**Second Semester Writing Pre-Assessment**

This semester we will continue to examine “power” and various themes in literature and poetry around that topic.

Like *Lord of the Flies*, the following stories are “Coming of Age” tales, but nonfiction, told as first-person biographies.

**Directions:**

*Read each story*. Using evidence from the stories and your own prior knowledge and experience, write the first two parts of a Five Paragraph Essay (so write two paragraphs) answering this question:

**What does “power” look like in high school?**

1. Paragraph #1 should be an Introduction Paragraph to your Essay with a *Thesis Statement*.\*
2. Paragraph #2 should be a Body Paragraph with a Topic Sentence/Claim + and Three Pieces of Evidence (quotes or paraphrase from the story or evidence from prior knowledge or experience – so just like the power paragraph you wrote for you final).

\*Thesis Sentence Frames: You may use the following sentence frames to help you with your thesis statement (which should be the last sentence of your Introduction (First) Paragraph):

High school students may think they have power, but they really do not because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Some people in high school have power while others do not because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

High school is a really difficult time for people who lack power because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

+ Topic Sentence Frames/Claim: You may use the following sentence frames to help you with topic sentence (which should be the first sentence of your Body (second) Paragraph) – ideally this also matches the first reason of your thesis:

High school students think they are powerful but they really are not because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Although some people in high school hold power, others do not because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

High school is tough for those people who lack power because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

You do not have to use the above frames and you may come up with your own if you want to use your own ideas about power and high school after reading the following stories:

**The Right Words At The Right** **Time** by John Leguizamo

I was a nerd in junior high. A really bad nerd. I was especially out of touch. When you’re a poor kid at a poor school, you worry a lot about how you look all the time, how much money you’re spending on clothes and all that. I had problems, man. I wore high waters. And my shoes? Forget about it. I had fake sneakers—you know, the kind your mother finds in those big wire bins.

“Hey, John, here’s one I like! Go find the one that matches!”

“I found it, Ma, but it’s only a three and a half.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll cut out the toes.”

So there I am, pants too high, sneakers too tight, underwear without leg holes. I was the Quasimodo of Jackson Heights. Then it hits me: this is no way to get girls. So I had my mission then: become cool.

I totally changed. I hung out with the gangsters. Cut class. By the time I got to high school, I was getting in trouble all the time.

What I loved most was cracking jokes in school. I liked keeping the kids laughing. Even the teachers laughed sometimes, which was the best part. See, I was still so out of it in a way—too cool to hang with the nerds, not cool enough to be with the real cool guys—I figured my only value was to be funny. I enjoyed people enjoying me.

Anyway, one day during my junior year, I was walking down the hallway, making jokes as usual, when Mr. Zufa, my math teacher, pulled me aside. I got collared by the teachers all the time, so I didn’t think much about it. Mr. Zufa looked at me and started talking.

“Listen,” he says, “instead of being so obnoxious all the time— instead of wasting all that energy in class—why don’t you rechannel your hostility and humor into something productive? Have you ever thought about being a comedian?”

I didn’t talk back to Mr. Zufa like I usually would have. I was quiet. I probably said something like, “Yeah, cool, man,” but for the rest of the day, I couldn’t get what he said out of my head.

It started to hit me, like, “Wow, I’m going to be a loser all my life.” And I really didn’t want to be a loser. I wanted to be somebody.

But that one moment Mr. Zufa collared me was the turning point in my life. Everything kind of converged, you know?

The planets aligned. But the big change didn’t happen overnight. Eventually, I got into New

York University, where I did student films. One of the movies won a Spielberg Focus Award, and suddenly my life changed.

I got an agent and wound up as a guest villain on Miami Vice. That started my career.

I’ve run into Mr. Zufa a bunch of times since high school and told him how his advice turned my life around. And I’m not just saying that. Here’s a guy who was able to look beneath all the stuff I pulled in class and find some kind of merit in it, something worth pursuing. How cool is that?

*John Leguizamo is an American actor, comedian, voice actor, producer and screenwriter.*

**Showdown with Big Eva** by Laila Ali

I saw my sophomore year as a new beginning. I was looking forward to going to a new high school and was happy to be starting out fresh. I even got a new hairdo, a short cut that made me feel more mature. It was a clean look; I was looking for a clean start.

My older sister, Hana, and my best friend, Mice, had been going to Hamilton High, where they seemed to be having fun. I knew there were cliques, but I figured I'd find my own place.

I was at Alice's house a month before school started when I felt the first twinge of trouble. She was on the phone with a girl reputed to be the roughest sister at Hamilton. For some reason this girl had attitude about me and was talking mess. She was telling Alice how she had every intention of kicking my butt. "If she's talking about me," I said, "let her say it to me."

I got on the phone.

"I hear you think you're all that," said the girl I'll call Big Eva.

"I don't think anything."

"Well, don't think you can just stroll over to Hamilton and be cool. Because you can't. I don't want you there. If you show up that first day, I'll whup you."

"Tell you what," I said, "not only will I show up that first day, but I'll personally come over and introduce myself to you. That way you don't have to go looking for me."

"You don't know who you talking to."

"I ain't talking to anyone." And with that, I hung the phone up in her ear.

When the first day of school came around, I was ready. Because Hana had preceded me at Hamilton, no one quite knew what to make of me. Hana was sweet; I was fire. Hana was friendly; I was reserved. I gave off a don't-mess-with-me vibe. And I wasn't interested in joining any clique. I've always gone my own way. Mice and Hana were my only friends--and that was enough. In fact, I was with Alice and Hana when I had my first "encounter." We were heading toward the school's main entrance.

A group of seven or eight tough-looking girls were hanging out on the steps. They all had attitudes. The biggest among them had a deep cut across her face. I wouldn't call her pretty.

"That's Big Eva," whispered Mice. I had figured as much.

I walked over to Big Eva and stood right in front of her, toe-to-toe.

"I'm Laila."

Big Eva started roiling her neck, chewing gum and scowling like she wanted to fight. I still didn't know why and I didn't care. I wasn't budging.

"I told you I'd introduce myself," I said. "So here I am."

"Girl," she said, "you don't know who you're messing with."

Her girls closed ranks and started moving in on me. I still didn't budge. That's when the bell rang.

"After school," said Big Eva. "I'll be looking for you."

"I'll save you the trouble. I'll meet you right here."

Word got out. The whole school was buzzing with anticipation. Big Eva, who wouldn't back down, and Laila Ali, who wouldn't be intimidated, were going head-to-head.

When the final bell rang at 3:30, I was back on the steps, waiting for Big Eva, with a crowd gathering round. Everyone wanted action, and I was ready for whatever. When Eva didn't show up, I was half-relieved, half-disappointed. I started walking to Taco Bell, and a large group walked with me. After a few steps, I looked across the street and saw Big Eva and her girls, heading for the same place. A large group also trailed them. It was a scene straight out of Grease.

When we got to Taco Bell, I ordered, then found a seat on one side of the restaurant. Eva's gang sat on the other. I wasn't sure what she wanted to do, but I was going to let her make the first move because she was the one who had the problem with me.

Hana, Alice and I sat there for a good half hour. By then the place was packed with Hamilton students waiting for a brawl. I felt a hundred eyes on me, but I just sat and ate my taco. When I was finished, I got up, slowly walked past Eva's table and, without saying a word, dumped my garbage in the trash. Eva kept rolling her neck, but she never made a move. Nothing happened--until the next day.

I was in the girls' room when Big Eva showed up.

"You're all show and no go," she said. "Fine," I said. "Let's go."

She shoved me hard. I shoved her back harder. And just as we were about to get cracking, a teacher walked through the door. A few seconds later we were sitting in the principal's office.

The principal started a long speech about the futility of fighting. I interrupted her.

"Look," I said directly to Big Eva, "I'm not interested in fighting. I never was. I just wasn't about to be bullied. What makes you think you can go around here bullying everybody?"

I expected Eva to start talking more mess. Instead, something amazing happened. Big Eva started crying. I mean, big tears. Maybe it was because the door was closed and we were alone in that office; maybe because she'd been holding it in so long; or maybe because she sensed that I wasn't really angry at her. Whatever the reason, in between tears she let loose all the reasons she'd been acting the bully. All her tears and fears came spilling out--how she hated being overweight, how she felt ugly inside, how she never got any attention at home, how the only way she beat back bad feelings was by intimidating others, how deep down she really hated herself and the ugly front she had created to scare off the world.

I was shocked by Big Eva's gut-honest revelations. And moved--so moved that I shed a few tears myself. I knew she was being honest; I could feel all the hurt this girl had suffered. I even put my arms around her and let her cry in my arms--both of us sobbing. Two girls who 20 minutes earlier had been ready to throw down were now acting like long-lost sisters. It was crazy, but in its own way, it was beautiful.

I'm not saying Big Eva reformed and joined the Girl Scouts, but the chip was off her shoulder. From that day on, Big Eva and I were cool.

*Laila Ali is the daughter of fighter Muhammad Ali and is herself a professional boxer.*