

Name: _____ Periods: _____
English 9

This I Believe

*The personal philosophies
of remarkable men and
women.*

Wednesday, September 14	Monday, September 19	Friday, September 23	Monday, October 3
First draft is due	Personal revisions are due	Peer revisions are due	Polished version OR brand new Version 2.0 due

This I Believe Essay-Writing Guidelines

We invite you to participate in this project by writing your own statement of personal belief. We understand how challenging this is—it requires intense self-examination, and many find it difficult to begin. To guide you through this process, we offer these suggestions:

Tell a story about you: Be specific. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events that have shaped your core values. Consider moments when belief was 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 between 500 and 600 words. That's about three minutes when read aloud at your natural pace.

Name your belief: 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.

Be positive: Write about what you do believe, not what you don't believe. Avoid statements of religious dogma, preaching, or editorializing.

Be personal: Make your essay about you; speak in the first person. Avoid speaking in the editorial "we." Tell a story from your own life; this is not an opinion piece about social ideals. Write in words and phrases that are comfortable for you to speak. We recommend you 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.

In introducing the original series, host Edward R. Murrow said, "Never has the need for personal philosophies of this kind been so urgent." We would argue that the need is as great now as it was 60 years ago.

Assignment Requirements:

- Final version must be typed (rough draft may be hand written)
 - o Double-spaced, size 12 font (Calibri, Arial or Times New Roman)
 - o Document name: LastName_This I Believe
 - o Share with mhaderlein@davincischools.org or akalma@davincischools.org
- 500 – 600 words in length
- Grammar: Proper capitalization and comma usage

Need more ideas? Visit: www.thisibelieve.org

Introduction



JAY ALLISON

This I Believe OFFERS A SIMPLE, IF DIFFICULT INVITATION: Write a few hundred words expressing the core principles that guide your life—your personal credo.

We issue that invitation to politicians, nurses, artists, construction workers, athletes, parents, students, the famous, and the unknown, everyone. All the essayists in this book accepted the invitation.

There is risk in what they did. They wrote of their most closely held convictions and then spoke them on the radio to an audience of millions in a media climate that tends toward sound bites, potshots, and spin. To make such an

earnest, exposed statement is itself an act of bravery. We who read the dozens of essays that arrive each morning in our e-mail recognize this act. It touches us, and it is not too much to say that we approach our work with a sense of honor.

All the editors of this series know how difficult it is to write one of these essays, because we have tried it. The editors of the original series in the 1950s did, too. Like most of the thousands we've received, these essays won't be on the radio and, in most cases, won't be read by anyone other than the writer. But we believe the exercise is important. The attempt alone has value.

At its heart, this book is an invitation to make the attempt yourself.

This I Believe was first broadcast in 1951, with Edward R. Murrow hosting. A team of editors worked on the project for five years, making the series a daily radio staple and eventually a publishing phenomenon.

Fifty years after the original series ended, we felt the time was right to bring it back. As in the 1950s, matters of belief divide our country and the world. We find ourselves in conflict over moral standards, patriotism, family, and issues of race and faith. Yet amid the most pervasive information delivery systems in history, there is little place for the encourage-

ment of quiet listening to the beliefs of others without rebuttal or criticism.

More and more, news output is based not so much on the events of the day but those of the moment. An hour old is old. When does the value of immediacy wear out? When we know what has happened in the last second? The last millisecond? *This I Believe* heads in the other direction. It is interested not in what can be learned in a moment but over a lifetime. When *This I Believe* essays appear in the midst of the NPR news programs *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition*, time changes a little. The din of the daily is left behind, and the moment is noted not for its clamor but its calm.

In our revival of *This I Believe*, we have been guided by the original team. We make the same requests of essayists that they did: Frame your beliefs in positive terms. Refrain from dwelling on what you do not believe. Avoid restatement of doctrine. Focus on the personal, the "I" of the title, not the subtly sermonizing "We." While you may hold many beliefs, write mainly of one. Aim for truth without accusation, patriotism without political cant, and faith beyond religious dogma.

We have found that some writers do best to tell a story, perhaps of a moment a belief was forged, or tested, or confirmed. Others peel the onion of what they were taught

to believe, what they think they should believe, and even what they always believed they *would* believe.

In this volume you will find essays from fifty years ago intermingled with essays of today. The themes are not very different. People still search for meaning, want to help others, try to overcome fear, wonder at death and birth. While we may now be more casual in style, this exercise often summons a formal declaration, a statement considered enough to stand up for.

A word on process. One distinction between our series and the 1950s is our public call for essays. We accept submissions over the Internet via our Web site (www.thisibelieve.org). As of this writing (spring 2007), more than 22,000 essays have been read by our reviewing team in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. We flag essays that stand out for their expressiveness, their perspective, or simply because we remember them. All essayists, those we invite to write for our series and also those whose essays are chosen from Internet submissions, are edited for radio—sometimes a little, sometimes a lot—until everyone is content. Writers usually record in studios near where they live, while I coach their readings over the phone. Finally, our photographer visits them to take their portraits.

In reading the submissions, we have noticed trends. Many offer testimony to such principles as the Golden Rule, living in the moment, the importance of love and giving. Others

write of family, god, and country. Deep lessons are learned in proximity to illness and death, when the value of life is felt more keenly; Alzheimer's, for example, often occasions an examination of the fundamental nature of personality and belief. It may also be worth noting some common rhetorical pitfalls: self-righteousness, prescribing for others, advertisements for self, cliché, and disguised attack.

Most essayists make earnest attempts to determine what they believe for themselves. In our online submission form, we have a space for reflections on the process. Writers express gratitude for the opportunity, the nudge, to take on the challenge. They generally don't find it easy. One said it was like packing for a long trip using an overnight bag. Some tell of sharing their essays with others, "broadcasting" them in their own circles. *This I Believe* essays have been read at weddings and funerals, given and asked for on birthdays. Colleges and schools around the country have undertaken the project; one school in Vermont packed the local public library for a night of essay readings. Once they assign students the task of writing an essay, teachers report they feel obligated to complete one, too. For those who may be interested, the appendices of this book contain a history of the series, guidelines for essayists, and resources for writers, teachers, places of worship, and community groups. An online archive of every submitted essay can be found at our Web site.

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Beliefs are choices. No one has authority over your personal beliefs. Your beliefs are in jeopardy only when you don't know what they are.

Understanding your own beliefs, and those of others, comes through focused thought and discussion. Most public dialogue is now propelled by media outlets owned by a dwindling number of multinational corporations. A healthy democracy needs ways to bypass gatekeepers so we can communicate with one another directly, and perhaps even find common ground. *This I Believe* is an exercise in philosophical self-examination in a public context. It rises from the grass roots, where people can begin to listen to each other, one at a time.

My own *This I Believe* essay begins, "I believe in listening . . ." This is no surprise, coming from one who works in radio, and public radio at that. At the station in my hometown, it's our motto, and the first word ever spoken on the air when we signed on. *Listen*. If there is a testament to a belief in listening, it will be found in these essays.

Take a moment, then, to consider the beliefs that guide the lives of others, beliefs that may confirm your own, or challenge them, or even open your mind to something new.

When you are done, think about this: What would you say?

Be Cool to the Pizza Dude

SARAH ADAMS

IF I HAVE ONE OPERATING PHILOSOPHY ABOUT LIFE, it is this: "Be cool to the pizza delivery dude; it's good luck." Four principles guide the pizza dude philosophy.

Principle 1: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in humility and forgiveness. I let him cut me off in traffic, let him safely hit the exit ramp from the left lane, let him forget to use his blinker without extending any of my digits out the window or toward my horn because there should be one moment in my harried life when a car may encroach or cut off or pass and I let it go. Sometimes when I have become so certain of my ownership of my lane, dar-

ing anyone to challenge me, the pizza dude speeds by in his rusted Chevette. His pizza light atop his car glowing like a beacon reminds me to check myself as I flow through the world. After all, the dude is delivering pizza to young and old, families and singletons, gays and straights, blacks, whites, and browns, rich and poor, and vegetarians and meat lovers alike. As he journeys, I give safe passage, practice restraint, show courtesy, and contain my anger.

Principle 2: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in empathy. Let's face it: We've all taken jobs just to have a job because some money is better than none. I've held an assortment of these jobs and was grateful for the paycheck that meant I didn't have to share my Cheerios with my cats. In the big pizza wheel of life, sometimes you're the hot bubbly cheese and sometimes you're the burnt crust. It's good to remember the fickle spinning of that wheel.

Principle 3: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in honor, and it reminds me to honor honest work. Let me tell you something about these dudes: They never took over a company and, as CEO, artificially inflated the value of the stock and cashed out their own shares, bringing the company to the brink of bankruptcy, resulting in twenty thousand people losing their jobs while the CEO builds a home the size of a luxury hotel. Rather, the dudes sleep the sleep of the just.

Principle 4: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in equality. My measurement as a human being, my worth, is the pride I take in performing my job—any job—and the respect with which I treat others. I am the equal of the world not because of the car I drive, the size of the TV I own, the weight I can bench-press, or the calculus equations I can solve. I am the equal to all I meet because of the kindness in my heart. And it all starts here—with the pizza delivery dude.

Tip him well, friends and brethren, for that which you bestow freely and willingly will bring you all the happy luck that a grateful universe knows how to return.

SARAH ADAMS has held many jobs in her life, including telemarketer, factory worker, hotel clerk, and flower shop cashier, but she has never delivered pizzas. Raised in Wisconsin, Adams is now an English professor at Olympic College in Washington.