

The Value of Life

Writing Assignment

The essay will be written in class on Wednesday, November 20. You may use the texts, all of your annotations, and any pre-writing you wish to complete on the reverse side of this prompt.

We have heard a number of different voices giving insights into the value of life. Hamlet's soliloquy offers an emotional, metaphor-laden glimpse into the thinking of a young man contemplating suicide. Chris Jones's interview with Roger Ebert uses first-hand observations and excerpts from Ebert's blog and movie reviews to convey how the film critic thinks about life. Amanda Ripley's article from *Time* magazine provides insight into the problems involved in translating the concept of valuing life from abstract terms into actual dollars and cents. A Human Life Value Calculator establishes specific criteria for assigning monetary value to a person's life. Feinberg's text and Steven Jobs' commencement speech add nuance and depth to this discussion.

You might not fully agree or disagree with any of the texts' essential claims about the value of life. This makes your voice an important contribution to this discussion about how we should value human life. Where do your ideas fit into the terrain mapped by the texts we have read? Is it right to assign dollar values to a person's life? Do suffering and illness impact how we should value life? Assume that the audience for your piece consists of intelligent citizens interested in this issue—the same types of people, for instance, who would read *Time* magazine.

As you write your essay, think about the different ways the authors we have read make their points about valuing life. Depending on the points you are trying to make, you might want to use some metaphors for life, as Hamlet does, or share observations and anecdotes the way Chris Jones does. On the other hand, you may choose to include some words from people you interview, as Ripley does in her article, or you might even decide to establish some criteria for how human life should be calculated in monetary terms. As you construct your essay, make conscious choices about the ways you can represent your ideas to your reader about how society should assign value to human life.

Be sure to refer to and cite the readings. Do not merely summarize. You may also use examples from your personal experience or observations.