

English 30-1

Samples of student writing (with some edited/revised passages)

Time-pressure critical responses to *The Mosquito Coast* by Paul Theroux

Sample 1 – introductory paragraph edited

Sample 2 – body paragraph edited

Sample 3 – concluding paragraph edited

Sample 1

Topic: Self-fulfillment

Throughout life, it is important to set goals and work towards their accomplishment. Without something to aspire to, humanity would be living without purpose and there would be no advancement in their daily lives. While failing to set goals may be detrimental, the same can be said about devoting one's life to achieving a specific outcome. Obsession on securing the satisfaction of self-fulfillment may prevent an individual from attaining their desired result because they are unable to see the bigger picture. In the novel *Mosquito Coast*, Paul Theroux illustrates the self-destructiveness of the extreme desire for self-fulfillment in the character of Allie Fox. While attempting to achieve his goals and prove his worth both to himself and the world, Allie ultimately designed his own downfall, demonstrating that one cannot be successful in achieving their goals if they don't put them in perspective with their world, recognize their weaknesses or learn from their failures.

Allie Fox, in the beginning of the novel, is introduced as a self-righteous and highly opinionated man living in the country he believes has got it all wrong, America. He will do anything to achieve his goals, regardless of the impact it may have on the people and the world around him. As a Harvard drop-out and self-proclaimed inventor, Allie has big plans not only for his inventions but for his own life and working on Polski's farm prevents him from carrying them out. His inventions are often declared useless or impractical by his employer and although he claims that the opinion of Polski is unimportant to him, all Allie wants is some recognition. So, in attempt to satisfy his own dreams of greatness, he designs the ultimate experiment, moving his family to a remote area of the Honduran jungle. Allie justifies this extreme action in saying that he is saving them from the inevitable war that will occur in America. In reality, he is looking for a way to prove his genius and superior opinion; he believes that by being able to survive in the jungle with only his own intellect and hard work will set him apart from the rest of the Americans, that away from all the "funny-bunnies", televisions, schools and corporations, people will recognize his greatness. Obsessed with finding his self-worth, Allie does not recognize the danger that he is putting himself and his family into by moving to Jeronimo and despite the warnings from others and pleading from his family, Allie continues to push them forward on the path that he had chosen. In the end, this lack of perspective works to thwart Allie's aspirations. By ignoring the implications he may have on his family and the suffering he was putting them all through, he became the cause of their unhappiness and his own downfall.

If one wishes to be successful, one must also be realistic; the facts of the situation cannot be ignored. Allie Fox failed to do so. He believed that he was always right, that he would never fail. He believed that he was invincible, claiming more than once that he felt "a little like a god." Allie's self-confidence enabled him to make decisions and to interact with people well, but it also prevented him from recognizing his own weaknesses, from understanding the truth. An example of his extremely assured attitude leading to disaster is that of his expedition of transporting ice up the mountain to Olancho. Determined to spread "civilization" to surrounding villages, Allie embarked on a hike up the mountain with his sons, loyal Zambus and a large block of ice. This idea, like many others, did not go as planned. Despite the hard work of his companions, Allie was forced to camp out over night on the way to Olancho and his ice continued to melt. Instead of recognizing the impracticality of this failing expedition, Allie carried on. Upon reaching the village, they ice had melted; Allie had showed up empty-handed. Consumed by his desire to be successful on this expedition, he overlooked some very important details and believed that the white men in the camp were captured slaves. He did not realize the danger he was putting Jeronimo in as he

told the "slaves" of his great village and attempted to help them escape. He created a purpose for the unsuccessful ice-delivery, to rescue these slaves. Allie believed that nothing could go wrong, that what he believed was true and overlooked any suspicions on the village of Olancho, essentially leading these dangerous men to his peaceful town. His inability to recognize his weaknesses and accept the truth was the destruction of Jeronimo, the destruction of the hard work towards his goals.

In addition to having a lack of recognition for the possibility of failures, Allie was unable to learn from his failures once they had occurred. The only way one can attempt to grow both personally and intellectually is if they are willing to gain experience from the unsuccessful aspects of their life. Allie was unable to do so. His constant avoidance of the reality of his dreams only caused more and more failures, more and more suffering. After Jeronimo he had caused the ruin of Jeronimo, Allie claimed that he was "a changed man", that he had "an experience. Instead of using the destruction of Jeronimo as a lesson to build a better village, Allie stated that they were now "free" and they could live better now that they had nothing. He did not learn from his failure, he simply tried to avoid it. Allie took his family to Brewer's lagoon but did not stay there, where it was safe. He was determined to prove that he could build another home, a better home. In reality, they had nothing, and Laguna Miskita was a far from ideal place to raise a family. After he had ignored the advice of Mr. Haddy and the Fox's home had been carried away by the rising water levels, Allie continued to try and prove that he could be successful. Claiming that he had planned it all, he took his family upriver once again. His constant denial of his failures leads to one disaster after another, each time leading the family into a worsened situation. If he had actually learned from each "experience," then he would have not forced his family to continue building new, unsuccessful settlements. Allie's pride prevented him from actually achieving his desire for self-fulfillment because he was unable to take useful information from his failures.

If one wishes to be successful in reaching their goals, they must think of the effect they will have on the world around them, realize their potential for error and learn from their failures. In "Mosquito Coast", by Paul Theroux, Allie Fox's obsession with securing the satisfaction of self-fulfillment ultimately leads to his death, as he was unable to do so. Goals give humanity a purpose but they can also be its downfall.

Edited introduction for sample 1:

~~Throughout life, it is important to set goals and work towards their accomplishment~~ **Setting goals and working towards their accomplishment is important.** [An independent clause (such as "it is important to set goals...") beginning with "it is" (called an expletive construction) is wordy and weak. Try to phrase the statement in a more emphatic way. In the edited version of this sentence, the action referred to—being the statement's focal element—is made the subject of the sentence, making the statement more forceful.] Without ~~something~~ **projects and dreams** [The words *something* and *thing(s)* are often vague. More precise or vivid replacements can usually be found.] to aspire to, ~~humanity~~ **humans** would be ~~living~~ **live** without purpose and ~~there would be no advancement in their daily lives~~ **fail to advance.** [This edit makes the statement more economical and therefore emphatic.] ~~While~~ **But while** [The insertion of the conjunction "But" assists the transition from the preceding thought to the thought in this sentence.] failing to set goals may be detrimental, the same can be said about devoting one's life **exclusively** to achieving a specific outcome. **This is mere obsession, a form of** ~~Obsession on~~ securing the satisfaction of self-fulfillment **that, ironically,** may prevent an individual from attaining ~~their~~ **his** desired result because ~~they are~~ **he becomes** [The pronouns "their" and "they" are plural pronouns, but their antecedent, "an individual," is singular. Therefore, singular pronouns ("his" and "he") are needed to agree with "an individual."] unable to see the bigger picture. In ~~the his~~ novel *Mosquito Coast* **The Mosquito Coast** [Titles of full-length works are shown in italics.], Paul Theroux illustrates ~~the self-destructiveness of the extreme desire for self-fulfillment in the character of Allie Fox~~ **through the character of Allie Fox the self-destructiveness that can attend obsessive pursuits.** While attempting to achieve his goals and prove his worth both to himself and the world, Allie ~~ultimately~~ **unwittingly** ~~designed~~ **designed** [Remember to refer to the elements of a text (including the author's efforts and effects) in present tense, not in past tense.] ~~his own downfall,~~ **demonstrating** ~~suggesting~~ that ~~one~~ **one** cannot be successful in achieving **successfully achieve** [for economy] ~~their~~ **his** goals

if ~~they don't~~ **he does not** put them in perspective with ~~their~~ world, recognize ~~their~~ **his** weaknesses, ~~or~~ **and** learn from ~~their~~ **his** failures*. [Singular pronouns are needed to agree with the antecedent "one."]

* This sentence—appropriately set at the end of the introductory paragraph—is a strong thesis for the essay. It does what a good thesis statement *should* do for a diploma-exam essay in that it answers the assignment question (What ideas the text convey about securing the satisfaction of self-fulfillment?).

Revision:

Setting goals and working towards their accomplishment is important. Without projects and dreams to aspire to, humans would live without purpose and fail to advance. But while failing to set goals may be detrimental, the same can be said about devoting one's life exclusively to achieving a specific outcome. This is mere obsession, a form of securing the satisfaction of self-fulfillment that, ironically, may prevent an individual from attaining his desired result because he becomes unable to see the bigger picture. In his novel *The Mosquito Coast*, Paul Theroux illustrates through the character of Allie Fox the self-destructiveness that can attend obsessive pursuits. While attempting to achieve his goals and prove his worth both to himself and the world, Allie unwittingly designs his own downfall, suggesting that one cannot successfully achieve his goals if he does not put them in perspective with the world, recognize his weaknesses, and learn from his failures.

Sample 2

Topic: Adaptation

It is the process of natural selection, famously studied by English naturalist Charles Darwin, which enables some species to thrive and others to perish in the natural world. This process is responsible for the diversity of life and its ability to continue. Each individual member of every species has certain adaptations, either physical, behavioural, or physiological, that can turn out to be either advantageous or detrimental in the race of life. However, Darwinist thought can be applied to more than just the natural world. Paul Theroux, author of *The Mosquito Coast*, brilliantly explores the idea of adaptation within society and the profound effect this has on both humanity and nature. Using the Fox family as a case study and America, Jeronimo, and Laguna Miskita as symbols, Theroux conveys three polar aspects of human adaptation, and in doing so, expresses the self-destructive nature of the human species.

In *The Mosquito Coast*, America is painted as a picture of evil, a land in which convenience and greed rule all. From the structure of its government down to the lifestyle of its individual citizens, America has adapted to accommodate the American Dream – that of equal opportunity for capitalistic success. Yet in doing so, the country has chosen not only to overcome nature, but to ignore it completely. For the sake of convenience and progress, one can have "cheese spray in aerosol cans" despite its horrendous effect on the ozone layer. Hiring foreign labourers is a viable means of cutting costs – it matters not that the workers cannot feed themselves or their families, but merely that minimal capital is spent and maximum profits are earned. The nation that once welcomed immigrants to the "refuse of its teeming shores" now invites investors and white-collar criminals to its polluted and corrupt expanse. This is the America readers of *The*

Mosquito Coast see because of the descriptions made by the main character, Allie Fox. Many would look upon the United States and see a wealthy, advanced nation, willingly blinding themselves to the open suffering it inflicts upon this life-giving planet, its own citizens, and humanity at large. However, Allie chooses not to overlook America's wrongdoings. He acknowledges the failures of his people, analyzes the adaptations that caused this, and eventually chooses to develop a new way of living.

Allie moves his family to the Mosquito Coast of Honduras to live away from America. They buy a town, Jeronimo, and try to build a utopian civilization in the jungle, avoiding American flaws and starting from scratch. Practically the only thing the Fox family brings to Honduras is bags of seed for food – seeds which have been genetically modified to flourish in areas such as the Mosquito Coast. The seeds are artificially adapted and symbolically, it is this fact that causes the downfall of Jeronimo and other human societies. Like the seed, the Foxes artificially adapt to their new home without ever truly becoming a piece of it. Instead of ignoring nature as in America, they try to overcome it. Allie strives to "perfect an imperfect world" in part by creating civilization in the jungle. What he does not realize is that although "ice [may be] civilization," the adaptations he imposes on the native Hondurans bring them farther from nature which is ultimately their salvation. This becomes evident when Fat Boy explodes, leaching ammonia into the air, water, and soil, rendering the jungle paradise into a toxic wasteland. Humanity's intrinsic flaw is the desire to feel apart from its organic environment – the adaptations that have permitted it to become earth's ruling species are also crippling, and doom it to constant dissatisfaction.

Finally, Paul Theroux demonstrates through the events at Laguna Miskita that living simply is not sufficient in order to live a fulfilling life. Allie is still insistent upon bringing the genetically-modified seeds, indicating that a part of him still wants to overcome nature. He refuses to acknowledge the simple facts of life like that his home and garden is sinking in the rising lagoon – something that more primal knowledge would grant him. Accordingly, readers begin to understand that Allie's main problem is that he is constantly trying to prove his points and beat life at its own game. He need only put aside his pride and give into his primal nature as a means of surviving happily. Allie is not of the right frame-of-mind to undertake living naturally; his inner desire for domination and outer expressions of natural harmony are too conflicting. Therefore, it is impossible for the Foxes to live as they intend at Laguna Miskita because Allie cannot let go of his hubristic dreams of overcoming the suffering brought on by nature. Although he refuses to admit it, Allie harbours the most harmful adaptation of capitalist society: egocentricity. Humanity can only live successfully in natural world when it is entirely willing to be a part of it, equal to all other aspects of the ecosystem.

It is fitting for the conclusion of this essay to close much in the same way of the fictional life of Allie Fox – with the recognition that man is not made to live the way he does. On a basic level, humans "are not made [to live the way they desire]." Yet it is the behavioural adaptations of humanity that have caused its downfall. As long as nature is chosen to be ignored or attempted to be overcome, man will suffer. This is suggested in the novel *The Mosquito Coast* by Paul Theroux as the story progresses in both content and location. America symbolizes man's adaptation to ignore his environment. This causes immeasurable damage as it removes humanity from its accountability to not only nature, but other human beings as well. Alternatively, Jeronimo represents humanity's tendency to try to overcome nature. As long as life is seen as a game to be won, man will never truly win. Contrarily, Laguna Miskita demonstrates the perils of living naturally without accepting the natural world. This juxtaposition of action and idea cannot yield a positive result. While dying, Allie says that scavengers will inherit the earth because they have an adaptive edge over humanity. This is not necessarily the case. Scavengers will survive because they live as scavengers; they exist the way they were meant to. True, scavengers will outlive man, but only if he is stagnant and refuses to change. Accepting his true nature as a being within, not above or separate, from creation will render him the use of his dormant adaptations in order to thrive.

Edited body paragraph for sample 2:

~~In *The Mosquito Coast*,~~ [This phrase is redundant, as the introduction makes clear that the essay will be a discussion of ideas in *The Mosquito Coast*.] **In Allie Fox's view,** [The writer needs to emphasize from the start that the jaundiced view of America is Allie's, not Paul Theroux's. Theroux may or may not

agree with his character, or he may feel that Allie's beliefs are a mixture of sound observations and cynical delusions. We don't know. To attribute the dark convictions to Allie alone is justified. To attribute them to Theroux is not.] America is painted as a picture of evil **not so much "the land of the free and the home of the brave" as it is** a land in which convenience and greed rule all. [The insertion of the phrase from the American national anthem provides an effective juxtaposition for the writer's phrase "a land in which convenience and greed rule all."] From the structure of its government down to the lifestyle of its individual citizens, America has adapted to accommodate **become a pale imitation, even a perversion, of the American Dream—that a place of equal opportunity, but not so much for hard-working, innovative, clear-sighted citizens as for "dope-taking, door-locking, ulcerated . . . rabid scavengers and criminal millionaires and moral sneaks"** for capitalistic success. [This would be a long quotation to store in memory for the sake of the diploma exam—but not *too* long. And it is an especially apt quotation if you need a rant-like fragment that neatly represents the usual attitude of Allie Fox.] Yet in doing so **(if we are to take Allie's observations for sound analysis)**, the country has chosen not only to overcome nature, but to ignore it completely. For the sake of **stultifying** convenience and **alleged** progress, one can have "cheese spray in aerosol cans." ~~despite its horrendous effect on the ozone layer.~~ [In the time setting of the novel (the 70s), Allie wouldn't have known about the ozone-depleting effect of aerosol sprays.] Hiring foreign laborers is a viable means of cutting costs—~~it~~ **And it** matters not that ~~the~~ workers cannot feed themselves or their families, but merely **only** that minimal capital is spent and maximum profits are earned. The nation that once welcomed immigrants ~~to the~~ **who had been the "wretched refuse of its [their] teeming shores"** [See the note below regarding this quotation from the plaque on the Statue of Liberty.¹] now invites **rapacious** investors and white-collar criminals to its ~~polluted and corrupted~~ **expansive**. This is the America ~~readers of *The Mosquito Coast* see because of the descriptions made by the main character,~~ **that Allie Fox sees and loathes. And many cynical readers would agree with him, also seeing** ~~Many would look upon the United States and see as~~ a wealthy, advanced nation, ~~willingly blinding themselves~~ **but one willfully blind** to the ~~open~~ suffering it inflicts ~~upon~~ this life-giving planet, ~~its own citizens,~~ and humanity at large. However, Allie chooses not to overlook America's wrongdoings. ~~He~~ **Rather he** acknowledges the failures of his people, analyzes the adaptations that caused the **degradations**, and ~~eventually~~ chooses **out of his outrage** to develop a new way of living.

¹ The full text of the Statue of Liberty inscription, a sonnet by Emma Lazarus, is this:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
 With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
 Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
 A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
 Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
 Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
 Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
 The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
 "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
 With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Revision:

In Allie Fox's view, America is not so much "the land of the free and the home of the brave" as it is a land in which convenience and greed rule all. From the structure of its government down to the lifestyle of its individual citizens, America has adapted to become a

pale imitation, even a perversion, of the American Dream—a place of equal opportunity, but not so much for hard-working, innovative, clear-sighted citizens as for "dope-taking, door-locking, ulcerated ... rabid scavengers and criminal millionaires and moral sneaks." Yet in doing so (if we are to take Allie's observations for sound analysis), the country has chosen not only to overcome nature but to ignore it completely. For the sake of stultifying convenience and alleged progress, one can have "cheese spray in aerosol cans." Hiring foreign laborers is a viable means of cutting costs. And it matters not that workers cannot feed themselves or their families, only that minimal capital is spent and maximum profits are earned. The nation that once welcomed immigrants who had been the "wretched refuse of [their] teeming shore" now invites rapacious investors and white-collar criminals to its corrupted expanse. This is the America that Allie Fox sees and loathes. And many cynical readers would agree with him, also seeing the United States as a wealthy, advanced nation, but one willfully blind to the suffering it inflicts on this life-giving planet and humanity at large. However, Allie chooses not to overlook America's wrongdoings. Rather he acknowledges the failures of his people, analyzes the adaptations that caused the degradations, and chooses out of his outrage to develop a new way of living.

Sample 3

Topic: Adaptation

Allie Fox, one of the major characters in Paul Theroux's *The Mosquito Coast*, is an individual who lives by his own rules. He has complete confidence in his own ideas and is blind to any alternatives. As a result of this, he takes his family from America to live in Honduras. He believes that America is on the brink of dissolving into war, and that he is saving his family by leaving. To the extent of our knowledge, all of the members of the family have lived in America their entire lives. They are accustomed to solid houses, readily available food and modern technology. When Allie takes his family and moves to Honduras, they are faced with an entirely different set of circumstances. The family quickly has to adapt in a number of ways in order to survive in the strange land. They must change their diet, their daily activities and their lifestyles according to Allie's desires so that they can live in Honduras. The author puts forward the idea that people will adapt, even when forced into a radical situation, in order to survive.

In America, the Fox family was a sheltered family which was dictated by Allie. Despite this, they were able to purchase food from supermarkets, cook it on an electrical stove and store the leftovers in the refrigerator. This is the way of life for many North Americans. When the family migrates to Honduras, they must develop an entirely new way of getting food. As there are no supermarkets in the dense Honduran jungle, they must grow and catch their own food. This food must be prepared over a fire and stored in whatever manner they can best manage. Unfortunately for the Fox family, Allie forbids them to eat any of the vegetation which naturally grows there, such as bananas. This adds a further restriction to the family's new diet. Since the consumption of food is essential for human life, adapting to new foods and food sources is essential for survival.

As well as adapting to a new diet, the Fox family has to adjust their daily activities. There is little opportunity for fun, as almost every minute of the day has to be dedicated to survival. Instead of playing

games or going to town, the Fox children spend their time tending to the garden and helping in the construction of Jeronimo. They are no longer permitted to behave as children, but must quickly assume the responsibilities of people far older than they are. While they were never average children, as a result of their father's personality, they were forced to become very different individuals virtually overnight. This is a difficult adaptation to make, as maturity and change usually occurs over a long period of time. The children are given tasks to complete that are much more difficult than the typical tasks a child would be expected to perform. For instance, Jerry and Charlie are forced to help their father and several indigenous people drag a sled full of ice up a mountain. This is not the sort of task that one would expect two pre-teen boys to have to complete.

One of the adaptations that Allie makes over the course of the novel is the adaptation to failure. Allie is always overly confident of his own success, and never considers the possibility of defeat. His first major failure occurs when he delivers the melted ice to the remote Indian tribe. In response to this unexpected event, Allie lies to himself. He talks proudly of the Indians shocked faces on the return journey, instead of admitting outright that he was unsuccessful. His hubristic personality refuses to accept that he has been not succeeded. As a result of this lie, his ever-faithful son Charlie begins to lose respect for him. In the failures that follow (such as the obliteration of Jeronimo, the flooding of the land in Laguna Miskita), Allie comforts himself by proclaiming that he knew it was going to happen or that he was happy that it did. This particular adaptation is frightening to his family, as it only makes Allie more determined to succeed, and his attempts at success repeatedly put his family in danger.

Although Allie will never admit it, he becomes several of his most loathed entities over time; a missionary and a scavenger. Unlike most missionaries found in Honduras, Allie imposes atheism. However, he portrays himself as a sort of god, and his ideas as the bible. He repeatedly insults missionaries, and yet he acts like one himself. Allie also despises scavengers, a fact which he states repeatedly. It is ironic that he himself is a scavenger, collecting washed up items on the beach and old tools in the jungle. He uses these items to create something new. He is, in essence, the very things he despises the most. Over the course of the story, these traits in him become increasingly prominent in him, an adaptation that he seems to be unconscious of.

The adaptations made by the characters in this novel are physical as well as mental. The family's skin becomes tanned as a result of repeated exposure to the sun. Since there is no junk food available, and little time for rest, much of their body fat is lost. These adaptations are observed by Emily Spellgood near the end of the novel, and help both the children and the reader understand how much the family has changed.

As the novel progresses, the family becomes increasingly defiant of Allie. At the beginning of the novel, they trust his judgment without question, and any doubts are not made public. As the family travels through Honduras, their defiance of Allie becomes more and more vocal. They openly question his judgement in regards to settlement location near the end, an occurrence which would have been highly unlikely at the beginning of the novel. In the last few chapters of the book, Allie's wife commits the ultimate defiance by taking the family downriver instead of upriver. She deliberately disobeys Allie's request, and helps liberate her children as a result.

One of the most dramatic adaptations that the Fox family makes over the course of the novel is adapting to the death of Allie Fox. The children have lived their whole life under a dictator, and his nameless wife has spent much of her life in the same situation. The family is now faced with the unfortunately uncommon situation of having to make their own decisions. The children are suddenly permitted to have their own opinions, and the family is able to return to America. Their father's narrow-minded ideas will no longer be imposed on them. This adaptation will likely take a great deal of time. It can be compared to a country making the transition from a dictatorship to a democracy. The full adjustment often takes a great deal of time, and is not always made easily. In a family that has been forced to adapt many times according to the wishes of a dictator, they now have to make a final adaptation to life without that dictator.

Just as the Fox family has to adjust to Honduras, Honduras has to adjust to the effects of the Fox family. A portion of the rainforest becomes contaminated with ammonia as a result of the destruction of Fat Boy. This will have a detrimental effect on the life in that area, and areas downstream. Those who have come into contact with Allie have been exposed to his radical ideas. Some have been given seeds which are superior to those found in Honduras. The Spellgood's plane has been destroyed, and their religious efforts damaged. The Fox family will likely leave a lasting impression on the missionaries. Mr. Haddy and the Maywits, who have the misfortune of living with the family for a while, have to adjust their lifestyles to fit the desires of Allie. While the most notable adaptations occur in the Fox family, the adaptations that those around them have to make should not be overlooked.

Throughout *The Mosquito Coast*, the author advances many ideas regarding adaptation. The characters in the novel are forced to adapt in a number of ways and placed in situations that are highly abnormal as a result of an overly ambitious and confident father/husband. These adaptations include changes to diet, lifestyle and appearance. These adaptations are all made to ensure survival and approval from Allie. The novel is filled with adaptations of various forms, both conscious and unconscious. The characters adjust to their surrounding, which are constantly changing. Only with the dramatic event of the loss of Allie can the family begin a final adaptation to normality.

Edited conclusion for sample 3:

Throughout *The Mosquito Coast*, the author advances ~~many~~ **significant** [See below the note taken from the document "Don't do this, don't do that," in the website folder "Writing Skills."¹] ideas regarding adaptation. [See the note below.²] ~~The characters in the novel Fox family are is forced to adapt in a number of ways and placed in situations that are highly abnormal as a result of an overly ambitious and confident father/husband~~ **placed in highly abnormal situations as a result of the over-ambitious, over-confident Allie and forced to adapt in a number of ways** [The chronology is changed here to follow a natural sequence. First: be placed in a new situation. Second: adapt to it. The original order is illogical.] ~~These adaptations include~~ **, including** changes to diet, lifestyle, and appearance. ~~These~~ **But curiously, these physical adaptations are all seem to be made less to ensure survival and than to secure approval from Allie, suggesting the enormous psychological power one person may wield over others.** [See the note below.³] ~~The novel is filled with adaptations of various forms, both conscious and unconscious. The characters adjust to their surrounding, which are constantly changing. Only~~ **In the end, only** with the ~~dramatic event of the loss~~ **destruction** of Allie can the family begin ~~a~~ **its** final adaptation **back** to normality **cy**.

¹ Don't use phrases such as these:

There are many examples of ...
Many ideas are developed about ...
... happens many times in the novel.

Unless you can cite more than, say, five examples of the "many" things you're referring to collectively, do not speak of the "many" things at all. And even if you *can* and *do* cite the five-plus examples, still avoid introducing them with this sort of clichéd phrasing. Don't say, for example, that "this work advances many ideas about the influence of an ideal on behavior." Rather, state the actual ideas (or the one idea, if that's how many you have) that the work advances.

² This sentence does restate in summary the content of the foregoing body paragraphs, but it doesn't stand a relevant topic sentence for the concluding paragraph, for the conclusion does not list the ideas regarding adaptation. Rather, the conclusion makes a general restatement about the family's process of adaptation and re-adaptation. For this reason, the writer would do better to begin the paragraph with the second sentence instead, letting *it* stand as the topic.

³ The diploma-exam topics are always focused on characters' and real-life people's psychological responses—e.g. dilemmas, turning points, isolation, fear, desire, integrity, ideals, and so on—particularly the psychological responses occasioned by individuals' interactions with other individuals. Now, while physical conditions *do* prompt psychological responses (as in the case of the Fox family's adapting for the sake of bodily survival), the writer should still emphasize the effects of persons on persons. For this reason, I've qualified this writer's original assertion about the family's adaptation to a new environment by drawing more attention to the novel's most significant catalyst, Allie Fox. (One should note, incidentally, that throughout the body of the essay, the writer *does* focus mainly on the effects of Allie on others.)

Revision:

The Fox family is placed in highly abnormal situations as a result of the over-ambitious, over-confident Allie and forced to adapt in a number of ways, including changes to diet, lifestyle, and appearance. But curiously, these physical adaptations seem to be made less to ensure survival than to secure approval from Allie, suggesting the enormous psychological power one person may wield over others. In the end, only with the destruction of Allie can the family begin its final adaptation back to normalcy.