Study Guide Questions for Outcasts United
Your Task: choose three questions, then freewrite about each for 20 minutes (keeping in mind the need for examples from the text and from your life, and also the desire to find an interesting thesis for your essay).

From Warren St. John: In an unfamiliar environment, like college, or a new city or country, how do you break through joining like-minded groups or similar ethnic groups in order to learn more about other cultures or beliefs (in order to facilitate Vertovec’s theory of superdiversity)?

Part 1 - Changes

1. Luna’s relationship with her family is strained by her decision to stay in the United States following her graduation from Smith College. While her circumstances are unique—given that her parents are thousands of miles away—similar situations are not uncommon. The transition to college—and to a new city, new friends, and new freedoms—can often cause tension between students and the friends and family at home. For this assignment, reflect on Luna’s transition and draw connections or contrasts to your own experience. What similarities are there? If not, how have you avoided them? And how will you handle transitions like this in the future?

2. Like many of you, the course of Luna Muffley’s life was heavily influenced by an important relationship with a mentor: her high school volleyball coach, Rhonda Brown. Reflect upon experiences from adolescence: did anyone play similar role in your life? Describe your relationship with your mentor, and provide a specific example of moment which is indicative of his/her influence. Finally, explain how this person continues to influence you as you enter a new community.
which is indicative of his/her influence. Finally explain how this person continues to influence you as you enter new endeavors.

ii. SERVICE: Almost immediately upon meeting these refugee boys, Luma Muffeh is compelled to become their coach. What do you think drives her to do this—what does she personally derive from volunteering like this? Connect her experience to service opportunities and projects in which you have participated: what do you get out of these experiences?

iii. PART I introduces refugee experience, via the stories of Beatrice Ziajy, Paula Balemagire, and their families. Reflect on their hardship: what did you learn about Atlanta, global politics, or people generally from these stories?

iv. Through research and personal observations, Warren St. John offers a depiction of the rapid changes that the small southern town of Clarkston has undergone in the last thirty years. While Clarkston’s immigrant/refugee population is somewhat unique, drastic change—expansion, decline, demographic shifts, etc.—are not uncommon. How has your community or home town changed in your lifetime? Provide some specific examples.

v. While political events in other nations and on other continents might not seem relevant to your life, what happens in places away can profoundly affect you and your community—as the stories of Beatrice Ziajy and Paula Balemagire suggest. Reflect on your experience as a member of a global community: what international presences have you observed or even interacted with during your time in Atlanta?

vi. Cultural confusion: The rapid demographic changes that occurred in Clarkston lead to a wide variety of culturally confusing moments—instances in which problems occur or exacerbated by differences in culture and language. Review some of these in Part I and either:

i. Explain one situation and provide a solution. What is the misunderstanding about, and what knowledge would help prevent similar situations in the future?

ii. Draw connections to similar experiences in your own life. Explain the circumstance, how you resolved it (or should have resolved it), and what insights you drew from it.

vii. In Ch 7, St. John provides a description of the disorienting experience of entering a new place. Relate this to your own transition to this school: what has been the most confusing moment since your arrival, and how did you handle it? Are you still overwhelmed?

Part II – A New Season
TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

1. Apathy and Commitment. Coach Luna Mufleh has demands much of her players. Do you agree with Luna’s decisions about playing time and her philosophy of coaching? What would you gain from participating in a group coached or mentored by someone like Luna? What would be difficult about this experience?

2. Mandela and Fomatee, among others, struggle to resolve a contradiction between allegiances to friends and allegiances to the Fugees and Coach Mufleh. Reflect on similar experiences of your own: when have you been pulled in opposing directions, and how do you handle the situation?

3. Each of the three teams within the Fugees program consists of players from many countries and many cultures. In Part II, the unity of the Under 15 team is challenged by the players’ frequent identification with teammates who share their nationality or ethnic origins. Reflect on how these allegiances affect the team. Why do you think these players maintain these allegiances? What is positive and negative about such allegiances? And how does Coach Luna handle the challenge to unity?

4. According to St. John, the mothers of African refugee boys dislike braided hairstyles and other styles the associate with African Americans; they have it seems, taken on prejudices and stereotypes that are familiar within American culture. Reflect on the problems with this sort of reliance on stereotypes: why people turn to stereotypes, and what is the consequence of that reliance?

5. Warren St. John observes that parents’ excitement upon meeting him: even though they live in the U.S., meeting an actual American is a novel experience for them. Why are these sorts of lines so rarely crossed? Look for answers both in the book and in your own experience.

6. Bill Muhling, the owner and manager of Thriftown, recognizes that the shifting demographics of Clintonburg present a financial opportunity: his failing store prospers once he responds to the culinary needs of the international community. Similar opportunities exist in other industries. What is another potential financial opportunity offered by the shifting demographics of the Atlanta area? Draft a plan for a business that could respond to these opportunities.

Muhling, Church, Tony. "Why Luna and all personally benefit by adapting/responding to..."
7. Mehlinger, Church, Tony Scipio, and Luna all personally benefit by adapting/responding to changing demographics. Reflect on something that you have learned from either engagement with folks from different cultures OR responding positively to a change that you might have initially resisted. How have you benefited—intellectually, spiritually, financially, academically—from interacting with people who are different from you, or from adapting to changes around you?

8. In St. John’s estimation, Mayor Swaney and many longtime Clarkston residents fundamentally misunderstand the refugees. They view them as a singular, monolithic group, rather than a collection of individuals and cultural backgrounds, and they expect them to be willing and able to join into the local community. Identify some specific differences that he fails to recognize, as well as the consequences of seeing the refugee community this way. What are the consequences, more broadly, of considering large populations or groups in this way? Provide a specific example from your own experience.

Part III - Full Circle

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

1. St. John cites anthropologist Victor Turner, who describes both adolescence and immigration as stages of liminality, that is, “a state of being between two worlds,” in which a person “becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, between and between all fixed points of classification” (St. John 221). Reflect on your own experiences with liminality: how did you face this confusing period, and what did learn from that difficult period?

2. In Part III, St. John describes the trying labor conditions for many refugees and the difficult work schedule for Generose Ntwari. Like many of the parents depicted here, Generose sacrifices much for her children. Reflect today on the notion of sacrifice: has anyone in your family sacrificed something to help you get here? What personal sacrifices have you had to make, or would you be willing to make, for family members?