Research Essay Assignment

In the opening pages of The Scarlet Letter, Nathaniel Hawthorne introduces Hester’s story as “a tale of human frailty and sorrow.” Hester endured a public shaming due to her scandal, suffered a punishment, and faced ridicule and alienation for much of her adult life. As a reader, it is important to identify connections in literature to people and events from modern times.

Directions: Research a contemporary public figure who, much like Hester, has endured a scandal, received a punishment, and faced public scorn and ridicule. Write a thesis-driven compare and contrast research essay that highlights both the similarities and differences between Hester’s experience and that of the selected public figure. Time will be spent in the library so that compare and contrast points may be validated.

Essay Requirements:

1. Length – Four pages (minimum), double-spaced, 12-point font, MLA formatting

2. References to the text – at least 10 specific references to the novel.

3. References to the online and print sources – at least four sources represented through use of quotations that indicate a thorough reading of each document. A minimum of two of the four sources must be print or from Infotrac. Reliable online sources include: CNN.com, Boston.com, and NYTTimes.com. Unreliable online sources include (but are not limited to): PerezHilton.com, TMZ.com, and UsWeekly.com.

4. Organization, Style, and Grammar – formal tone and advanced diction (word choice) is expected, edit for grammar and spelling errors.

5. Works Cited Page – use the Purdue OWL website for assistance (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/).

Due Dates:
Topic selection -
Outline -
Rough Draft -
Final Draft -
Suggested Public Figures

Rob Ford – suspected of alcohol and drug abuse
Edward Snowden – treason
Alex Rodriguez – violation of MLB banned substance rules
Bob Filner – sexual harassment
Aaron Hernandez – accused of murder
Oscar Pistorius – accused of murder
Jerry Sandusky – sexual abuse
John Edwards – infidelity
Pete Rose - gambling
OJ Simpson – accused of murder
Bernie Madoff – ponzi scheme
Charlie Sheen – alcohol and drug abuse
Anthony Weiner – infidelity, inappropriate texting
Arnold Schwarzenegger – infidelity
Barry Bonds – steroid use
David Petraeus – infidelity
Richard Nixon – Watergate break-in and cover-up
Tiger Woods – infidelity and drug abuse
Michael Vick – dog fighting and illegal gambling
Lance Armstrong – doping
Bill Clinton – infidelity

You may also choose your own. Keep in mind that no two students may choose the same public figure from the same class.

Helpful hints:

1. To compare is to prove that similarities exist between two people while to contrast is to prove that differences are present. Be sure the similarities and differences that are analyzed are substantial and significant. Look for similarities between Hester and the selected public figure’s circumstances. They do not have to be a perfect match.

2. Keep in mind that the obvious facts need not be mentioned (ex. they are both females, one is alive and the other lived 400 years ago, etc.).

3. The majority of the essay will likely feature the comparisons between the two individuals while a minor portion may be used to explain the differences.

4. Be sure to consider how the comments from the 17th century citizens (Puritans) compare with the responses from the general public in modern times.

5. Cite sources and page numbers at the end of every sentence if the information collected is not common knowledge.

6. Introduce each expert source through embedding.

For example:
This essay is an example to use as a reference. Notice the heading at the top left of the page. Everything should be double spaced with no extra spaces between the date, the title, or the first line of the essay. Notice the original title and not the title of the novel. Also, keep in mind that the entire essay should be typed in Times New Roman 12 font.

All quotations should be formatted correctly. This means that every quotation should have an introduction - no quotation can stand alone as a sentence! For example, Steinbeck writes, "blah, blah, blah" (Steinbeck 5). A paragraph should also never end with a quotation. Instead, all quotations should be followed by analysis. A few other rules to follow include: no personal pronouns in formal writing (me, you, us, I, etc.) and no contractions in formal writing (can't, don't, it's, etc.).