**In groups, rank the titles, intros, and conclusions from 1 (most effective) to 5 (least**

**effective). Be prepared to discuss why you gave a 1 or a 5.**

**Titles**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Multitasking State of Mind**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_High-School Confidential: Notes on Teen Movies**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Movie Fantasy vs. Classroom Reality**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_The Shock of Education: How College Corrupts**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_The Classroom and the Wider Culture: Identity as Key to Learning English**

**Composition**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_American Dreams**

**Introductions**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *Professor,*

*I did not turn in my final assignments. I would really like to do so….I am wondering if you have already turned in my grade, and if not will you tell me what my grade is before you turn it in. I need to graduate next semester…and I can’t get a D or F. I would rather get a W and take the class again. Please let me know.*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_The most hated young woman in America is a blonde – well, sometimes a

redhead or a brunette, but usually a blonde. She has big hair flipped to a swirl of gold at one side of her face or arrayed in a sultry mane, like the magnificent pile of a forties movie star.

She’s tall and slender, with a waist as supple as a willow, but she’s dressed in awful, spangled taste: her outfits could have been put together by warring catalogues. And she has a mouth on her, a low, slatternly tongue that devastates other kids with such insults as “You’re vapor, you’re Spam!” and “Do I look like Mother Teresa? If I did, I probably wouldn’t mind talking to the geek squad.” She has two or three friends exactly like her, and together they dominate their realm – the American high school as it appears in recent teen movies. They are like wicked princesses, who enjoy the misery of their subjects. Her coronation, of course, is the senior prom, when she expects to be voted “most popular” by her class. But, though she may be popular, she is certainly not liked, so her power is something of a mystery. She is beautiful and rich, yet in the end she is preeminent because…she is preeminent, a position she works to maintain with Joan Crawford-like tenacity. Everyone is afraid of her; that’s why she’s popular.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_In the past year or so, I have seen Matthew Perry drink 30 cartons of milk,

Ted Danson explain the difference between a rook and a pawn, and Hilary Swank remind us that white teachers still can’t dance or jive talk. In other words, I have been confronted by distorted images of my own profession – teaching. Teaching the post-desegregation urban poor, to be precise.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ College is where the Great Change begins. People start to question

the blue-collar take on the world. Status dissonance, the sociologist call it. Questions arise: Are the guys accurate in saying people from such-and-such a race are really so bad? Was Mom right when she said nice girls don’t put out? Suddenly, college opens up a world of ideas—a life of the mind –abstract and intangible. The core blue-collar values and goals – loyalty to family and friends, making money, marrying, and procreating – are supplanted by stuff you never talked about at home: personal fulfillment, societal obligation, the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge’s sake, and on and on. One world opens and widens; another shrinks.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_One day in June 1975, when I walked into the aircraft factory where I was

Working as an electrician, I saw many large-letter posters on the walls and many people parading around the workshops shouting slogans like “Down with the word ‘I’!” and “Trust in masses and the Party!” I then remembered that a new political campaign called “Against Individualism” was scheduled to begin that day. Ten years later, I got back my first English composition paper at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The professor’s first comments were: “Why did you always use ‘we’ instead of ‘I’?” and “your paper would be stronger if you eliminated some sentences in the passive voice.” The clashes between my Chinese background and the requirements of English composition had begun. At the center of this mental struggle, which has lasted several years and is still not completely over, is the prolonged, uphill battle to recapture “myself.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_When I was little, I honestly thought I would grow up to be the president. After all, I lived in a land of opportunity where anyone, with enough determination and hard work, could aspire to the highest office in the land. I planned to live out the American Dream.

**Conclusions**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_It is very important to have space in the mind. If the mind is not overcrowded, not ceaselessly occupied, then it can listen to that dog barking, to the sound of the train crossing the distant bridge, and also be fully aware of what is being said by a person talking here. Then the mind is a living thing, it is not dead.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_But enough. It’s possible to make teen movies that go beyond these fixed polarities – insider and outsider, blond-bitch queen and hunch-shouldered nerd. In Amy Heckerling’s 1995 comedy *Clueless*, the big blonde played by Alicia Silverstone is a Rodeo Drive clotheshorse who is nonetheless possessed of extraordinary virtue. Freely dispensing advice and help, she’s almost ironically good – a designing goddess with a cell phone. The movie offers a sun-shiny satire of Beverly Hills affluence, which it sees as both absurdly swollen and generous in spirit. The most original of the teen movies, *Clueless* casts away self-pity. So does *Romy* and *Michele’s High School Reunion* (1997), in which two gabby, lovable friends, played by Mira Sorvino and Lisa Kudrow, review the banalities of their high-school experience so knowingly that they might be criticizing the teen-movie genre itself. And easily the best American film of the year so far is Alexander Payne’s *Election*, a high-school movie that inhabits a different aesthetic and moral world altogether from the rest of these pictures. *Election* shreds everyone’s fantasies and illusions in a vision of high school that is bleak but supremely just. The movie’s villain, an over-achieving girl (Reese Witherspoon) who runs for class president, turns out to be its covert heroine, or, at least, its most poignant character. Across between Pat and Dick Nixon, she’s a lower-middle-class striver who works like crazy and never wins anyone’s love. Even when she’s on top, she feels excluded. Her loneliness is produced not by malicious cliques but by her own implacable will, a condition of the spirit that may be as comical and tragic as it is mysterious. *Election* escapes all the clichés; it graduates into art.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Every day teachers are blamed for what the system they’re just a part of doesn’t provide: safe, adequately staffed schools with the highest expectations for all students. But that’s not something one maverick teacher, no matter how idealistic, perky, or self-sacrificing, can accomplish.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”That was really the end of it,” Loretta says. “I couldn’t have a guy around who was going to act like that. He was wild and crazy and I was trying to make my way.” Barry relented, and left Loretta alone. They lost touch, and Loretta later learned that Barry had died, the cause of death unknown to her. It was such a shock….

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Carolyn Matalene mentioned in her article (789) an incident concerning American businessmen who presented their Chinese hosts with gifts of cheddar cheese, not knowing that the Chinese generally do not like cheese. Liking cheddar cheese may not be essential to writing English prose, but being truly accustomed to the social norms that stand behind ideas such as the English “I” and the logical pattern of English composition – call it “compositional cheddar cheese”—is essential to writing in English. Matalene does not provide an “elixir” to help her Chinese students like English “compositional cheese,” but rather recommends, as do I, that composition teachers not be afraid to give foreign students English “cheese,” but to make sure to hand it out slowly, sympathetically, and fully realizing that it tastes very peculiar in the mouths of those used to a very different cuisine.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_By coming out as a gay man and demanding my freedom, I realize that I have done the most American thing of all. And while I have come a long way since the days when I dreamed of living in the White House, I have discovered that what I’m fighting for now is the very thing I thought I’d be fighting for if I ever became President – “liberty and justice for all.”