

## Sample College Essay #4

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**If you could have lunch with any person, living, dead, or fictional, who would it be and what would you discuss?**

We met for lunch at El Burrito Mexicano, a tiny Mexican lunch counter under the Red Line “El” tracks. I arrived first and took a seat, facing the door. Behind me the TV showed highlights from the Mexican Soccer League. I felt nervous and unsure. How would I be received by a famous revolutionary—an upper-middle-class American kid asking a communist hero questions? Then I spotted him in the doorway and my breath caught in my throat. In his overcoat, beard, and beret he looked as if he had just stepped out from one of Batista’s “wanted” posters. I rose to greet Ernesto “Che” Guevara and we shook hands. At the counter we ordered: he, enchiladas verdes and a beer, and I, a burrito and two “limonadas.” The food arrived and we began to talk.

I told him that I felt honored to meet him and that I admired him greatly for his approach to life. He saw the plight of Latin America’s poor and tried to improve their state but went about it on his own terms, not on society’s. He waved away my praise with his food-laden fork, responding that he was happy to be here and that it was nice to get out once in a while. Our conversation moved on to his youth and the early choices that set him on his path to becoming a revolutionary.

I have always been curious about what drove Che Guevara to abandon his medical career and take military action to improve the lot of Cuba’s poor. Why did he feel that he could do more for the poor as a guerilla leader than as a doctor? His answer was concise: as he came of age he began to realize that the political situation in Latin America had become unacceptable and had to be changed as soon as possible. He saw in many nations “tin-pot” dictators reliant on the United States for economic and military aid, ruining their nations and destroying the lives of their people. He felt morally obligated to change this situation and believed he could help more people in a more direct manner as a warrior rather than as a doctor. Next I asked why he chose communism as the means of achieving his goals.

He replied that communism was merely a means to an end. That end was a Central and South America run by its citizens, free of foreign intervention. In his opinion communism was the best way to realize this dream. I agreed that a nation should be run by and for its citizens, but I hesitated to agree wholeheartedly. I was concerned by his exclusive emphasis on Latin Americans. His description, as I interpreted it, implied a nationalism and exclusion of others, most notably Americans. I felt that this focus on “Latin Americanism” could easily lead to the outbreak of war in the region.

Moving from Cuba’s past to its present, I asked him if he sees the revolution begun in 1959 as successful. Has Cuba fulfilled his vision for it? Che Guevara sighed and gathered his thoughts for

a moment. Then, speaking slowly, he said that he didn't think that Cuba had fulfilled the revolution because the revolution never spread beyond Cuba, as he had hoped it would. The revolution did not spread, he reasoned, because of the success of the United States in propping up corrupt dictators and the inability of Cuba to build a viable economy upon which to support the export of revolution. I countered his negative view, pointing out that today many of the Latin American countries once under totalitarian rule are democratic, partly due to the spirit of reform he exemplified nearly half a century before. He acknowledged the progress made but remained adamant that the nations were still not free of foreign intervention.

At this point one of the Mexican teams on TV scored a goal, and we broke off our political conversation to talk about soccer. Though I know about European soccer, I know next to nothing about the South American game. He enlightened me, although he admitted his information was a bit out of date. I asked him if he had seen the great Argentinean striker Alfredo Di Stefano play, but Che Guevara said he couldn't remember.

In light of the events of September 11th, I asked about violence. In his view, when is it justified? Che Guevara responded by saying that violence is justified because those who hold power unjustly respond only to violence as a tool for change. They will not willingly relinquish power unless shown that the people will overwhelm and destroy them. I disagreed vociferously, citing Peru and Guatemala as places where violence had been used and failed, only further impoverishing the nations. Che Guevara explained these failures as the inevitable outcome of the revolutionaries losing sight of their original moral goals. Reflecting upon his answers so far, I realized that I had lost some of my admiration for him. By taking up the standard of Pan-American unity, I felt he lost some of his humanity that led me to identify so closely with him. To me he had become more of a symbol than an actual person.

At this point I realized that I had to be home soon and thanked him profusely for his generosity in answering my questions. As we walked toward the door, I noticed that I had left my hat on the table. I turned back to retrieve it, but by the time I had reached the doorway again, Che Guevara had disappeared into the mix of the afternoon sunlight and shadow cast by the "El" tracks, as mysteriously as he had come.