

THE GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE of AMERICAN HISTORY

David McCullough Essay Prizes Rubrics

Category 2: Interpretive Essay

Score of 5:

1. Presents a historically defensible claim
2. Supports and strengthens the claim by using diverse evidence
3. Emphasizes analysis over description, involving the evaluation, creation, and examination of information
4. Uses historical reasoning to explain how different pieces of evidence are connected or related
5. Provides extensive support for the claim with numerous relevant facts, examples, and details
6. Demonstrates a logical and clear organizational plan
7. Concludes with insights that go beyond merely restating the initial claim
8. Conducts a thorough examination and evaluation of one primary source from American history (1491–2001) in the Gilder Lehrman Collection
9. Directly relates the findings from the close examination of this primary source to the main argument or claim
10. Cites a primary source and includes a bibliography
11. Adheres to a suggested word count of 750–1,000 words (approximately 3 pages)

Score of 4:

1. Presents a historically defensible claim
2. Supports and strengthens the claim with evidence
3. Includes analysis and description involving the evaluation, creation, and examination of information
4. Uses historical reasoning to explain how different pieces of evidence are connected or related
5. Provides support for the claim with relevant facts, examples, and details
6. Demonstrates a logical and clear organizational plan
7. Concludes with insights that go beyond merely restating the initial claim
8. Conducts an examination and evaluation of one primary source from American history (1491–2001) in the Gilder Lehrman Collection
9. Cites primary source(s) throughout and includes them in a bibliography
10. Adheres to a suggested word count of 750–1,000 words (approximately 3 pages)

Score of 3:

1. Presents a historically defensible claim
2. Supports and strengthens the claim with evidence
3. Is more descriptive than analytical (may apply, analyze, and/or evaluate information)
4. Uses some historical reasoning to explain different pieces of evidence
5. Provides some support for the claim with relevant facts, examples, and details; may include some minor inaccuracies
6. Demonstrates an organizational plan
7. Concludes with a brief restatement of the claim of the essay

8. Incorporates information from at least one primary source from American history (1491–2001) in the Gilder Lehrman Collection
9. Cites a primary source and includes a bibliography
10. Adheres to a suggested word count of 750–1,000 words (approximately 3 pages)

Score of 2:

1. Presents a historically defensible claim
2. Is primarily descriptive; may include faulty, weak, or isolated analysis
3. Uses some historical reasoning to explain different pieces of evidence
4. Provides some support for the claim with relevant facts, examples, and details; may include some minor inaccuracies
5. Demonstrates a general organizational plan; may lack focus or include digressions
6. Concludes with a brief restatement of the claim of the essay
7. Incorporates information from at least one primary source from American history (1491–2001) in the Gilder Lehrman Collection
8. Cites primary sources unevenly throughout and includes them in a bibliography that may be incomplete (e.g., omitting title, author, and/or date), but may not include all sources cited and may be in an inconsistent format
9. Adheres to a suggested word count of 750–1,000 words (approximately 3 pages)

Score of 1:

1. Presents a weak historical claim
2. Is descriptive; may lack understanding of the topic and does not explain different pieces of evidence
3. Provides minor support for the claim with facts, examples, and details; may include inaccuracies
4. Demonstrates a weak organizational plan; may lack an introduction or a conclusion
5. Incorporates information from at least one primary source from American history (1491–2001) in the Gilder Lehrman Collection
6. Citations and/or bibliography noting primary sources may be missing entirely
7. Adheres to a suggested word count of 750–1,000 words (approximately 3 pages)