

## Teacher's *Remix* Sample Homework

### Chapter One: Identity

*(list the essays read and write one sentence for each)*

- In Emily White's *High School's Secret Life*, the journalist investigates cliques, which she calls "tribes," because the behavior of sticking with like individuals is a long-honored human trait.
- Queen Latifah's "Who You Callin' Bitch?" offers readers, including African American women, an alternative to Karrine Steffans' gossipy memoir about her time as a "video vixen," which I am sick of hearing about due to its limited approach.
- In Andrew Sullivan's "The 'He' Hormone," women appear reduced to a single aspect of biology: having less testosterone than men. Therefore, simply put, men have more power, meaning among other applications, more power to earn money in a capitalist economy. As a female, I think there is more to say, but I appreciate the discussion.
- Lucy Grealy's "Masks" reveals a complicated look at illness and childhood, where illness is not all bad and childhood is not all good.
- The poem "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" by Gloria Anzaldúa makes me want to learn Spanish, or perhaps invite Jennifer Lopez to recite for students.
- The use of metaphor in Firoozeh Dumas' "The F Word" is fun but not as personal and moving as her reference to the 1970s television show *Charlie's Angels* and its recently deceased star, Farrah Fawcett.

#### Summary

*(write a one paragraph summary of one essay)*

In "the 'F Word'" by Firoozeh Dumas, Americans are asked to open up and accept foreign cultures. The essay is a chapter from the author's memoir *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America*. Back in the 1970s, Dumas moved to northern California with her family. In middle school, she felt the need to simplify and Americanize her name, to make communication easier for the natives, so she complied, as did her siblings eventually. As she matured and passed through college into parenthood, Dumas reversed her earlier decision. She changed her name back to Firoozeh, deciding that she was fine as she was born and that Americans would be better off adapting to a multi-cultural world. In her essay, she uses the metaphor of the "spice cabinet" to equate trying unfamiliar tastes with learning new names and cultures.

#### Analyzing the Text

*(answer one question for the essay summarized)*

In her autobiographical essay, "The 'F Word,'" Firoozeh Dumas addresses the need for flexibility and cultural awareness. After moving to America from Iran in the 1970s with her family, she changed her name to Julie, but eventually she changed it back to her birth name. "I have found that Americans are now far more willing to learn new names, just as they're far more willing to try new ethnic foods," she

adds in 2000 (the year of publication). Decades before, however, trying to find a new name, she turned down the suggestion of “Farrah,” an Iranian name, because she didn’t want to be associated with then teenage heart-throb Farrah Fawcett. Anyone alive at the time, in America and anywhere else the television program had migrated, was well aware of THE Farrah Fawcett poster, photographed in tones of amber, orange and Coppertone. “I didn’t want to be associated with somebody whose poster hung in every postpubescent boy’s bedroom,” Dumas explained.

In America, no one person can ignore the larger culture, and American television largely shapes the nation. (Look at reality television now.) Being Iranian would not have helped Dumas escape comparison to the sexy *Charlie’s Angels* television star had Dumas changed her name as her mom suggested. In middle school, such comparisons could have become cruel and caused the young woman to feel extremely self-conscious. Instead, Dumas yearned for something that would help her blend in quietly, like the short simple name she chose. Dumas wanted to fit in, not stand out, which, ironically, is one American ideal practiced by many that is not often highlighted in the land of the free.

Dumas noted the way Americans like to feel comfortable by taking the easy road: sharing familiar things (television shows), taking short cuts (reducing names like William to Bill) and eating plain foods without foreign spice. She evokes an America out of the past (thankfully) when there were fewer television channels, and everyone watched programs like *Dynasty* and ate mass-produced fast-food a la McDonalds—in short, a more homogenous world. It’s funny the way Americans are known for liberty but often cling to a narrow definition of community that acts more like conformity. Eventually, Dumas changed her name back to her birth name, as she gained confidence in herself and no longer needed to hide. She insinuates that both the writer and her adopted country have grown up, in sense, and learned to be more accepting of diverse individuals, which is a very good development.

### **Rough draft mini-essay**

*(as inspired by the chapter)*

#### **Free the Clowns**

Growing up, I always wanted to be a circus clown. When the Ringling Brothers circus came to town, my grandfather Bob packed us up in his woody station wagon and took all his grandchildren to see the elephants. He’d take us alone, without our parents or Grams, and he let us eat as much junk food as we could stomach, all the pink cotton candy and Good N Plenty we could hold down. Naturally, our annual trip was beloved. My cousin Rick, now a police officer, liked the lions. My brother Tony, who later travelled the world with the army and his wife, even taking a safari to Africa, preferred the high-wire act, but I loved the guy with the big red nose, brightly colored wig and over-sized hobo clothes. Instead of a pink Barbie toy convertible or aqua Suzy Homemaker oven, for Christmas I wanted shoes four times too big. Rather than bell bottoms and halter tops, I was likely to match stripes, polka dots and discordant colors whenever I was allowed to dress myself, which wasn’t often.

What could be better than to make people smile? There’s so much sadness in the world, I considered my choice of profession to be honorable. When I grew up, I would run away and join the circus. My mom and dad supported my fantasy because they didn’t take me seriously. The family would joke about how I would be paid (in funny money) and what kind of children I’d have (born wearing make-up).

Years later, in high school, the first time I saw Cirque du Soleil (the Saltimbanco show), I cried. It was so beautiful, with a whole new take on clowns, clowns that were acrobatic and tragic, more serious and more talented than old fashioned clowns. I was impressed, rightly, as this new circus has now been around for twenty-five enduring years because people need what clowns give. Dreams change like clouds as we mature. I grew up, learned to dress myself (pretty much) and realized I was better suited to accounting than showbiz. Thankfully, the stereotype of the boring accountant is just plain wrong, at least in my case. Every year for Halloween, I pull out my lime green dress with purple polka dots and the rest of the costume I've lovingly gathered over the years, complete with plastic flowers in my hat. Happily, I maintain my alter-ego, Bubbles the Clown, all day, even at work. It's become a tradition that people look forward to in my neighborhood and at the office. I feel great when others enjoy the show.

The world has changed a lot since I was a kid in the 1970s, when *The Brady Bunch* was a first run television show. At this point, I'm fed up by evil depictions of clowns because Bozo and his pals should be used for spreading good will, not fear and sarcasm. I believe in freedom of speech, but I also believe in common sense and good taste. There's never been a better time for a quick smile! Today, in the time of HDTVs and the ability to watch movies huddled alone over thumbnail-size telephone screens, too many kids associate clowns with scary or creepy characters, which is a shame. It's like the last innocent thing has been trampled and defiled. Nothing is left of childhood innocence. Movies like *It*, *Killer Clowns from Outer Space*, *Poltergeist*, and *Shakes the Clown* muddy the image of clowns. I say, free the clowns! It's important for children to laugh and not automatically distrust unfamiliar adults. Clowns, like other actors, allow audiences to laugh (and cry) at themselves, which is so valuable in world brimming with stress. Traditional clowns may seem quaint, but they represent the finest tradition of theater and offer catharsis, which isn't just child's play. Scary movies avoid real life. Clowns, ironically, embrace it.