Writing Assignment
The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

Cell Biology
Spring, 2015

After reading The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, consider the following questions. Your writing assignment, worth a maximum of 25 points, will be graded based upon the thoroughness and thoughtfulness with which you answer each of the questions below. In answering these questions, refer to specifics in the book and/or use outside resources as necessary.

1. Was there a ‘success story’ in this book? If so, what was it?

2. For whom in this book did you feel the greatest empathy and why?

3. How would you describe George Gey as an individual?

4. Assume you were hired to curate of the future Henrietta Lacks Health History Museum in Turner Station. Design one display that you would have in the museum and describe it (or draw it, if you’re so inclined). What would you display, and what caption/explanation would you write to describe what is being displayed? Please remember your ‘audience’.

5. If Henrietta were an affluent Caucasian woman in 1950 Baltimore, do you think that would we have HEla cells in our freezers today? Explain.

6. Henrietta signed a consent form to “…perform any operative procedures...that they may deem necessary...” [refer to the book for the verbiage of the entire consent form that was signed.] Given this, do you believe that it was ethical to obtain a cervical sample for research? What information should have been given to Henrietta such that she might have been able to provide informed consent? If this information had been provided, do you believe that Henrietta would have given informed consent? If you were in Henrietta’s situation, would YOU have given consent? If so, why? If not, what would have been required for you to do so?

7. Discuss the benefits that cultured cells, such as HEla cells, contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge. Discuss some of the beneficial and detrimental effects that HEla cells have had on Henrietta’s family. Then, discuss the conclusion you draw on whether or not such cultured cells are beneficial overall.