“Watching TV Makes You Smarter” by Steven Johnson

Questions for Your Journal
(from They Say, I Say by Gerald Graff, Cathy Birkenstein and Russel Durst.)

1. Steven Johnson makes clear in his opening paragraphs what view he is arguing against. What is that view? How does the dialogue from the Woody Allen movie Sleeper relate to that view?

2. Johnson’s own argument relates to the intellectual effects of television viewing. Find his thesis statement, locating his supporting discussion, and write a concise summary of the whole argument.

3. Pick an example of popular entertainment that Johnson discusses or another one of comparable quality that you are familiar with, and imagine how someone could use it to make a case against Johnson’s argument.

4. Compare Johnson’s view with Dana Stevens, whose essay “Thinking Outside the Idiot Box” follows. Which piece do you find more persuasive, and why?

5. Write a response to Johnson using your own experiences and observations as support for what you say. Consider the audience you wish to address, and craft your opening and choice of examples with that audience in mind.