**Constructing Character Essays**

With a character essay, the question should direct you towards which particular character you should focus on – in this case, Vincent. As with any essay, the trick is to do a brief plan beforehand. Decide on a theme to run through your essay, one that relates to the character (in the below case I decided to use desire and ambition as my connecting theme). Once again, the theme will more than likely present itself within the wording of the question, and the character that the question bases itself around. Focus your essay on the ONE character, and work from the inside out.

By this I mean you need to use a character (like Vincent) as your centre point, and from there you can branch out to his relations to other characters and events that are relevant (e.g. Vincent’s relationship with his brother, Jerome). Centre each of your paragraphs around an example that exemplifies your general argument (in the above case, “swimming races“, “genetic discrimination” and “desire”), and discuss how the character in question relates to these ideas and, voila – instant character essay!

Ok, so it’s not quite that easy, but the process is. To write yourself a great character essay, follow these steps, adding knowledge of your text and the relevant question where appropriate:

1. Identify the character
2. Identify the themes that relate to that character
3. Identify how that character relates to others, focusing on the themes.

“The world of Gattaca is focussed on genetic perfection, yet it is the imperfect Vincent who achieves the most.”

Gattaca presents a world in which genetics form a new manner of class distinction. Even before birth, babies have their whole lives mapped out, from eye colour, to their propensity for achievement. Rather than focussing on the lives of these perfect genetic specimens, Gattaca tells the story of Vincent, a “faith birth” (natural conception), who as an “invalid”, manages to achieve the most of any of the characters contained in the film. This essay will argue that ambition essential to achieving goals, and that the “pre-ordained” existences of the genetic elite robs people of this desire to succeed. In this way, Vincent can truly be seen to achieve the most.

1. **Utilise the terms used in the question in your introduction.** It’s a good way of ensuring you stay centred on the question (and it makes you look like you know what you’re talking about!)

2. **Outline your argument**, and tell your reader what you’re going to tell them in the main body of your essay.

Vincent may have the lowly status of a “de-gene-erate”, but it is this status that feeds his desire to achieve. Whether it his dream, to go into space, or merely beating his genetically perfect brother in a swimming race, the odds are stacked against him from the very beginning. Vincent’s sheer determination, coupled with the many obstacles that stand in his way, make any small victory achieved by Vincent, a relatively greater achievement than anything that is achieved by a so-called “valid” person, as Vincent’s success is not pre-ordained or guaranteed in any way. For example, when as a young boy Vincent finally beats his younger brother in an endurance swimming race, we feel much more excitement about his victory than we do any of the countless other victories achieved by his brother. The very fact that Vincent is required to accomplish feats above and beyond what is expected of him to accomplish even the smallest of feats, ensures that he can truly be said to have achieved more than any of the other characters within the film.

3. **One or two word quotes** avoid breaking up your sentence, and make your argument clearer to the reader.

4.  **Main Body.** Tell your reader what you said you were going to tell them! In a character essay, it is useful to centre each of your paragraphs around an example that exemplifies your general argument (in the above case, “swimming races”, etc.).

Vincent’s greatest dream, and seemingly the most impossible for him to achieve, is to travel into space. Unlike in the earlier swimming races with his brother, sheer determination alone is not enough for Vincent to join the genetically focussed *Gattaca* space travel corporation. Instead he must assume the identity of a (willing) “genetically perfect” specimen, Jerome Morrow, a champion swimmer, who has been paralysed in an accident. The true extent to which genetics have become a judge of worth is contained in Vincent’s initial “interview” at*Gattaca*. Armed with a sample of Jerome’s DNA, Vincent attends his “interview”. The minute Jerome’s DNA passes as “valid,” he is welcomed aboard. Confused, Vincent asks, “what about the interview?” only to be told, “that was it.” When such near-impossible odds are placed in Vincent’s way, it is easy to see that in finally getting into space, Vincent has achieved far more than any genetically perfect person who has achieved the same fate.

5. **Structure.** Note that each body paragraph covers only one main idea, with the internal structure clearly following the pattern of idea, explanation, example and then relating this back to the initial question.

Jerome declares early on to Vincent that he has “everything he needs” to go into space, except “the desire to do so.” “Desire” is essential to achievement. It is desire that drives Vincent to the dangerous move of trying to outsmart the *Gattaca* Corp. It is desire that drives Vincent to undergo a series of painful operations, and become “Jerome”. It is desire that drives Vincent to pursue what is above and beyond what is expected of him. In contrast, the genetically perfect specimens that populate *Gattaca* appear to have no desire. Any success they obtain, and victories they achieve merely make up part of a pre-ordained existence. So much so that it is their failures that attract more attention, this is captured in Jerome thrusting a silver medal in Vincent’s face, and declaring “I was never meant to be a step down on the podium”. The very fact that the world of *Gattaca* has no expectations for Vincent, coupled with his desire to achieve, make his achievements all the more spectacular.

Desire and ambition are essential to achieving goals. The “pre-ordained” existence of the genetic elite in *Gattaca*robs people of such desire to succeed at anything more than what is expected of them. In contrast, the “in-valid” Vincent achieves far more that anyone ever thought possible of him, and in this way, he can truly be seen to achieve the most.

6. **Summarise your arguments** in the conclusion, clearly linking them back into the question. It’s important to leave your marker something strong to remember about your essay, so take your time to ensure that the conclusion brings together your ideas in relation to the question.