HC 2019 Application Essay Question

The essay is an important part of your HC application and should represent your polished writing. While many college admissions essays invite you to share a personal story, the HC essay has a different focus: it asks you to demonstrate your critical thinking skills. In 450-500 words, provide your perspective on the issue raised in the prompt. The essay as a whole should address the specific and substantive question(s) posed. In evaluating your response, we will consider your writing skills and ability to think deeply and creatively.

“Geography is life’s limiting factor. Speciation—life itself—is ultimately a matter of warm and cool currents, rich and bare soils, deserts and forests, fresh and salt water, deltas and jungles and plains.”


In the passage above, Annie Dillard discusses the impact of geography on life. We can understand this passage metaphorically as well as literally: the environments in which communities or individuals find themselves, through choice or fate, can shape who or what they become.

There are many examples of defining factors and their impacts. Mesopotamia’s growth was possible because of the fertile soil and close proximity to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Portugal’s geographical and political relationship to Spain in the 15th century initiated an era of maritime exploration. Rosa Parks, Steve Jobs, Ai Weiwei, Amelia Earhart, Malala Yousafzai, Elon Musk, and Meghan Markle were shaped by specific life experiences and circumstances. The Cold War between the US and Russia provided the foundation for the Space Race.

Rather than using one of the above examples, identify your own choice of an individual or community from literature, history, or the modern world as the subject of your response.

Then, write an essay in which you

1. Choose one individual or community and describe their environment and defining factors – what are the “deserts and forests,” “fresh and salt waters,” or “rich and bare soils” of their circumstances?
2. Explain how those circumstances and defining factors shaped this individual or community.

Please do not select yourself or a personal anecdote as the topic for your response. The best response will offer a unique and specific example that will stand out among the many essays the admissions committee will review.