric. The Seminoles, for instance, have two nicknames for him: Troublemaker and Crazy White Man. Once, when Laroche was telling me about his childhood, he remarked, "Boy, I sure was a *weird* little kid." For as long as he can remember he has been exceptionally passionate and driven. When he was about nine or ten, his parents said he could pick out a pet. He decided to get a little turtle. Then he asked for ten more little turtles. Then he decided he wanted to breed the turtles, and then he started selling turtles to other kids, and then he could think of nothing *but* turtles and then decided that his life wasn't worth living unless he could collect one of every single turtle species known to mankind, including one of those sofa-sized tortoises from the Galapagos. Then, out of the blue, he fell out of love with turtles and fell madly in love with Ice Age fossils. He collected them, sold them, declared that he lived for them, then abandoned them for something else—lapidary¹ I think—then he abandoned lapidary and became obsessed with collecting and resilvering old mirrors. Laroche's passions arrived unannounced and ended explosively, like car bombs. When I first met him he lusted only for orchids, especially the wild orchids growing in Florida's Fakahatchee Strand. I spent most of the next two years hanging around with him, and at the end of those two years he had gotten rid of every single orchid he owned and swore that he would never own another orchid for as long as he lived. He is usually true to his word. Years ago, between his Ice Age fossils and his old mirrors, he went through a tropical-fish phase. At its peak, he had more than sixty fish tanks in his house and went skin-diving regularly to collect fish. Then the end came. He didn't gradually lose interest: he renounced fish and vowed he would never again collect them and, for that matter, he would never set foot in the ocean again. That was seventeen years ago. He has lived his whole life only a couple of feet west of the Atlantic, but he has not dipped a toe in it since then.

Laroche tends to sound like a Mr. Encyclopedia, but he did not have a rigorous formal education. He went to public school in North Miami; other than that, he is self-taught. Once in a while he gets wistful about the life he thinks he would have led if he had applied himself more conventionally. He believes he would have probably become a brain surgeon and that he would have made major brain-research breakthroughs and become rich and famous. Instead, he lives in a frayed Florida bungalow with his father and has always scratched out a living in unaverage ways. One of his greatest assets is optimism—that is, he sees a profitable outcome in practically every life situation, including disastrous ones. Years ago he spilled toxic pesticide into a cut on his hand and suffered permanent heart and liver damage from it. In his opinion, it was all for the best because he was able

¹lapidary—the cutting, polishing, or engraving of gemstones

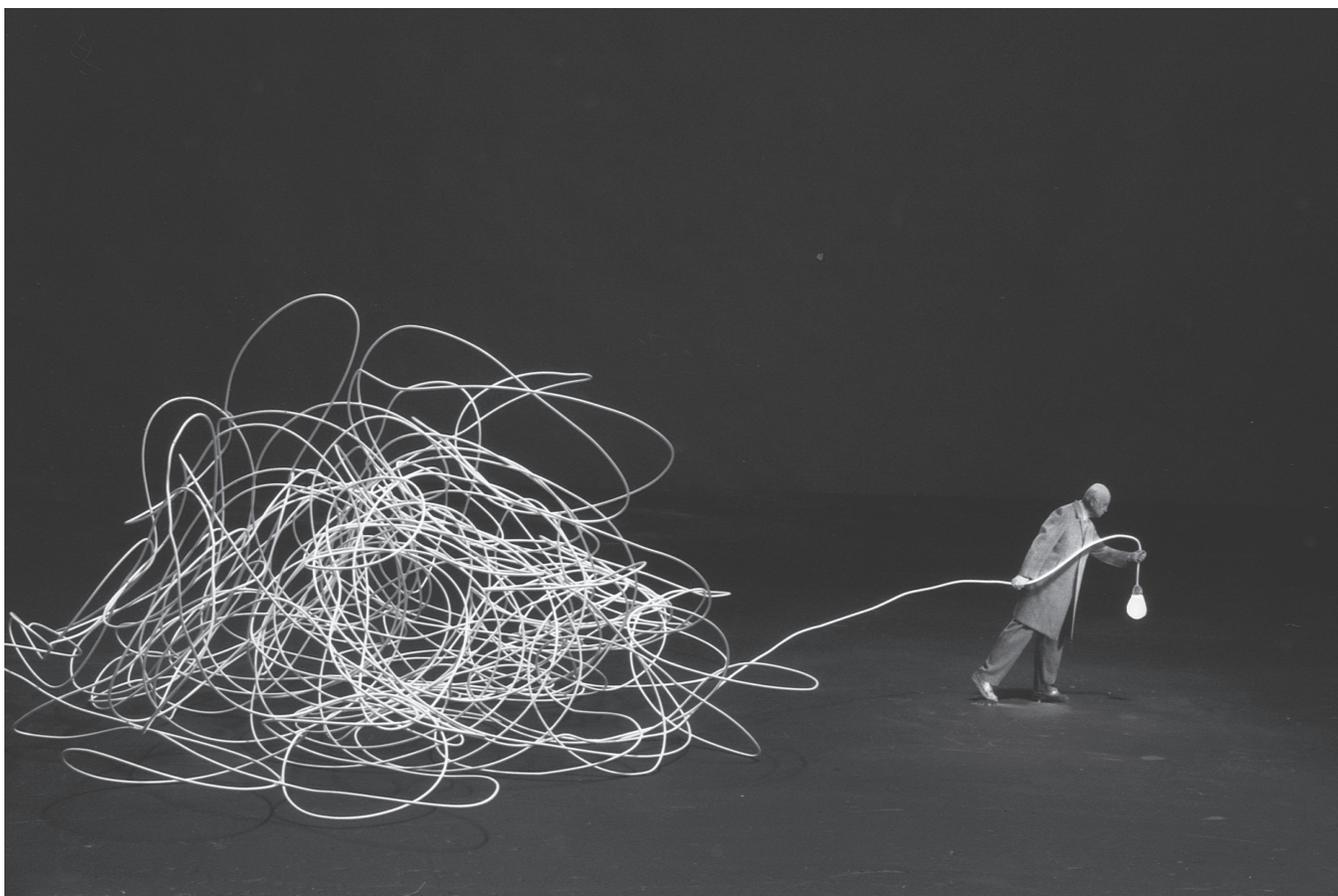
to sell an article about the experience (“Would You Die for Your Plants?”) to a gardening journal. When I first met him, he was working on a guide to growing plants at home. He told me he was going to advertise it in *High Times*, the marijuana magazine. He said the ad wouldn’t mention that marijuana plants grown according to his guide would never mature and therefore never be psychoactive. The guide was one of his all-time favorite projects. The way he saw it, he was going to make lots of money on it (always excellent) *plus* he would be encouraging kids to grow plants (very righteous) *plus* the missing information in the guide would keep these kids from getting stoned because the plants they would grow would be impotent (incalculably noble). This last fact was the aspect of the project he was proudest of, because he believed that once kids who bought the guide realized they’d wasted their money trying to do something illegal—namely, grow and smoke pot—they would also realize, thanks to John Laroche, that crime doesn’t pay. Schemes like these, folding virtue and criminality around profit, are Laroche’s specialty. Just when you have finally concluded that he is a run-of-the-mill crook, he unveils an ulterior and somewhat principled but always lucrative reason for his crookedness. He likes to describe himself as a shrewd bastard. He loves doing things the hard way, especially if it means that he gets to do what he wants to do but also gets to leave everyone else wondering how he managed to get away with it. He is quite an unusual person. He is also the most moral amoral person I’ve ever known.

I met John Laroche for the first time a few years ago, at the Collier County Courthouse in Naples, Florida. I was in Florida at the time because I had read a newspaper article reporting that a white man—Laroche—and three Seminole men had been arrested with rare orchids they had stolen out of a Florida swamp called the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, and I wanted to know more about the incident. The newspaper story was short but alluring. It described the Fakahatchee as a wild swamp near Naples filled with exceptional plants and trees, including some that don’t grow anywhere else in the United States and some that grow nowhere else in the world. All wild orchids are now considered endangered, and it is illegal to take them out of the woods anywhere, and particularly out of a state property like the Fakahatchee. According to the newspaper, Laroche was the ringleader of the poachers. He provided the arresting officers with the proper botanical varietal names for all the stolen plants and explained that the plants were bound for a laboratory where they were going to be cloned by the millions and then sold to orchid collectors around the world....

Sometimes this kind of story turns out to be something more, some glimpse of life that expands like those Japanese paper balls you drop in water and then after a moment they bloom into flowers, and the flower is so marvelous that you can’t believe there was a time when all you saw in front of you was a paper ball and a glass of water.

Susan Orlean

Diogène ou la Lucidité – Diogenes¹ or Lucidity, 2005



© Gilbert Garcin / Courtesy of Stephen Bulger Gallery

¹Diogenes—a famous Cynic philosopher (404–323 BC), who lived with extreme simplicity, acted without shame, valued the power of reason, critiqued living by convention, and is reported to have lit a lamp in the middle of the day and wandered about saying: “I am looking for an honest man.”

PERSONAL RESPONSE TO TEXTS ASSIGNMENT

Suggested time: approximately 45 to 60 minutes

You have been provided with three texts on pages 1 to 4. In “The Jackhammer Syndrome” by Al Purdy, the speaker recalls transcendent moments of elation as he walks about in his business suit. In the excerpt from *The Orchid Thief* by Susan Orlean, Laroche is characterized as an individual who pursues his personal obsessions while maintaining an unconventional code of conduct. In Gilbert Garcin’s *Diogenes or Lucidity*, a man in an overcoat and business suit carries a light bulb.

The Assignment

What do these texts suggest about the conflict between pursuing a personal desire and choosing to conform? Support your idea(s) with reference to one or more of the texts presented and to your previous knowledge and/or experience.

In your writing, you must

- use a prose form
- connect one or more of the texts provided in this examination to your own ideas and impressions