

## Project 2 | Assignment 6: Structuring Your Argument

For those who are unsure about how you might go about structuring this argument, I suggest that you recall the way in which locating a problem and proposing a solution can apply to this assignment. I offer here bundles of questions, any of which you could make use of in framing your own argument. They are intended to help you generate your own argument, and should not constrain your writing. I have asked more question than any single writer could work with.

### Introductory Section

#### shared context

Consider the ways in which Bristow's chapters can help you to establish the shared context. What does those who are interested in the 1918 pandemic have in common? What warrants greater attention? What's generally been missing from public understanding so far? How does the event get trivialized? What makes getting to the level of the "lived experienced" for those who lived through the epidemic so challenging?

#### problem (briefly described)

As a novelist representation of a community during the 1918 pandemic, what can Commonwealth tell us? How might it enrich our understanding of the challenges of the 1918 pandemic? Given the dynamics of the community, what troubles you about their behaviors and their attitudes? Is there anything you admire about them? How shall we account for the failure of Commonwealth? What goes wrong, and how do characters' and the town's actions and attitudes point to this?

#### solution (essence of solution sketched out; central claim asserted)

How can the concept of *vulnerability* (as Fineman sets it forth) be applied to help us understand the failure of Commonwealth? Are there characters who illustrate an awareness of others' vulnerabilities? Do they act on that awareness in some way? Does the concept of vulnerability—acknowledged and/or attended to by the town or by particular residents—acquire special meaning in the time of an epidemic? What special social or moral problems might turning to the concept help us to "solve?"

### Body: Problem

In several paragraph, define a problem (the concern or question about collective or individual behaviors and attitudes) that you find evidence of in Commonwealth. Use evidence from the novel (in the form of words, phrases, passages, or your own summaries of actions) to illustrate the elements of the problem. When useful, indicate how Commonwealth's problems represent the kinds of difficulties that may likely occur to most small communities in a pandemic moment. When useful, indicate what makes Commonwealth unique, not like other communities. Make sure to identify

aspects of Commonwealth's problems or failings that your solution might help to address.

### **Body: Solution**

What makes Fineman's concept of vulnerability important to consider when we are contemplating a "solution" to the problem you've identified earlier in the paper? How does she define the concept? How do you plan to make use of the concept? Which of Fineman's original aspects of the concept are most helpful to building your case, and which are less important? How does applying Fineman's concept to Commonwealth reveal certain features that would be more difficult to highlight if you did not have the concept at hand? Which characters will you pay attention to? How might their vulnerabilities been better or differently acknowledged or attended to? Does the concept of vulnerability suggest different ways of responding to human lives in an epidemic?

### **Concluding Section**

Moving from Commonwealth to the real world, what questions, issues, or concerns does the novel point to about our own moment? What can we learn from Commonwealth's example? What parallels might be drawn between the fictional community and a community that you know about? How well has the U.S. government and/or its individual citizens attended to others' vulnerabilities?