Essay Prompts for *Paper Sons: A Memoir*
<u>**Composition Courses**</u>

1) Stereotypes
In her TED talk "The Danger of a Single Story," Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describes the harmful effects of stereotypes. Using the "single story lens," to what extent does *Paper Sons* challenge stereotypes? Are there ways the book unintentionally reinforces stereotypes? Pick a group to analyze (e.g., youth of color, Asian Americans, victims/survivors, etc.). For example, you could analyze how the book challenges and/or reinforces the "model minority myth" of Asian Americans.

2) Gender
You have read Aaron Devor's "Gender Role Behavior and Attitudes." What do you think is *Paper Sons* implied argument about masculinity?

3) Mindset
You have read "Brainology" by Carol Dweck. Analyze Lam's life from the perspective of Dweck's concept of mindset. In what ways does Lam demonstrate a growth mindset? A fixed mindset?

4) American Dream
Key to the cultural myth of the American Dream is the concept of meritocracy, that success in the United States is primarily based on work, talent, and intellect rather than circumstances of one's social position (i.e. race, class, gender). Lam's family immigrates to the US with the American Dream in mind. Does *Paper Sons* challenge the idea of the American Dream or does it reinforce it?

Supplemental texts:
- "Why the Myth of Meritocracy Hurts Kids of Color," by Melanie Anderson
- "Is the American Dream Really Dead?" by Carol Graham
- "Rethinking the American Dream," by David Kamp
- "Class in America – 2012" by George Mantsios

5) Rhetorical Analysis
Analyze Lam's use of rhetorical strategies in *Paper Sons.* How does he use rhetorical strategies to appeal to the reader? When are these strategies effective? Ineffective?

Essay Prompts for *Paper Sons: A Memoir*
<u>Literature Courses</u>

1) Characterization
Lam tells us that he frequently uses the template "How Should We View_____?" as a guiding question in his teaching units. A couple of examples he mentions are "How Should We View Lincoln?" and "How Should We View Mao?". Write an essay where you analyze how we should view one of the main characters of *Paper Sons*.

2) Setting
How does San Francisco exist as a character in *Paper Sons*? Compare Lam's treatment of San Francisco with other literary works set in San Francisco.

Other books about San Francisco:
China Boy by Gus Lee
All Over Coffee by Paul Madonna
Bone by Fae Myenne Ng
The Golden Gate by Vikram Seth
Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas by Rebecca Solnit
Valencia by Michelle Tea

3) Structure
Paper Sons is not organized in a linear manner. What is the intended effect of this book's organizational structure? Does it succeed in its goals? Why or Why not?

4) Diction
How would you characterize the "voice" Lam uses to narrate *Paper Sons*? What are some characteristics of this voice, and how does the voice affect the tone of the book?

5) Symbolism
Authors often choose physical objects to take on a deeper significance, a symbol of something else. Examine *Paper Sons* in terms of symbolism. What objects in the book are being used to convey a deeper meaning to the audience, and what do you think are their larger symbolic meanings?