

Essay 2: Historical Analysis/Critical Response

This essay assignment asks you to practice a key skill taught in the literature surveys: the ability to draw on relevant historical and critical knowledge to analyze and interpret the literary works studied. Choose whichever option seems most interesting to you.

Assignment Option 1. Select one of texts on our reading schedule. And find a history (an article, a narrative, a chapter from a history book, for example) or an historical document from the era in which your selected literary text was published. This historical source should be related in some interesting and meaningful way to the selected text. You may use more than one document, if you choose. Then write an essay that provides a description/explanation of this history/historical document and an interpretation of the selected literary text in light of this history or historical document. The basic question you will be answering is this: How does knowledge or examination of the chosen history or historical document alter or add to one's understanding of the selected literary text?

Assignment Option 2. Select one of texts on our reading schedule. And find a review or critical article on the selected text. Then write an essay that summarizes the review or critical article and responds to that article using your own interpretation of the selected text. Your basic task will be to speak back to the critical article in a way that makes use of your own reading, analysis, and interpretation of the selected literary text.

Documents and Articles. Finding an appropriate and significant historical document or an interesting critical article should not be difficult. For instance, if you elect to write on either Faulkner or Alcott, you will find in the back of those editions several histories, documents, reviews, and/or critical articles.

Although those editions provide appropriate histories, documents, reviews, and articles that may make your search quicker, you are not required to use what's available in those books. Hale Library contains thousands of histories, documents, reviews, and articles that are potentially appropriate for this assignment. You might start with a search in the Hale Library catalog, or the online MLA database, or *Book Review Index* [2nd Floor Reference: Z1035.A1 B6]; alternatively, you might use the course website or the *Norton Anthology of American Literature's* introductions, headnotes, timelines, or bibliographies to help you generate topic ideas that you then pursue wherever they make take you.

If you use an article or document not found in the Faulkner or Alcott edition, please just make me a photocopy (if it is relatively short) or provide me with citation information and copies of only the most relevant pages.

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

- Does the paper offer a useful description/explanation of an historical document or history OR an accurate summary of a review or critical article?
- Does it use the article, review, history, or document to generate or facilitate an interpretation or analysis of the selected literary text?
- Does it demonstrate the ability to draw on relevant historical or critical knowledge to analyze and interpret the literary work selected?
- Does it make a specific and interesting claim (or claims) about the text examined?

- Does it support that interpretation with well-chosen direct references to the text?
- Does it explain in a clear and persuasive manner its interpretation of the text, in particular the direct citations from the text?
- Is it organized clearly enough so that anyone in this class could read the paper and follow the argument?
- Does it document all sources and citations according to MLA style?

Documentation. To support your views, you need to refer directly to the text you are examining. You will also need to cite and provide the source for the document or article you'll be using. Please use a works cited page to acknowledge precisely the source of your text and article or document(s). I ask that you please 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; the library also provides a single sheet handout that explains the MLA format for citation of work by others.

Proposals. I will need a proposal from everyone sometime before **November 13**. The proposal should briefly explain your paper idea and include, if necessary, a photocopy of your history, historical document, review, or critical article. I will accept three different kinds of proposals: 1) a conference with me; 2) a one-paragraph, typed explanation of the option you've selected and a preliminary indication of what you would like to do (please include information about the document or article you've selected); or 3) an e-mail version of #2 (with a photocopy handed to me in class during the next class session).

Workshop. We will have an in-class writing workshop on Wednesday, **November 15**. Please bring a typed, complete rough draft of your paper to this workshop.

Due Date. Monday, **November 20**.

Length. 4-6 typed, double-spaced pages + a works cited page.

Revisions. After I return your papers (on November 27 probably), please read my comments. If you would like to revise your paper, please do so. Revisions will be due one week after papers have been returned (**December 4**). Your revision will not automatically receive a better grade. The revision must be substantially improved. The paper must demonstrate significant change in its thesis, organization, development, or analysis. Simply correcting typos or making editing corrections will not warrant a higher grade. To submit a revision, please follow the format outlined below:

- Highlight and explain any additions you make to the text on the new version.
- Mark and explain any deletions on the old version.
- Write a summary explaining why and how you revised--for example, how and why you decided to change the paper's focus and organization; why you deleted or added a certain part of the paper; why and how you rearranged information; and so on.
- Hand-in the revised version of the paper, the old version with my comments, and your summary explaining the changes.

I will return revisions that don't follow these criteria.

Let's Talk. If you have questions or concerns about your paper or you just want someone to bounce some ideas off of, please drop by the office to talk with me. I'll be in my office during office hours. If those times don't fit with your schedule, I am always happy to set up some other time to meet with you.