

## Essay 1: Historical Analysis of an Early American Literary Text

**Basic Assignment.** Choose one of the early American texts on our reading schedule (anything before or up to Phillis Wheatley on Sept 26th). What can we learn about American history or culture of this time or period by studying this text? What does this text reveal about its own historical moment? In a short essay of 4-5 pages, explain what one learns about early American history or culture by reading and analyzing the text you selected.

**Advice.** Literary texts and the careful analysis of them tend to reveal not so much the facts of history as attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. So your paper will probably want to focus on figuring out what the text teaches us about how early American peoples thought, believed, or felt about their worlds.

What do you learn about Native cultures or early explorers or Puritan New England or the Enlightenment or Revolutionary America or colonialism or slavery (and so on) by reading these texts? Show us what we can learn from the text by developing a clear thesis supported by carefully explained passages from the text you selected. The text you select may be long (Franklin's autobiography, for example) or short (a poem by Bradstreet or Wheatley, for instance).

**What-I'm-Looking-For.** When I'm reading these papers, I'll be asking myself the following questions:

- Does the paper explain how the selected text reveals to us some interesting aspect of early American history or culture?
- Does it make a specific and interesting claim (or claims) about the text examined?
- Does it explain in a clear and persuasive manner its interpretation of the selected text?
- Does it support that interpretation with well-chosen passages or direct references to the text?
- Are those references and passages explained in a manner that clarifies and supports the paper's claims?
- Is the paper organized clearly enough so that anyone in this class could read it and follow the argument?

**Editing, Documentation, and Outside Research.** I care about editing (spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.) and MLA format.

At the end of your paper, on a separate sheet, please provide a works cited page to acknowledge precisely and completely your sources. I would like you to use the format suggested by the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th edition, by Joseph Gibaldi. You can find this book at the K-State Union or the library. Hale library also provides a single sheet handout that explains the MLA format for citation. Online you can find a guide to MLA style and formatting at "The Owl at Purdue" – just go to <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>.

To support your views, you need to refer directly to the texts you are examining. When you cite your source in the text of your paper, refer to the author and page number in parentheses at the end of the quotation or sentence:

Enlightenment ideals could also appear in very personal documents, such as a "Plan for Self-examination" (Franklin 530).

If it's obvious whom you are citing, simply refer to the page number when quoting from the text:

At the beginning of the poem, Wheatley seems to suggest that her enslavement is also a part of her salvation when she writes, "'Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land" (752).

**Paper Conferences.** Each of you will meet with me individually for a fifteen-minute paper conference sometime between September 14 and 25. I will send around a sign-up sheet on September 10. Please bring your ideas, a rough draft, or a detailed outline of your paper to the conference.

**Due Date.** Wednesday, **September 26.**

**Length.** 4-5 pages, typed, double-spaced.

**Revisions.** After I return your papers (on October 3 or 5 probably), please read my comments. If at that point, you would like to revise your paper, please do so. Revisions will be due during the week after papers have been returned (by October 12 at the latest). You will also have the opportunity to revise your second major essay. A revision does not automatically receive a better grade. The revision must be substantially improved. It must demonstrate significant change in ideas and focus, arrangement and organization, or evidence and development. Simply correcting typos or making editing corrections will not change the grade.

To submit a revision, you need to:

1. Write a summary explaining why and how you revised—for example, how and why you decided to change the focus and organization; why you deleted or added a certain part; why and how you rearranged information; and so on.
2. Hand-in your revision, your original paper, and my original comments along with your summary explaining the changes.

Revisions that don't meet these criteria (arriving by the deadline, offering substantial change, providing a summary of changes, and enclosing the original version) will be returned.

**Let's Talk.** If you have questions or concerns about your paper or you just want someone to bounce some ideas off of, drop by the office to talk with me. I'll be in my office during my office hours (MWF 10:30-11:20, Tue 12:00-1:00). If those times don't fit with your schedule, I would be happy to set up some other time to meet with you.