**Whistleblowers: Traitors or Patriots?**

**Subject area/course:** English/Language Arts, Composition 2

**Grade level/band**: 11–12

**INSTRUCTOR PROCEDURES**

1. **Task overview**:

In this task, students demonstrate their ability to conduct research and use the results of their research to support their own ideas in an argumentative essay. Students will research the revelations made by a whistleblower of their choice (such as Edward Snowden) and consider the effects that those revelations have had on governments or companies. Ultimately, students will write a 5- to 6-page paper about whether the whistleblower should be treated as a traitor or a patriot.

1. **Prior knowledge required:**

Students should be able to:

* Differentiate between facts and opinions.
* Plan, organize, and write informational and argumentative essays.
* Conduct basic web searches.
* Use the library resources available to them at their institution.
* Use an MLA handbook as a guide for correctly formatting in-text references and a Works Cited page.

1. **Common Core State Standards aligned to this task**:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RI/11-12/1/) Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RI/11-12/2/) Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RI/11-12/3/) Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RI/11-12/4/) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RI/11-12/6/) Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/1/) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/2/) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/4/) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.5](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/5/) Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/7/) Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/8/) Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/9/) Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

1. **Time requirements**:

This assignment should take approximately two weeks. During that time, one or more class periods may be devoted to each of the following tasks:

* Individual brainstorming and research planning
* In-class research
* In-class writing
* In-class proofreading and editing

1. **Instructor materials to use during administration**:

No specialized materials will be necessary for this task. The material is covered in every college-level writing handbook and can also be accessed at the Purdue Online Writing Lab (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/)

1. **Instructor procedures during administration**:

One of the interesting aspects of this task is that it asks students to think about a topic—privacy, health, politics—which they may feel they know and understand but that they may not have actually studied in depth. One interesting way to begin the unit is to have the class take a short survey about their perceptions of privacy, leading to a discussion of Edward Snowden’s revelations about the U.S. government. Such a survey might ask questions like these:

1. How much privacy do you feel you have online and/or in general? Why/Why not?
2. How often do you think about your privacy? Why/Why not?
3. How do you feel about the current situation as regards your privacy online?
4. Are you satisfied with your level of privacy?
5. Do you find it acceptable to surrender some of your privacy in the name of security?
6. Are your generation’s feelings and expectations the same as, or different from, older (and perhaps younger) generations?
7. What are the origins of our attitudes and feelings about privacy?
8. What part of the Constitution protects privacy rights?

The results of this obviously informal survey should provide an easy transition into a discussion of Edward Snowden and the issues that his story has revealed (and also reveal that students don’t know as much about privacy as they thought).

As another option, you could start the discussion by having students read the January 1, 2014 New York Times editorial (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/02/opinion/edward-snowden-whistle-blower.html?_r=0>) that called for Snowden to be treated as a whistleblower. The article is polarizing and provides enough background to bring even those with no prior knowledge into the debate.

**Teaching the Task:**

* Explain that the topic of an informant’s motives is a broad one, and that each student will have to narrow the research focus to create an argument about one specific part of the problem. Learning how to isolate one part of a broad topic is a critical skill that students need to develop for college-level work.
* Explain that students need to first establish a general understanding of the topic in order to craft an effective argument about it.
* Establish research parameters and make sure that students have the ability to find adequate resources.
  + Determine if students will be allowed to use sources like Wikipedia or about.com.
  + Explain that students should use at least four sources for an essay of this length.
* During the process of writing this paper, instructors may want to check student progress at several points. It is often helpful to check students’ prospective thesis statements near the beginning of the project, briefly evaluate the type of sources the students are using near the middle of the project, and require that a rough draft be complete at a date before the final draft is due.
* After students have written their papers, reserve one class period for a class discussion on the topic.
  + If the class is small, consider having students give short presentations in which they explain their theses and briefly explain how they supported them.
  + If students can be grouped according to the positions they took on the issue, consider having the students present their ideas in a class debate.

1. **Student support:**

The following suggestions are examples of scaffolding that can be used to meet the diverse student needs within the classroom.

* Provide class time for research on students’ topics.
* Provide definitions of new vocabulary words ahead of time.
* For the final product, all learners will benefit from peer assistance while brainstorming their topics, as well as a peer- or teacher-edit of their papers before final submission.
* Some students will have good research skills, but some will need guidance in the determination of appropriate sources and where to look for them. It is important to spend class time in review of what constitutes an appropriate source in advance of students’ independent work time.

1. **Extensions or variations:**

* Students could present the results of their research to the class via an oral or multimedia presentation.
* A debate could be organized where students discuss their views on various individuals and the impact they have had on the United States, both positive and negative. Students should provide examples from their research and personal experiences.

1. **Scoring and assessment considerations:**

EPIC developed the *College and Career Ready (CCR) Task Bank Scoring Rubric* to accompany this task. If your school or department uses a standardized rubric that would fit the content and requirements of this task, you may choose to use your existing rubric. The following notes and suggestions are meant to clarify the intent of the rubric and include considerations for the assessment of student work.

* When assigning the task, provide students with the rubric that will be used to score their final product and discuss it as a class.
* Unlike some rubrics, the *CCR Task Bank Rubric* does not predetermine “point values” for the scoring criteria. The rubric thus allows for flexibility with different instructors’ scoring systems and individual determination of the “weight” of each criterion.
* Student work that scores at the *Accomplished* level is considered to be entry-level college work.
* The *Exceeds* category on the rubric provides an example of how a student can go above and beyond the *Accomplished* level. These examples are intended to be only ONE way a work product can exceed expectations, thus allowing room for your professional judgment.
* If needed, consider including task-specific criteria as an additional scoring category to the rubric or providing a checklist of requirements for the task.