

## Writing Prompt

### **Big questions:**

1. *How can we reconcile the ideals of liberty & equality in the founding documents, with the historical reality of slavery and its legacy of racism?*
2. *What techniques do writers use to make their argument stronger?*

Focus for 1st paragraph: What is the author’s thesis? (i.e. what does the author have to say about big question #1?)

**T:** Answer the question: paraphrase the author’s thesis in your own words

**E:** Go into more detail and give context for your example

**X: Direct quote from text: which quote best sums up the author’s claim?**

**A:** Break the example down. What does the example mean, and why do you think it sums up the author’s whole argument, including all the other main points they make?

**S:** Explain how this thesis answers Big Question #1.

Nikole Hannah-Jones, in section 1 of “The Idea of America,” argues that African-Americans have played a crucial role in making our country what it is today. After detailing the contributions African-Americans have made throughout US history, she ties all her ideas together in her concluding paragraph. She states, “That black Americans, as much as those men cast in alabaster in the nation’s capital, are this nation’s true ‘founding fathers.’” Hannah-Jones tells two related stories in this piece. She opens with the story of her father, who despite the oppression that he suffered as a Black man, still was determined to honor the American flag. She then goes into a discussion of all the ways enslaved Africans and their descendants helped build not only American wealth but also helped fight for American freedom across generations. In this sentence, she ties both of these ideas together: her dad had every right to fly that flag because his ancestors made this country what it is. According to Hannah-Jones, African-American people, through their centuries of fighting for equality, have helped the ideals of liberty and equality in the founding documents become reality.

Focus for 2nd paragraph: How does the author strengthen their argument to prove the thesis you identified in paragraph 1?

**T:** Answer the question: pick ONE pattern of evidence, logical connection, or stylistic/rhetorical technique that you think is the strongest and the most important.

**E:** Go into more detail and give context for your example

**X: Direct quote from text: which quote best exemplifies the thing you talk about in your topic sentence?**

A: Break the example down. What does the example mean? What is noteworthy about it? If evidence, what is important to know about the evidence? If it’s logical reasoning, explain the connections the author makes. If it’s stylistic techniques, what is the author doing and how does it appeal to the audience?

S: Explain WHY the example you chose strengthens the author’s argument, and whether YOU thought it was effective / convincing.

In this piece, Hannah-Jones sets up her argument by asking a powerful rhetorical question. After telling the story of her father’s struggles to make it in a racist society, she explains how, as a child, her father’s care for the American flag didn’t make sense to her. “How could this black man, having seen firsthand the way his country abused black Americans, how it refused to treat us as full citizens, proudly fly its banner?” This question points out a logical contradiction: because Hannah-Jones’ father had been treated like a second-class citizen his whole life by this country, his patriotism didn’t make sense to her. By highlighting this contradiction, the author gets us to share in her confusion. The question works like a hook makes the reader want to keep reading to figure out what the answer is. It strengthens her argument by making the reader pay close attention to everything she says after the question, in order to figure out what the answer is. She finally answers in the last paragraph, when she gives us her thesis.