



Common Read 2024

Instructions

The Thomas College Common Read is our invitation to join our academic community of individuals who share and explore ideas with each other.

After reading and reflecting on this year's selection, "*Starlings in Winter*" by Mary Oliver, create a written response from one of the options listed below. During Fall Orientation, you will have an opportunity to discuss what you have written along with other students in your class.

Option 1

Oliver's poem is a reflection on the lessons that the world prepares for us, even in times of challenge or struggle. She writes that even when times might be hard, it is still possible to "think of noble things," to imagine we can succeed despite all barriers. She tells us that it is always possible to be "improbable beautiful and afraid of nothing, as though [we] had wings."

For this writing option, identify a time in your life where you may have faced some kind of barrier or obstacle. Describe the challenge you faced, and how you demonstrated the ability to be "improbable beautiful and afraid of nothing"—as though you had wings. What was the challenge and how did you respond?

Consider the following when outlining your essay:

- Describe the specific situation you found yourself in. What (or who) was the challenge or the barrier you faced? What aspects of your personality helped you rise above that barrier to the future beyond?
- What was the realization—the noble thought or the light—that you could see in the situation? What steps did you take in that direction? Were you successful?

Option 2

In looking at how we respond to challenges, Oliver points out that even the small starlings can be "acrobats in the freezing wind" that "rise and spin/over and over again/full of gorgeous life." She writes that these "acrobats" can inspire us to dance as well, so that even if we are weighed down with concerns, we can feel our own boots "trying to leave the ground."

For this writing option, choose a time when you were inspired to move to a new perspective, a new attitude, a new position, or a new belief. What was the situation that brought about this change? What was the new position that you moved *to*? How did this person show you the possibilities in your situation?

Consider the following when outlining your essay:

- Identify the specific situation where you felt a change was necessary. What was the situation? What might have been holding you back?
- Who or what factored into your decision that you needed to change? Did your decision end with a positive result? What has changed for you? Would you make the same decision again?

A word about writing. . .

Write at least 500 words (two typed double-spaced pages). Provide illustrations or examples from your life to support your work. Since your response will also be read by your first-year experience course instructor and your faculty advisor, please do not rely on a chatbot or other artificial intelligence (AI) source for composing your essay. Instead, please write in your own voice and from your own experience while demonstrating your own understanding of appropriate sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and word choice.

Please access your Onboarding Checklist to submit your essay by Friday, August 2nd

If you have any questions about the Common Read project, please do not hesitate to contact the following individual:

Sammy Grimaldi, First Year Experience Coordinator
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She will be happy to help you in any way she can.

We are looking forward to receiving your project, and to welcoming you on campus this fall.

Our best wishes to you this summer and for the coming semester!