

You will need to carefully read the selection below and complete various activities using the essay as your basis.

Using the highlight function on your computer, you will need to mark the essay below. It will be necessary for you to read the essay several times to fully *understand* the essay and complete the markings in such a way that demonstrates a close reading of the essay. You will need to use the following chart to correctly mark the essay.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Highlight Color | Item to be identified | Use an X to indicate you have accomplished this task. Use NA if this task did not apply to this essay. |
| PINK | Mark the main idea of the essay. |  |
| AQUA | Mark key examples/ support for the main idea/ theme of the essay. |  |
| GREEN | Mark statements that you agree with . |  |
| YELLOW | Mark statements that are new to you or make you think in a new way. |  |
| RED | Mark statements in the essay that you disagree with. |  |
| GRAY | Mark terms/ concepts that you found difficult to understand. |  |

The time I began reading and marking this assignment was:

When my students ask me why I live in a tiny house, they ask it in light of all the “sacrifices” I am making. They know that I have given away most of my possessions and moved from a large apartment in the city to a 128 square foot custom-built home on wheels in the backyard woods of dear friends. They know I forego running water, internet connection, sewage, and reliable phone reception. I am often surprised to find myself stumbling over my answer, as if defending what I assume to be a perfectly logical decision. Doesn’t everyone want to live more simply, or at least can understand my own deep attraction to it, I think? But alas, in the wise words of Monty Python, “we are all individuals (I’m not!)”.

When I lived in rural Africa, I recognized some jarring facts. Too many to list here. But four that connect to the pertinent question:

1. It was possible to be happy, genuinely happy, while living with fewer material possessions.

2. My body responded well, in health, fitness and mood, to following a schedule more aligned with the natural day and night cycle.

3. Pardon the cliché but the most valuable possessions were not material possessions at all. Observing the daily sunset, hosting friends for days at a time, reading and journaling and letter writing and exploring natural wonders in my spare time all were free and invaluable experiences.

4. I had often confused necessities with luxuries and only when living without them did I realize, sometimes surprisingly, that they were not necessities afterall. Television, electricity, running water and toilet, a telephone and computer, a vehicle…I couldn’t escape the reality that they were all wonderful luxuries and not, by definition, necessary for my survival.

What was necessary to my survival proved to be a rather short list. Healthy food, clean and potable water, heat source, weather-protecting shelter, weather-appropriate clothing, and equally important, friends and intellectual and physical stimulations.

When I returned to life in the US, I couldn’t help but sense a deep, uneasy conviction that life was suddenly, for lack of a better word, plastic. Not plastic in the malleable sense, so much as in the synthetic, phony sense. I felt disconnected…from the earth, from others, from my food source and my waste disposal, from the natural cycle of my body and the earth, and from the productive pursuits I once cherished but now found myself “too busy” to enjoy. How was it that I was now earning literally 40 times my Peace Corps salary and was less healthy, satisfied and deliberate in my daily schedule? I found myself asking, what is it to be rich anyway?

In short, I was not living deliberately here. I was following a social script written and directed by forces outside my control. It felt inauthentic, arbitrary and meaningless.

So, last August I took the plunge…I let go of most of my possessions and moved into a tiny house on wheels because I wanted to see if I could, in the US, live a more deliberate lifestyle reminiscent of my lifestyle in Africa. And so far, several months into it, so good. No inconvenience, all minor to begin with, has offset the multiple positive benefits that continue to come from this change in lifestyle. At least in this time in my life, I believe that I have made the right decision.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Your response should be self-contained. When someone reads your responses, they should be able to tell which question you are responding to.  In marking the essay you should be clear in what idea and item you are reacting to. The markings should indicate a close and personal reading of the essay. Excessive markings or lack of markings may indicate a failure to have closely read and comprehended the essay. |  |
| Based on your reading and marking of the essay identify the main idea of the essay as well as support including direct quotations and evidence from the essay. Your response should be limited to no more than one (1) well written and adequately edited paragraph. |  |
| Using at least two (2) of the writing prompts below and in no more than three (3) well written and adequately edited paragraphs create a response to the essay:   * The part (s) of the essay I agreed with were * The part (s) of the essay I disagreed with were * This essay reminded me of/ made me think of * This essay made me think in a new way * This essay was similar to another essay |  |
| What question (s) would you like to ask the author of this essay? Explain your reasoning for wanting to have the answer to this question. |  |
| Having now read this essay I… |  |
| **Presenters Only:** You will need to have three (3) questions that you would like to present to your classmates during your seminar. |  |

The time I completed reading and marking this assignment was: