Identity and Conflict

The main idea behind the Identity & Conflict assignment is that conflict often helps clarify identity — whether that identity is of a person, a group, or a nation. It is up to you whether you want this paper to be personal or about something outside of you.

For example, one of the basic sources of conflict we experience in this culture is between the generations. As a matter of fact, many psychologists say that it is only by conflicting with (differing in opinion, all the way to fighting) our parents that we are able to see ourselves as separate from them — separate enough to have our own well defined identities so that we can ultimately leave home, go out on our own, and succeed. Our culture emphasizes the individual; this the establishment of the individual’s identity has top priority. What you need to think about now, as we continue to explore many other shapers of identity, is the role conflict plays in shaping identity.

A possible way to proceed with this paper is the following:

1) First, establish the situation from which conflict arose. To do this use what you’ve learned about narrative (i.e., telling a story). Or, if you don’t see this situation as a story, then describe what it is — its background and participants — using descriptive techniques you learned in your previous paper. The main point is to set up a clear picture of whatever the situation is — e.g., your membership in a gang and what that entailed; your family’s insistence that you attend church despite your wishes; your position living between two cultures or sub-cultures, etc.
   ----> Make this part less than half the length of your whole paper.

2) Once you’ve established the background and context for the conflict, then you need to show cause and effect: how and why did this situation cause conflict and what was its effect on your perceptions of yourself and/or your perceptions of life? How did your beliefs or values change? Or how did those of others change as a result of the conflict? (Or, if your paper concerns a group or nation, apply these same questions to them.)
   You’ll probably need to include a comparison of how things were before and then after the conflict.
   ----> This part of the paper — analysis of cause and effect — should make up more than half of the entire paper.

In the past, students have come up with fascinating topics:
In a paper entitled “Generation X - A New Way of Thinking,” one young woman wrote about her stereotype-defying identity as a punk-rocker, single mother, good student. “A good mother can be a good student with a pierced nose and tattoos; a free-thinking, authority-questioning woman can be a positive influence on a child,” she writes.

In “When Statistics Mean Nothing” another student wrote about the effect of her parents’ divorce on her family, and how it both hindered and helped her personal growth.
“Crossing Cultures” describes a Vietnamese-American boy’s initial denial, then acceptance, of both his cultures: “My new culture helps me explore myself and be the best I can be. My other culture lets me stand out from the crowd...”

“Perfectly Lazy: tells about one person’s conflict between his perfectionist ideal of himself and the opposing, make-shift, too-true reality.

“Pocha” explores the conflicts that arise between two cultures when one feels a part of — yet simultaneously alienated from — both of them, in this case Mexican and North American.

In “How Many More Seasons?” a Vietnamese immigrant to the U.S. took on the persona (character) of a Mexican migrant worker, writing about the hardships of living the migrant’s life.

“Society’s Hopefuls” concerns a wolf saved by the American Wildlife Rescue Service, the challenges he faces, and the bigger picture he represents.

An Israeli woman wrote about the plight of the Palestinians in Israel, and her resulting disillusionment with her own country.

“A Little Girl’s Dream” tells of the developing dreams of a former gang member.

From these papers you can get the idea that “Identity and Conflict” can cover a broad spectrum of topics. I leave it to you what to write about, as long as you include (1) a description of a conflict and (2) a cause-effect analysis of how this conflict influenced someone’s or something’s identity.