1. **Mark your confusion.**
2. **Show evidence of a close reading.**
3. **Write a 1+ page reflection.**

The next civil rights frontier is digital
Source: Juan Andrade/*Dallasnews.com*/9.4.15

Across the country, students are back to school, their parents having purchased long lists of essential school supplies. These days, that list includes more than just pencils and notebooks; increasingly, access to a home Internet connection is a prerequisite for academic success.

Unfortunately, too many families lack the means to afford a monthly subscription — and the digital literacy to understand and benefit from its value. What's more is that students on the wrong side of this digital divide — those whose access to online resources is limited to public library visits or limited mobile data plans — will increasingly find themselves at a disadvantage compared to their peers.

The digital divide is pernicious to the Latino community. A 2013 study found that only 53 percent of Latinos had a broadband connection at home, compared to 74 percent of white households. That's why, like voting rights, the digital divide has now become a front burner civil rights issue and a fundamental barrier to full enfranchisement.

Recently, the Obama administration announced a new pilot program, ConnectHome, aimed at expanding broadband access to low-income households. It's an important step forward.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is rolling out the program in 28 pilot communities, and Sec. Julian Castro is following the model pioneered by an earlier program that the NAACP has called the biggest experiment ever aimed at closing the digital divide — a program initiated by, of all organizations, a leading Internet provider.

Comcast's Internet Essentials, launched in 2011, has connected more than 2 million Americans in 500,000 low-income households by offering a home broadband subscription for less than $10 a month to families with children eligible for the National School Lunch Program. Families also have the option of purchasing a computer for less than $150.

The program also partners with civic organizations and leaders in neighborhoods across the country that have both the "street cred" and the infrastructure to effectively teach digital literacy skills to participating families.

It's the comprehensiveness of this approach — and not just the discounted price points — that explains the program's success. It's a validation of research that has shown that cost is not

the only barrier (or even the most significant barrier) standing between low-income families and broadband adoption.

According to the Pew Research Center, less than 20 percent of households without home broadband name price as their primary barrier to adoption; by contrast, 34 percent don't feel it is relevant to their lives, while 32 percent say they simply don't understand how to use the Internet.

In the Latino community, this digital literacy gap is heightened by language barriers. Of Latino Internet users in the U.S., nearly three in four are either English-speaking or bilingual; among those not yet connected, that figure falls to 40 percent.

Addressing the digital literacy and cultural barriers — including teaching prospective enrollees how broadband Internet can radically change their lives — might be the most important part of the puzzle. Programs that understand this and embrace it as a core challenge will succeed.

The results speak for themselves. Nearly every single family that has enrolled in Internet Essentials say it has improved their children's grades — an unimpeachable validation of the importance of home broadband.

Unlike so many of our social and economic problems, we now know how to solve the digital divide; it just requires more leaders getting involved and building on the clear successes we've already seen. HUD's ConnectHome pilot is an important step that hopes to duplicate the results of Internet Essentials, but the scope of the problem demands a greater effort.

The digital divide is a fundamental civil rights issue. But with a greater commitment from both public and private sector leaders, it could soon become a problem of the past.

Possible Response Questions:
- Do you agree that digital access is a "fundamental civil rights issue"? Explain.
- In what ways can Internet access "radically change lives"? Explain.
- Do you make wise use of your Internet time? Explain.
- Pick a passage from the article and respond to it.