

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks The Final Research Paper

Congratulations! You have successfully read the college-level text The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks. Now is your time to shine and explore the burning questions you've had while reading. You will be writing an informative research paper exploring a question inspired by this book. We know you have an opinion about this topic, so there will be a space for your voice, along with the voices of others, to be featured in your writing. Here are the nuts and bolts of this writing process.

Research Questions:

1. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), "People with higher levels of education and higher income have lower rates of many chronic diseases compared to those with less education and lower income levels." Considering what you have learned through the reading of The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks as well as what you have witnessed first-hand, research the connections between one's health and his or her education, income level and access to the healthcare system.
2. The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks details numerous ways scientists have used HeLa cells to advance the medical and scientific fields. We know the HeLa cells were used to create a Polio vaccine, but how are these cells being used for research today? Research current medical advancements made possible by the use of HeLa cells as well as the research that is being done with these cells today.
3. Scientific and medical advancements are constantly changing due to new discoveries, technologies and advancements. Henrietta underwent intense medical treatments, many of which were standard practice during that time period in history, but would never be used today. If Henrietta Lacks had the same cancer, but lived today, how would she be treated? Research the current cancer treatments and analyze how have they changed since the 1940s/50s.
4. The use of stem cells is a controversial topic in our society. Congress is frequently arguing about whether this program should be funded and what stem cell treatments should be used for. Research medical treatments using stem cells today and how they are being used in research. Consider why the use of stem cells is a controversial issue and what stem cells could be used for in the future.
5. After getting out of jail, Zakariyya Rahman participates in a number of research studies in exchange for monetary compensation. Research the laws and the ethical debate over offering payment in exchange for participation in scientific studies, or for the donation of blood, eggs, sperm, or other biological materials. Do people have a right to "sell" their body, tissues, or organs if they wish? Consider: What ethical dilemmas could result from financially compensating "donors" and research participants? At what point could compensation become forceful?
6. Many scholars argue that this story is really one about race relations and racism in the United States. Investigate the history of African Americans in the United States through a social justice lens. Research the ways African Americans been disempowered and empowered throughout history. How does this book display these themes? Consider Henrietta and Deborah as symbolic characters for the journey from disempowerment to empowerment. Also consider: slavery, Jim Crow segregation, interracial marriage, the Civil Rights Movement, individual and interpersonal action to fight prejudice and racism.

7. The book features many alarming and controversial research experiments done on humans, both in the United States and in Europe during the Holocaust. The barbaric treatment of the victims of the Holocaust raised significant questions and international awareness about the ethics of scientific experimentation on humans. Research the history of scientific experimentation on humans in the United States.

Consider: What types of experiments have been done, and how did researchers find test subjects? What are the ethical obligations of medical research? Why did scientists find it necessary to conduct research on human beings? How did the development of HeLa cells change the way research could be conducted? What attempts (e.g. Nuremberg) have been made to govern the way this research is conducted, and how successful have these attempts been?

8. In chapter 33, Deborah and Rebecca find out about Elsie and thousands of others' treatment at Crownsville. Research the complex history of mental health institutions in the United States. Consider: How were facilities run and maintained, why were individuals institutionalized, what experiments were conducted, when were they shut down and how has the decision to close these facilities impacted society today?

9. Family structure plays a pivotal role in human development. All of our families look different, and as a byproduct, each of us are very different people. Divorce, single parent households, birth order, adoption, nuclear and extended families are just a sample of the different ways our family structures are formed. Research how a family's structure impacts personal development, choices and lifestyle. Consider: Nature vs. Nurture, Are we destined to repeat the patterns of our families, how much control do we have over our behavior and personality?

10. Many characters in the book, including Henrietta's children, experience abuse from those close to them. The effects of abuse, whether physical, sexual or emotional, can last far longer than the abuse itself. Often times abuse results in a condition referred to as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research the causes of PTSD, its effect on the brain, the body and treatment options. Consider: Who is impacted most by PTSD in our society? What is the stigma associated with this disorder? How does this disorder impact those close to its victims?