

ECLA ADMISSIONS ESSAY QUESTIONS 2010-11

1. Tell us why you are applying to ECLA. (200-300 words.)
2. Write two essays. Choose one from Column A and one from Column B. (Between 300-600 words each) (The aim of these essay questions is not to test for "correct answers." We believe that there are many possible thoughtful and interesting answers to all of these questions. We would like to get a sense of what matters to you and how you think about things.)

COLUMN A

- a. Describe a building you find interesting, meaningful, cool, beautiful, or intriguing.
- b. Every culture has proverbs which are supposed to capture some sort of wisdom in a memorable way. Some examples include: "Honesty is the best policy" (USA), "Least said, soonest mended" (England), "Lange Rede, kurzer Sinn" ["Long discourse, short sense"] (Germany), "Aival buu hii, hii baival buu ai" ["Don't start (doing something) if afraid, but if already doing, don't be afraid!"] (Mongolia).

Tell us one from your own culture and discuss it. What exactly does it mean? Do you think it is wise or not wise? Why?
- c. Recently, an American illustrator (R. Crumb) published a comic-book style *Book of Genesis*. (You can read about it here: <http://books.wwnorton.com/books/detail.aspx?ID=5917>). If you could illustrate one book, what would it be and why? Carefully describe the illustration you would want for the cover. (Note: do not actually send an illustration. We want you to imagine the illustration and describe it in words.)
- d. Send us a link to something on Youtube. Tell us why it's interesting and worth watching.

COLUMN B

- a. *In the Middle of the Road*

In the middle of the road there was a stone
there was a stone in the middle of the road
there was a stone
in the middle of the road there was a stone.

I'll never forget this event
in the lifetime of my tired eyes.
I'll never forget that in the middle of the road
there was a stone
there was a stone in the middle of the road
in the middle of the road there was a stone.

—Carlos Drummond de Andrade
(Translated by Mark Strand)

<http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780375709883&view=excerpt>

What do you think this poem is about?

- b. "When we read, another person thinks for us: we merely repeat his mental process. It is the same as the pupil, in learning to write, following with his pen the lines that have been penciled by the teacher. Accordingly, in reading, the work of thinking is, for the greater part, done for us. This is why we are consciously relieved when we turn to reading after being occupied with our own thoughts. But, in reading, our head is, however, really only the arena of some one else's thoughts. And so it happens that the person who reads a great deal—that is to say, almost the whole day, and recreates himself by spending the intervals in thoughtless diversion, gradually loses the ability to think for himself; just as a man who is always riding at last forgets how to walk. Such, however, is the case with many men of learning: they have read themselves stupid. For to read in every spare moment, and to read constantly, is more paralyzing to the mind than constant manual work, which, at any rate, allows one to follow one's own thoughts. Just as a spring, through the continual pressure of a foreign body, at last loses its elasticity, so does the mind if it has another person's thoughts continually forced upon it. And just as one spoils the stomach by overfeeding and thereby impairs the whole body, so can one overload and choke the mind by giving it too much nourishment. For the more one reads the fewer are the traces left of what one has read; the mind is like a tablet that has been written over and over. Hence it is impossible to reflect; and it is only by reflection that one can assimilate what one has read if one reads straight ahead without pondering over it later, what has been read does not take root, but is for the most part lost. Indeed, it is the same with mental as with bodily food: scarcely the fifth part of what a man takes is assimilated; the remainder passes off in evaporation, respiration, and the like."

—Arthur Schopenhauer, from "On Reading and Books"

In this passage, Schopenhauer tries to identify a danger associated with reading. From this passage, can you form an idea of how Schopenhauer thinks we *should* read? Do you agree with this idea? Explain why or why not.

- c. Read Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The Minister's Black Veil." (You can find it here: <http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/nh/mbv.html>).

Why does Mr. Hooper remain behind his veil rather than marry Elizabeth?

- d. Watch "Bringing Up Baby" (1938, directed by Howard Hawks). Explain the significance of the leopard (or leopards). (If you cannot find a DVD of the film in a library or for rental, you can currently watch it in 9 parts on Youtube.)

- e. "Since the liberty we need is different from that of the ancients, it needs a different organization from that which suited ancient liberty. In the latter, the more time and energy man dedicated to the exercise of his political rights, the freer he thought himself; in the kind of liberty to which we are drawn, the more time the exercise of political rights leaves us for our private interests, the more precious liberty will be to us. Hence the need for the representative system. The representative system is nothing but an organization by means of which a nation charges a few individuals to do what it cannot or does not wish to do itself. Poor men look after their own affairs; rich men hire stewards" (Benjamin Constant).

Is freedom from politics an important ingredient in the general desire for freedom today?

- f. Produce a proof of Pythagoras' theorem, i.e., that the sum of the squares of the lengths of the two legs of a right-angled triangle equals the square of the length of the hypotenuse. In what way could mathematics (and specifically the practice of proving theorems) be relevant to liberal education or "value studies" as described on our website? (Make sure that all references to mathematical knowledge in your discussion involve the proof you produced.)

- g. Consider the case of Zell Kravinsky, as reported in this article in *The New Yorker* magazine: <http://facstaff.unca.edu/moseley/zellkravinsky%27skidney.pdf>

Do you think it is possible to give too much?