

Final Writing Assignment:

Juvenile Justice

Background: On June 25, 2012, the Supreme Court ruled that juveniles who committed murder could not be sentenced to life in prison because it violated the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. Justice Elena Kagan, writing for the majority, stated that "Mandatory life without parole for a juvenile precludes consideration of his chronological age and its hallmark features—among them, immaturity, impetuosity, and failure to appreciate risks and consequences. It prevents taking into account the family and home environment that surrounds him—and from which he cannot usually extricate himself—no matter how brutal or dysfunctional."

However, four justices strongly disagreed, arguing that mandatory sentences reflected the will of American society that heinous crimes committed by juveniles should always be punished with a sentence to life in prison. Justice Alito noted that otherwise, "Even a 17 ½-year-old who sets off a bomb in a crowded mall or guns down a dozen students and teachers is a 'child' and must be given a chance to persuade a judge to permit his release into society..."

Task: Write an essay analyzing the issues raised by these arguments. Be sure to indicate which side you most strongly agree with. Support your position, providing reasons and examples from your own experience and observations, discussions you have participated in, and texts you have read for this module. Your essay should be as clearly focused, well organized, and carefully written as you can make it.

Help: Questions such as the ones below will help you plan what you want say before you begin to draft your essay.

- Do you agree with the majority of Supreme Court justices who argued to abolish mandatory life in prison for juveniles who commit murder or with the minority who argued to retain it?
- Which author or authors that we have read support your position? What evidence do they provide?
- Which author or authors support those who disagree with you? What evidence do they provide? Sketch out a plan for the arguments and evidence you will use in your essay.
- Write a working thesis. After you have finished your essay, reread your thesis statement and revise it if necessary.