

This I believe Assignment

Read the following essays. Then with a partner answer questions 1-7 that follow. Next, on your own, write your own one paragraph or longer essay that is a statement of your beliefs in life.

This I Believe Essay 1: The Beatles Live On

Macklin Levine - New York, New York

I believe in The Beatles. Although they don't exist anymore, their music is very much alive, even to a 12-year-old like me. As old as the songs are, you can learn a lot about yourself from the lyrics. Listening to them with others and singing along has been important to me and to my family.

Three years ago, my dog Phoebe ran away near our house in Cold Spring, New York. Every Friday afternoon, we would drive upstate from Manhattan together as family and dog. My parents never had much music in the car—nothing that we could all agree to listen to except for "Yellow Submarine" by The Beatles.

We were really scared when Phoebe took off, but hoped she'd come back soon. She didn't. My friend's Dad hiked into the state park behind our house, miles in, posting signs explaining about our lost dog. A day passed, and still no Phoebe.

We called and called into the woods.

Next thing I knew, my Dad climbed into our station wagon and disappeared. A half an hour later, I saw the headlights of our car and heard the weirdest thing: loud, loud music. It was nine o'clock at night, my dad is in the car alone, and he's blasting Beatles music.

My Dad was really smart, probably the smartest one of any of the people looking for Phoebe. But Mom thought he'd lost his mind. Dad explained he figured Phoebe had been in the car with us all those times when we had nothing else to listen to but The Beatles over and over again. He thought if anything could make her come home, it would be the sound of The Beatles.

Phoebe did come home a few days later. It wasn't The Beatles who got her there; it was a sign a neighbor saw, and the phone number on her collar. But I think back to my Dad playing The Beatles' music so loud we could hear him a half mile away across the lake, and it makes me smile.

My Dad died a few months after my dog ran away, and when I first wrote the essay I was afraid to say that because I knew I wouldn't be able to read it out loud in class without crying. But now when I think of him, I remember his wacky idea to play the family music, and how it made me feel like everything would be okay.

The Beatles don't exist anymore but their music will live in everyone forever. I believe in The Beatles because their music brings people together, and gives us hope.

Macklin Levine wrote her essay for her sixth grade English class at school in New York City.

This I Believe Essay 2: In Giving I Connect with Others

Isabel Allende - Sausalito, California

I have lived with passion and in a hurry, trying to accomplish too many things. I never had time to think about my beliefs until my 28-year-old daughter Paula fell ill. She was in a coma for a year and I took care of her at home, until she died in my arms in December of 1992.

During that year of agony and the following year of my grieving, everything stopped for me. There was nothing to do — just cry and remember. However, that year also gave an opportunity to reflect upon my journey and the principles that hold me together. I discovered that there is consistency in my beliefs, my writing and the way I lead my life. I have not changed, I am still the same girl I was fifty years ago, and the same young woman I was in the seventies. I still lust for life, I am still ferociously independent, I still crave justice and I fall madly in love easily.

Paralyzed and silent in her bed, my daughter Paula taught me a lesson that is now my mantra: You only have what you give. It's by spending yourself that you become rich.

Paula led a life of service. She worked as a volunteer helping women and children, eight hours a day, six days a week. She never had any money, but she needed very little. When she died she had nothing and she needed nothing. During her illness I had to let go of everything: her laughter, her voice, her grace, her beauty, her company and finally her spirit. When she died I thought I had lost everything. But then I realized I still had the love I had given her. I don't even know if she was able to receive that love. She could not respond in any way, her eyes were somber pools that reflected no light. But I was full of love and that love keeps growing and multiplying and giving fruit.

The pain of losing my child was a cleansing experience. I had to throw overboard all excess baggage and keep only what is essential. Because of Paula, I don't cling to anything anymore. Now I like to give much more than to receive. I am happier when I love than when I am loved. I adore my husband, my son, my grandchildren, my mother, my dog, and frankly I don't know if they even like me. But who cares? Loving them is my joy.

Give, give, give — what is the point of having experience, knowledge or talent if I don't give it away? Of having stories if I don't tell them to others? Of having wealth if I don't share it? I don't intend to be cremated with any of it! It is in giving that I connect with others, with the world and with the divine.

It is in giving that I feel the spirit of my daughter inside me, like a soft presence.

Novelist Isabel Allende was born in Peru and raised in Chile. When her uncle, Chilean President Salvador Allende, was assassinated in 1973, she fled with her husband and children to Venezuela.

Questions to be answered in discussion with a partner and emailed to me:

Partners Names: 1. _____ 2. _____

1. What is the belief that the first author makes the thesis of her essay?

2. What is the belief that the second author makes the thesis of her essay?

3. What do the two essays have in common?

4. What personal strengths do you see in the writers of the essays?
 - a. Macklin Levine

 - b. Isabel Allende

5. Google Isabel Allende's father, Salvador Allende, and give a brief summary of his life.

6. Google the Beatles "Yellow Submarine" and explain the song title.

7. What experiences in your own life are you reminded of from reading the essays?

8. What life lesson did the two of you learn from reading the essays?

9. Write your own one paragraph or longer essay that is a statement of your beliefs in life. Use the following to guide your writing.

Tell a story: Be specific. Take your beliefs and ground them in the events of your life. Consider moments when your beliefs were formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work, and family, and tell of the things you know that no one else does. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching—it can even be funny—but it should be *real*. Make sure your story ties to the essence of your daily life philosophy and the shaping of your beliefs.

Be brief: Your statement should be anywhere from a paragraph to a page long.

Name your belief (that's your Thesis Statement!): If you can't name it in a sentence or two, your essay might not be about belief. Also, rather than writing a list, consider focusing on one core belief, because a paragraph is not long.

Be positive: Please avoid preaching or editorializing or advising people how they should lead their lives and how they should behave. Avoid speaking in the editorial "we," or "you" should do or believe this way. For example, don't write "you should be honest with your friends." Instead, write, for example, "I believe in being honest with my friends." Make your essay about you; speak in the first person ("I believe").

Be personal: Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. Read your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.

9. When you're finished, read your essay aloud to your partner.