

ESL M12/912: Academic Reading and Writing II

Reading

In this class, we read the young readers' edition of the novel, [*Dear America: The Story of an Undocumented Citizen*](#) by Jose Antonio Vargas.

Writing

Here is a sample of the kind of writing assignment you can expect in this class. If you can write this type of essay easily, go to the next higher class. Remember, you will have a tutor and teacher working with you.

ESL M12/912 Writing Prompt:

You will write a **2-paragraph Response Essay** expressing your opinion on ONE (1) of the following topics. Your opinion must be supported with quotes from the book and/or personal experience (anecdotes).

1. Vargas decides to distance himself from his biological family and become closer to the adults in his school. Do you think he made the right choice? Explain.
2. Vargas decides to tell everyone that he is gay because he does not want to live a lie. In other words, he is more public about his sexual orientation than his immigration status. Do you agree with his decision to “come out” gay publicly?
3. **Vargas eventually tells everyone that he is undocumented even though his lawyers tell him that this will affect his chances at getting citizenship. Did he make the right choice?**
4. Vargas travels to Washington DC twice even though it is risky. Do you think he made the right decision?
5. At the end of the book, Vargas explains that people can be citizens even if they do not have official paperwork. Do you agree with Vargas' definition of the word “citizen”?

Student Model:

Vargas Should not Tell People He is Undocumented

Vargas tells everyone that he is undocumented even though his lawyers advise him not to. I disagree with Vargas' choice because this decision impacted his chances of getting a greencard and it put his life in danger. First, Vargas' immigration case became too complicated because he was public about his undocumented status. For example, Vargas' lawyers ask him, “Jose, are you going to print that you've done things that are ‘unlawful’ in the New York Times...Jose, the moment you publish that, we cannot help you” (81). Even though his lawyers did not agree with his choice, Vargas published the essay. This means that he will have a harder time getting a greencard. Another example is from my personal life: when I was growing up, many of my family members were

undocumented. They always told me, “Never answer any questions about immigration because they might come to the house and ask for our papers.” From a young age, I knew that being quiet was safer for undocumented people. If anyone from the government knew about my family’s undocumented status, my family members might lose their jobs and have a harder time getting greencards later. These two examples show that it would have been better for Vargas to keep his immigration status a secret.

Second, Vargas’ essay puts his life in danger. After the essay is published in the newspaper, many people start saying negative comments to him. To illustrate, he explains how one man grabbed his shoulder and said, “I didn’t know illegals fly first class” (88). Vargas explains that he felt “violated” and “mad” (88). Even though Vargas is a large man, he still feels violated when the white man grabs him. This example shows that many people could hurt Vargas because they disagree with his opinions on undocumented immigration. Additionally, Vargas explains that tensions about immigration started to increase after Donald Trump became president. His lawyer friends advised him to “prepare for the worst-case scenario: not only getting detained, but also getting deported” (124). Vargas even states, “...it wasn’t safe” (125). Because many people know about his undocumented status, Vargas could be the target of detention or deportation. His life in the US becomes more difficult because he cannot even have a permanent address. His apartment manager advises him to move out because he cannot protect Vargas if immigration officials come to arrest him (123). Vargas did not make the right decision when he told the world that he was undocumented. This decision affected his opportunities of getting a greencard and made his life dangerous. Because of his actions, I predict that Jose Antonio Vargas will remain undocumented for a long time.