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American Studies English

**Summer Reading: *Outliers* Review Questions**

Malcolm Gladwell uses the specific narrations in *Outliers* to re-envision the American Dream and argue that highly successful people have an appetite for hard work, but they are also influenced by circumstances and cultural legacies. In effect, he refutes a one-dimensional “rags-to-riches” tale that is commonly associated with the American Dream.

**Introduction**

1. What is an outlier? (1)
2. Gladwell asserts that the Rosetans, immigrants from Italy who settled in Pennsylvania, are outliers because of their extremely low death rate. What conclusion does he come to as to why the Rosetans are so healthy? (9)

**Part I: Opportunity**

Note: An individual’s circumstances influence opportunities.

**Chapter One: The Matthew Effect**

1. What is the connection that Malcolm Gladwell makes between the Canadian hockey players who are born at the beginning of the cut-off date and their success as players? (24-25)

**Chapter Two: The 10,000-Hour Rule**

1. What is the 10,000 -Hour Rule? (39)
2. Gladwell argues that successful people are those who, because of circumstances, have been provided with opportunities to exercise the 10,000-hour rule. Who are the people described in this chapter who fit that description?

**Chapter Three: The Trouble with Geniuses, Part I**

1. In addition to having a high IQ, what type of mind does Gladwell think successful people need to have? (88-89)

**Chapter Four: The Trouble with Geniuses, Part II**

1. Why does Gladwell think that Chris Langan, a genius, is not successful? (114-115)

**Chapter Five: The Three Lessons of Joe Flom**

1. In this chapter, Gladwell uses stories of different immigrants to explain Joe Flom’s success. He also uses this chapter to transition to the next section of the book, which focuses on cultural legacy. What are some of the life lessons that can be learned from the early immigrants coming to America? (151)

**Part II: Legacy**

**Chapter Six: Harlan, Kentucky**

1. Gladwell asserts the significance of cultural legacies in this chapter. While he acknowledges that we have to be extremely wary about making broad generalizations about cultural groups, one’s cultural background is significant. How does Gladwell use the theory of the “culture of honor” to explain high rates of criminality that exist in the South? (168-169)

**Chapter Seven: The Ethnic Theory of Plane Crashes**

1. In this chapter Gladwell states, “Each of us has his or her own distinct personality. But overlaid on top of that are tendencies and assumptions and reflexes handed down to us by the history of the community we grew up in, and those differences are extraordinarily specific” (204). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

**Chapter Eight: Rice Paddies and Math Tests**

1. How do the work hours of a rice farmer in Asia compare to other farmers across the world? What “redeems” this work, according to Gladwell? (235-236)

**Chapter Nine: Marita’s Bargain**

1. Why does Gladwell think reforms should be made so that the school year is longer? (260)