**General questions**

1. Using the [New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/), [San Francisco Chronicle](http://www.sfchronicle.com/), [Miami Herald](http://www.miamiherald.com/), or the [St. Maarten Herald](https://thedailyherald.sx/) find a job with a stated salary and then find an apartment you could afford. How much money would you have left for food, clothing, cell phone, and travel expenses? (Hint: can't find the *Los Angeles Times* or the *Daily News*? Most major newspapers are available online)
2. How would this book (or one section or even one scene) be different if Ehrenreich were a woman of color? If she were lesbian? An immigrant from a foreign country?
3. Frequently in her **Introduction**, and occasionally throughout the rest of the book, Ehrenreich calls our attention to the many ways in which her experiences differ from those of "real" minimum wage workers--for instance, when she says "I was only visiting a world that others inhabit full-time, often for most of their lives" (6), and when she points out in some detail the "reassuring limits to whatever tribulations [she] might have to endure" (6-7). Why?
4. How would Ehrenreich's experience be different if she had been a Briton living and working in London? What if she had been a Frenchwoman living in Paris? Or an Israeli in Haifa or Tel Aviv?
5. How did reading this book change you or your opinions? What else do you still need to know? What other information would help you shape an informed opinion about minimum wage working conditions in the United States?
6. This book is both wonderful and flawed. Consider for instance the references to "WalMartians" and to obesity. Ask students: what did you personally find offensive in this book?
7. Ehrenreich has a PhD in biology. How does this fact contribute to the success of her book?

**Writing Classes**

Note: questions 4-10 below are adapted with permission from Mary Kay Harrington, Cal Poly SLO, who suggested during her 8/21/08 visit to CSUN seven things students could gain in a writing class using *Nickel and Dimed:*

* (1) Reading strategies applicable to a variety of texts;
* (2) Ways of thinking through writing topics;
* (3) Knowledge of how thinking helps reading;
* (4) How to read rhetorically;
* (5) How to analyze;
* (6) How to make an argument, noting in particular Ehrenreich's own form. What is Ehrenreich’s form and style?
* (7) The importance of revision. Agree or disagree with this statement, “In the **revision** process, you improve your reading skills and your analytical skills. You learn to challenge your own ideas, thus deepening and strengthening your argument. You learn to find the weaknesses in your writing.”

1. Ehrenreich mentions her writing process occasionally in *Nickel and Dimed*, for instance on p. 8: "I went home every day [ . . . ] to a laptop." When, where, and how do you write? Do you have a daily writing process? Do you think it would help you to have one? Why?
2. When Barbara begins working at the Hearthside restaurant, she compares that job to her former work "in the writing business" (17). Which do you think is the more difficult task: writing or waiting tables? Explain.
3. In one memorable passage, Barbara invites us to "Picture a fat person's hell," and goes on to describe Jerry's restaurant (29-30). What kind of writing is this? What is her aim?
4. Pages 58-9: opinion surveys. Barbara suggests that we lie and attempt to psych out surveys. What is your view? Why?
5. Pages 67-9: "Deliverance" episode. How would you characterize Ehrenreich's tone as she describes this experience? Explain by using examples. How does she make you *personally* feel?
6. Pages 76: What do you find most upsetting about this description? Why? Have you or your family hired someone to clean for you? Have you yourself performed this work for someone? If so, what would you like to see changed?
7. Pages 90-93: Analyze Ehrenreich's rhetorical stance. How does she use logos, pathos, and ethos to ensure her desired effect on us?
8. In the Introduction to Nickel and Dimed, the author writes: “Unlike many low wage workers, I have the further advantages of being white and a native English speaker.” How and why were these two facets of Ehrenreich’s identity advantageous over the full duration of her study.
9. Near the beginning of this book, Ehrenreich compares the restaurant-tipping habits of Americans and Europeans. Near the end, she notes that, while “most civilized nations compensate for inadequacy of wages by providing relatively generous public services,” the U.S. “leaves its citizens to fend for themselves.” What, in Ehrenreich’s view, could America learn from other countries about how to better treat its low-wage workers?
10. The action of Nickel and Dimed unfolds in three American communities, as found in three different states: Florida, Maine, and Minnesota. What about your own community? How would Nickel and Dimed be different—or similar—if it included the area you call home? •
11. Ehrenreich often speaks of dietary matters, of nutrition, of food as fuel. Why does she keep doing so? What did reading this book tell you about how we eat and how we work in America? And what about the correlations that may or may not exist between low-wage American workers and their use of cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol?
12. Throughout Nickel and Dimed the author makes complaints about “management.” Summarize the many problems that Ehrenreich has with managers, looking especially at the book’s WalMart passages and the breakdown of “workplace authoritarianism” in the Evaluation chapter.
13. Explain why Ehrenreich believes that personality surveys and drug tests are both categorically unfair to low-wage workers. Look back over the full range of her low-wage experiences when responding.

**Cinema (CTVA)**

The “High Cost of Low Prices”. We’ll watch this movie and discuss rhetorical strategies used in the movie.