

For this essay assignment, we will continue to practice close textual analysis while we examine identity as a major theme in contemporary literature. In particular, *Actually* gives us the opportunity to examine identity as it pertains to privilege and oppression in our society. Anna Ziegler's brief biographical sketches of the main characters Amber and Tom describe the two characters this way:

#### AMBER

early-mid 20s, high-strung, talkative, charmingly neurotic.

She does not present as insecure. She is Jewish

#### TOM

early-mid 20s, appealing and confident with some swagger that conceals a deeper vulnerability.

He is African-American. (Characters)

However, there is much more to the two. As we learn by reading the play, Amber is deeply insecure about her looks and body, while Tom is vulnerable to issues of race and socioeconomic class, especially when comparing his experiences to other students at Princeton. In addition, Amber comes from a well educated family with parents working in well-paying fields like law, while Tom comes from a working-class, inner-city background, and he is the first in his family to attend college. Amber's white privilege contrasts Tom's experiences as African American, and it's rather clear that Amber has only a slight understanding of the layers of privilege she holds.

Written in 2017, the play responded to several high profile campus sexual assault cases and how they were handled by universities and local law enforcement. Ziegler's use of **ambiguity** as a major theme throughout the work situates the audience as jury to the stories Amber and Tom tell about the night they had sex, with the end of the play positioning the audience to decide—for themselves—if sexual assault occurred. This uncomfortable position also pushes us to confront our own implicit biases about gender, race, sexuality, and violence. Ziegler's work clearly calls into question the procedures used by universities to examine sexual assault cases with the bar for conviction set at "50% and a feather" rather than "beyond a shadow of doubt" as is expected in criminal proceedings. Below are several options for you to choose from when writing your essay.

[Option One](#)

[Option Two](#)

[At the End of Your Paper](#)


[Uncomfortable](#)

## Tom Character Analysis

For this option, examine how different aspects of *Tom's identity* position him within the play in relationship to Amber. Think of this essay as a comparison and—more of a—contrast between the two characters. For this approach, please consider the systemic oppressions that Tom's character discusses as it relates his race. Also, are there some privileges Tom holds?

**Make sure to click each tab to see all the information!**

### Some General Essay Writing Guidelines:

- Papers should be thesis driven and rely on close textual analysis for support.
- Papers should contain an introduction with a thesis, body, and concluding paragraphs.
- Each paragraph should present pieces of evidence directly from the text and your analysis of the evidence should point back to your topic sentences and your thesis.
- Please follow [MLA guidelines for paper formatting](#) , which includes margins, header, font typeface and point size, in-text citations, and works cited.

### Due Dates:

Essay Outline: Feb. 4th

Essay Rough Draft: Feb. 4th, 11:59 PM : Peer Review: Feb. 8th, 11:59 PM

Final Draft: Feb. 11th, 11:59 PM -ish

[Option One](#)

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## Tom Character Analysis

For this option, examine how different aspects of ***Tom's identity*** position him within the play in relationship to Amber. Think of this essay as a comparison and—more of a—contrast between the two characters. For this approach, please consider the systemic oppressions that Tom's character discusses as it relates his race. Also, are there some privileges Tom holds?

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## Amber Character Analysis

For this option, examine how different aspects of *Amber's identity* position her within the play in relationship to Tom. Think of this essay as a comparison and—more of a—contrast between the two characters. For this approach, please consider the privileges that Amber's character holds. Also, are there forms of oppression that Amber experiences?

[Option One](#)

[Option Two](#)

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## In the Final Portion of Your Essay

No matter if you're choosing option one or option two above, you likely have a judgment about what should be the outcome of the investigation, i.e. should Tom be found responsible for sexual assault or not. In the last portion of your essay, please present your opinion about the outcome of the investigation, and why you believe or do not believe that sexual assault has occurred. If appropriate, discuss how your own implicit biases might affect your decision making. How can you ensure that such biases are not (or at least a very limited) part of your decision making process? Is that even possible?

## Triggers, Challenges, Uneasiness

Chances are that this assignment may feel a little uncomfortable to write. I urge you to lean into that feeling of uneasiness as it means that you're writing something meaningful. Ziegler wrote *Actually* to purposefully challenge her audience and to make you cringe and shift in your seat. All art forms should move us (physically, emotionally) in some way, otherwise they are bland and boring like whip cream on vanilla ice cream (who does that?). This uneasiness and the challenges that Ziegler offers, also means that some of us may be triggered by the text. It's important to check in with yourself as you're reading and as you're writing. If needed, take a break. Also, remember that the text is just a play, a work of fiction. It can be put down and pages can be skipped if needed.