When you write your *Nickel and Dimed* reflection papers - follow the instructions about choosing questions to answer. As with all reflection papers, it should be a page to a page and one-half – maximum in length. It should be double spaced and use a 12 point font (Arial or Tahoma or Verdana).

Don’t rehash the questions at length – just answer the ones you have chosen concisely.

Provide some depth (reflection) to your answers and make sure you have spell-checked and proof read your paper. Also, make sure you have checked for any grammar errors.

The purpose of the reflection paper is for you to be able to give your opinion, offer your suggestions for handling situations and/or reflect how you responded when faced with similar situations in your life.

Be thoughtful, insightful and honest.
Consider the following questions from *Introduction: Getting Ready* from pages 1-10

Then, after reading the chapter, concentrate on the selected area and write your reflection paper addressing one or more of the points addressed in the questions that follow. Be sure to clearly outline your points and make sure your grammar and spelling are accurate.

1. At the outset of undertaking her project, Ehrenreich sets about creating “certain rules and parameters.” What are her rules? What resources does she allow herself that the working poor might not have?

2. What advantages does Ehrenreich start out with that members of the working poor might lack?

3. According to this book, what are some of the things that could “give away” the fact that Ehrenreich is not really a member of the working poor? How does she try to “disguise” her middle-class lifestyle?

4. On page 2, Ehrenreich says, “In my own family, the low-wage way of life had never been many degrees of separation away” and goes on to list the low-wage, working-class jobs that characterized her immediate and extended family. Following Ehrenreich’s example, describe the types of jobs held by you and your family members. Are you working class, lower class, working poor, middle class, or upper class in your family income? Do you identify with any particular economic class? Why or why not?
Consider the following questions from *One – Serving in Florida.*

from pages 11 - 16

Then, after reading the chapter write your reflection paper addressing one or more of the points addressed in the questions that follow. Be sure to clearly outline your points and make sure your grammar and spelling are accurate.

1. What kind of community is Key West? (If you don’t know, look it up on the Internet).

2. “In this parallel universe where...I never got through college, I am “baby,” honey,” “blondie,” and, most commonly, “girl.” What point is the author making about education and the types of names that designate her as a female member of the working poor?

3. Why does the author have to rent an efficiency apartment that is forty-five minutes from her place of employment? How does that reflect the realities of resort communities?

4. What are the types of jobs Ehrenreich categorizes as possibilities for her research in Florida?

5. On pp. 13-14, Ehrenreich refers to Winn-Dixie’s “onerous application process.” Describe this experience. How does it reflect the “corporate point of view”? Do you agree with the author’s point, or are businesses justified in asking such questions in order to screen potential employees?

6. What does Ehrenreich mean when she says that want ads are “the employers’ insurance policy”? What does this suggest about the jobs they advertise?
Consider the following questions from *One – Serving in Florida.*

from pages 16 - 29

Then, after reading the chapter, concentrate on the selected area and write your reflection paper addressing one or more of the points addressed in the questions that follow. Be sure to clearly outline your points and make sure your grammar and spelling are accurate.

1. On p. 17, the author talks about the touch-screen computer ordering system that she has to master. What other kinds of technology characterize the jobs of the working poor? How might these technologies be barriers to employment?

2. On p. 19, the author imagines that she is a princess in a fairy tale. Later, when she takes up motel housekeeping, she and her fellow maids listen to soap operas while they work. What other forms of escapism are available to the working poor?

3. On p. 22, Ehrenreich writes about her resentment of assistant managers, most of whom are pulled out of the ranks of cooks and clerks. She says “everyone knows they have crossed over to the other side, which is crudely put, corporate, as opposed to human.” List three examples of inhumane behavior she experiences at the hands of managers while working in Florida. Why do you think people’s behavior changes when they rise to the management level?

4. On p. 23, the manager, Phillip, says that the break room is “not a right...it can be taken away.” Using examples from the text, what other basic rights are no longer rights when you are a low-wage employee?

5. On p.27, the author says: “There are no secret economies that nourish the poor; on the contrary, there are a host of special costs.” List some of the examples of the hidden costs of poverty that are described by the author
Consider the following questions from *One – Serving in Florida.*

from pages 29 - 49

Then, after reading the chapter, concentrate on the selected area and write your reflection paper addressing one or more of the points addressed in the questions that follow. Be sure to clearly outline your points and make sure your grammar and spelling are accurate.

1. In the footnote on p. 33, the author refers to a theory of “management by stress” where workers are “squeezed to extract maximum productivity to the detriment of their health.” List some examples of workplace illness described in this chapter.

2. What are some examples given that illustrate the way management tries to increase productivity out of hourly wage earners.

3. What are some examples of how customers treat Ehrenreich when she is working as a waitress? Have your ever worked as a waiter/waitress? Provide examples of how you were treated by customers. Did this experience change the way you treat people who wait on you?

4. When the author’s friend, George, is accused of stealing, she cannot find the courage to stick up for him. She states that she is usually “moderately brave, but plenty of brave people shed their courage in POW camps, and maybe something similar goes on in...the low-wage American workplace” (p. 41). Is this a fair comparison? What are the reasons why, at times, we don’t stick up for our fellow workers?

Consider the following questions from *Two – Scrubbing in Maine.*

from pages 52 - 69

Then, after reading the chapter, concentrate on the selected area and write your reflection paper addressing one or more of the points addressed in the questions that follow. Be sure to clearly outline your points and make sure your grammar and spelling are accurate.

1. Why does the author “choose Maine for its whiteness”? What advantages does this offer her?

2. Why is it so much more difficult to find a job if you are homeless?

3. On p. 57, Ehrenreich states that “Clerical work is ruled out by wardrobe limitations.” What other hourly jobs require a “business” wardrobe that is unavailable to the working poor? Where might one find affordable clothing in our community?

4. On p. 59, the author encounters yet another employer’s “personality test.” She asserts that there is a hidden meaning in such tests: “The real function of these tests...is to convey information not to the employer but to the potential employee, and the information being conveyed is always: You have no secrets from us. We don’t just want your muscles and that portion of your brain that is directly connected to them; we want your innermost self?

In your opinion, should potential employers have the right to demand that such a test be required of all applicants? How might an employer justify administering such a test?

5. On p. 60, Ehrenreich tries to apply the marketing principle of supply and demand to the wages offered by potential employers: “If the supply (of labor) is low relative to demand, the price should rise, right?” However, she finds that employers in Portland, Maine, as elsewhere, offer $5 to $6 an hour “for what...is heavy labor with a high risk of repetitive-stress injuries.” She then asserts that there is a new version of the law of supply and demand: “jobs are so cheap---as measured by the pay---that a worker is encouraged to take on as many of them as she possibly can.” Why are employers able to get away with offering low wages for these jobs, and still attract employees?
Nickel and Dimed –
Week 6

Consider the following questions from Two – Scrubbing in Maine.

from pages 69 - 86

Then, after reading the chapter, concentrate on the selected area and write your reflection paper addressing one or more of the points addressed in the questions that follow. Be sure to clearly outline your points and make sure your grammar and spelling are accurate.

1. On p. 71, the author describes her Merry Maids uniform. What jobs have you had where you had to wear a uniform? What are the advantages and disadvantages of uniforms? In your opinion, what does a uniform signify?

2. On p. 72, Ehrenreich asserts that one of the advantages of corporate cleaning services is that the homeowners deal only with the middle-class franchise owners, and not with the actual cleaners. As a result, “there are no sticky and possibly guilt-ridden relationships involved.” How would you feel about hiring someone to clean your house? Have you ever done cleaning or janitorial work? If so, describe your experience. Why do you think people who do this essential work are so poorly paid?

3. On p. 72, Ehrenreich points out that independent cleaners can get up to $15 per hour. Why do you think the women who work at Merry Maids choose to stay there for $6 per hour rather than seek independent clearing employment at a higher rate?

4. On p. 74, the author finds the Merry Maids’ training video of a strap-on vacuum cleaner disturbing in its “theme of human/machine merger: when properly strapped on, we too will be vacuum cleaners, constrained only by the cord that attaches us to an electrical outlet, and vacuum cleaners don’t have backaches.” What is she implying with this statement? In what ways are the Merry Maids’ employees treated as if they were machines?

5. How does Ehrenreich characterize the typical cleaning job done by Merry Maids? How does this reflect the company’s attitude toward cleaning and toward its employees?
6. On p. 80, the author describes Maddy’s daycare dilemma and contrasts it with the situation of the owner of a house they clean, who can afford a nanny: “Maybe there’s some secret division of the world’s women into breeders and drones, and those at the maid level are no longer supposed to be reproducing at all.” What is she saying about society’s attitude towards income and childbearing? Do you think people who cannot afford daycare should have children?

7. On p.85, the author describes one homeowner’s complete lack of sympathy for Ehrenreich, who is on her hands and knees, scrubbing the floor. Why do you think this woman fails to identify with the worker? How does this connect with Ehrenreich’s later assertion that “Many of the owners seem hostile or contemptuous towards us” (p.100)?
Consider the following questions from *Two – Scrubbing in Maine*.

from pages 86 - 117

Then, after reading the chapter, concentrate on the selected area and write your reflection paper addressing one or more of the points addressed in the questions that follow. Be sure to clearly outline your points and make sure your grammar and spelling are accurate.

1. On pp.86-87, the Merry Maids franchise owner, Ted, blames his workers for any “lockout” on the part of employers. Why doesn’t he blame the homeowners?

2. On p. 87, the author discusses physical pain and injury and the attitude that one should “work through” pain. She describes laboring jobs where, over the course of a lifetime, people ruin their bodies. Have you ever had a job where you had to continue to work even though you were dealing with a physical injury or were ill? Why did you continue working? What was your boss’s attitude toward your condition?

3. When the author gets angry at a wealthy woman, she internally recites the following rant:

   “That’s not your marble bleeding, I want to tell her, it’s the world-wide working class—the people who quarried the marble, wove your Persian rugs until they went blind, harvested the apples in your lovely fall-themed dining room centerpiece, smelted the steel for the nails, drove the trucks, put up this building, and now bend and squat and sweat to clean it.” (p. 90)

   How have you benefitted from cheap migrant labor or labor in third-world countries? Do you feel any guilt about this? Why or why not?

4. On p. 93, Ehrenreich raises the specter of management surveillance of employees. Have you ever worked at a job where your efforts were being recorded? How do you feel about this? Why might employers believe that this type of oversight is necessary?
5. On pp.101-103, the author describes the process she goes through in attempting to receive food assistance. How is she treated? What are the obstacles she encounters when trying to get help? How could social service agencies change in order to be more accommodating?

6. On pp.108-9., the author refers to certain religious practices where menial labor is viewed as good for the spirit, “a chance to earn grace through submission and toil.” How does her experience with physical labor support or contradict this point of view?

7. On p. 110, Holly snaps her ankle. How do her fellow workers react to her injury? How does Ted, her employer, react?

8. Many of Ehrenreich’s fellow workers rely heavily on family -- for housing and help with childcare, by sharing appliances and dividing up the cooking, shopping, and cleaning. Do you think Americans make excessive demands on the family unit rather than calling for the government to help those in need?

9. On p. 115, Ted tries to get Ehrenreich to “snitch” on her fellow employees. Why does he think she might do this? What other strategies does he use to turn employees against each other? Why does he do this?

   Have you ever been in a situation where you had to choose between management and your fellow workers? Describe your dilemma. What did you do, and why did you make this choice?

10. Why don’t the Merry Maids employees turn against Ted? Why do they continue to work for such low wages in such poor conditions?

11. Taking care of the elderly, as well as taking care of children, are both low-wage jobs in the U.S. Why do you think this is? Why doesn’t the wage offered reflect the importance of the job?

12. Ehrenreich asserts that “the poor have disappeared from the culture at large, from its political rhetoric and intellectual endeavors as well as from its daily entertainment (p.118).” Why do you think this has happened in our cultural and political forums?
Nickel and Dimed –

Week 8

Consider the following questions from Three - Selling in Minnesota pages 121- 191

Then, after reading the chapter write your reflection paper addressing one or more of the points addressed in the questions that follow. Be sure to clearly outline your points and make sure your grammar and spelling are accurate.

1. Discuss the stress that Ehrenreich’s living conditions create for her. What are her reasons for staying at the Clearview? What forces create a situation in which poor people are forced to live in expensive residential motels rather than rent apartments?

2. On p. 133, Ehrenreich describes the process a potential employee must go through in order to be considered for a job at Wal-Mart or Menards: “Each potential new job requires (1) the application, (2) the interview, and (3) the drug tests—which is something to ponder with gasoline running at nearly two dollars gallon, not to mention what you may have to pay for a babysitter.” How does this process affect a job seeker?

3. What is your opinion about employee drug testing? For example, do you believe it is an invasion of privacy? Or do you believe that employers have a right to know if their employees take drugs, even if they aren’t doing so during work hours? Should people who use recreational drugs be considered morally inferior to those who don’t?

4. On pp. 152-3, Ehrenreich describes a poor woman’s sense of vulnerability in the Twin Lakes residential motel. Why is she afraid and what is she afraid of?

5. Ehrenreich suggests that “When presenting yourself as a potential employee, you can never be too much of a suck up” (p. 124). What does this suggest about the effectiveness of screening potential employees through pre-employment personality tests? On her personality test at Wal-Mart, Barbara gets some of the questions wrong. What are they and how does she correct her answers?

6. Please explain why you agree or disagree with the following opinion held by the author: “…the truth is, I don’t much care if my fellow workers area getting high in the parking lot or even lifting the occasional retail item, and I certainly wouldn’t snitch if I did. Nor do I believe that management rules by divine right or the undiluted force of superior knowledge” (p. 127)
7. What are some of Barbara’s opinions about the orientation session described on p. 143? Why does she call Wal-Mart the “Cult of Sam”? How do the three principles: “respect for the individual,” exceeding customers’ expectations,” and “strive for excellence” seem in conflict with Ehrenreich’s experience at Wal-Mart?

8. Why does the orientation show (p.144) an employee being led off in handcuffs to serve four years in jail for stealing? What is the intended effect on employees watching this video?

9. Ehrenreich describes the difference between male and female management styles on pp. 157-8. What are these differences? As an employee, which would you prefer? Does your own experience reflect Ehrenreich’s description of these management approaches?

10. On p. 165, Ehrenreich describes feeling “aggressive hostility” towards Wal-Mart customers. What causes her to feel this way? Later (p.169), Barbara Ehrenreich says that she is “regressing”: “Take away the career and the higher education ....it’s interesting and more than a little disturbing to see how Barb turned out –that she’s meaner and slyer than I am, more cherishing of grudges, and not quite as smart as I hoped I’d be.” How does work environment affect personality? Do you think the working poor have attitudes toward life and others that are shaped by their work experience? What are these attitudes and where do they come from?

11. Do you believe that there is corporate propaganda on the job? How does it control workers with buzzwords like “associate,” “team player” and “servant leaders”?

12. On p. 175, Ehrenreich points out that the low wages paid by Wal-Mart produce employees who must rely on local handouts and welfare in order to survive: “...our bright blue bests bear the statement ‘At Wal-Mart, our people make the difference.’ Underneath those vests, through, there are real-life charity cases, maybe even shelter dwellers.” What is your opinion of businesses that refuse to allow employees to work full-time and receive benefits? Do you believe that the government should continue to offer tax breaks to corporations whose labor practices result in the need for more public welfare for the working poor?

13. On p. 184, Wal-Mart employee, Marlene, says: “They talk about having spirit,’ she says, referring to management, ‘but they don’t give us any reason to have any spirit.’ In her view, Wal-Mart would rather just keep hiring new people than treat the ones it has decently. You can see yourself there’s a dozen new people coming in for orientation every day.” What is wrong with this business practice? Do you think Wal-Mart could benefit from spending more money on employees and having a more stable workforce? Why or why not?

14. Have you ever avoided confrontation for fear of future reprisals?
15. Wal-Mart’s employee orientation video says unions only want employees’ dues money. Wal-Mart says that in a union, “you would lose ‘your voice’ because the union would insist on doing your talking for you. Finally you might lose even your wages and benefits because they would all be ‘at risk on the bargaining table” (p. 143) On the other hand, how might unionization, something which Wal-Mart discourages and has generally managed to avoid, affect the welfare of its employees in ways different from those described in this video?
Consider the following questions for “Evaluation” pages 193-221.

1. On p. 196, Ehrenreich discusses the following attitude that promoted “Welfare to Work” legislation: “In the rhetorical buildup to welfare reform, it was uniformly assumed that a job was the ticket out of poverty and that the only thing holding back welfare recipients was their reluctance to get out and get one.” As revealed in this book, what are some of the other factors that conspire to keep the working poor in a state of poverty?

2. On p. 201, Ehrenreich discusses housing issues. Why can’t the working poor find affordable housing? Why can’t these people buy homes?

3. On p. 208, the author says: “What surprised and offended me most about the low-wage workplace....was the extent to which one is required to surrender one’s basic civil rights and -- what boils down to the same thing --- self-respect. Ehrenreich provides examples of practices that violate the Bill of Rights. For example, unwarranted search: “I was warned that my purse could be searched by management at any time.” Freedom of speech: “Rules against ‘gossip,’ or even ‘talking’ make it hard to air your grievances to peers” (p. 209); or freedom of assembly: “The AFL_CIO estimates that ten thousand workers a year are fired for participating in union organizing drives...and it is illegal to fire people for union activity.” In light of these examples, answer the following:

   a. How would you react if your boss demanded to search your purse or backpack for stolen merchandise or contraband?

   b. Have you ever been warned not to “gossip” on the job? Did you ever pay the rule any heed? Why or why not? Do you believe that talking about the work situation on the job affects worker morale?

   c. What fears might prevent you from attending a union organizing meeting where you work?

4. On p. 212, the author describes the U.S. as having a “culture of extreme inequality.” How does she define this term and what reasons does she give for its existence?

5. On p. 214, what arguments does Ehrenreich provide to combat the attitude that the poor are “always with us” and there is no reason to change the status quo?
P. 215-216, Ehrenreich asserts: “Political power too is concentrated within the top 20 percent, since its members are far more likely than the poor – or even the middle class – to discern the all-too-tiny distinctions between candidates that can make it seem worthwhile to contribute, participate, and vote. In all these ways, the affluent exert inordinate power over the lives of the poor, determining what public services will be available, if any, what minimum wage, what laws governing the treatment of labor.” What forces might encourage the less privileged among us to vote for their own interests? If more of the working poor voted, what changes do you think they would want to see in our society and its laws?