

Assignment Sheets

Assignment Sheet: Mid Term

Assignment

A major aspect of developing as a reader is the ability to make analogies from a text to "real" life, to connect what you're reading on the page to your own world. These connections sharpen your understanding both of the material under study (Early American, Federalist [Franklin], and Transcendentalist literatures) and of the "material" -- mores, beliefs, actions -- of your own culture.

To foster this connection you'll plan (at home) and then write (in class) an argumentative essay that answers **one** of the two questions/topics below.

1. Of the three literatures that we've explored so far this semester – Puritan, Enlightenment/Federalist, Transcendental -- which of them – or the philosophy/ideas they espouse – is prevalent in America today?
2. Trace one of America's cultural myths/ideals (see "Course Introduction," "America's Self-Portrait" and "Defining America" for a list of these myths and ideals) as it is expressed or illustrated by at least two different writers .

Requirements

The basics need to be covered: title, introduction, thesis statement with divisions, body paragraphs and a conclusion. You should cite from at least two of the authors we've studied or who are associated with that period/movement. You'll be using MLA documentation (see 43 and 45) for both your primary sources (the literary works) and secondary sources (essays on contemporary America) if used.

Speaking of sources, remember that newspapers, history, sociology, and psychology textbooks, readers from English I, magazines, advertisements, etc., make great sources for delineating contemporary America, and remember that most students who write better essays include a source or two to support a point they are making.

Length of essay? Come on . . . this is college. You need to explain yourself in as many words (I'd think paragraphs) as are necessary.

Suggestions

Your paragraphs should be constructed around your reasons (the blanks in the thesis above – what I call "divisions." See Glossary, which starts on 13, for more information), and each should offer examples from the story to prove the validity of your claim.

The key, as you've seen in your body paragraphs ("Oh, that's why he assigned those . . . they're like practice for our essays"), is to explain the quotes that you use. In this case, you'll offer a clear and detailed explanation of how and why these the connections you've noted are valid.

Remember to link specific passages in the texts we've read with specific incidents (passages?) in contemporary life. The mo' specific, the mo' better.

You can (and should) use your textbook to support your argument, and you may plan for your essay by bringing in a completed Reasons and Evidence sheet (Packet 26). You can (and should) bring in a completed works cited page for your essay.

In the past, many students have incorporated secondary sources in their essays to develop specific connections to contemporary America. I'd say that's a good idea – your call. If you do plan on using sources, do not go on an internet trolling expedition: use the databases supplied by the library (accessed via Library Links on the course site). Newspapers, magazines and the like make fine sources.

As you plan your essay, remember that the essay will be written in class – and that you need to finish it.

Organizing Tip

When writing any in-class essay, the following organizing questions are good to keep in mind:

1. What are you talking about? (introduction) Hint: don't just start with thesis; if essay is about heroism, you could discuss heroes in a general way, and then narrow down to your thesis.

You should mention the authors and the works you'll be focusing on in your introduction

2. What's your point? (thesis – remember to include division statement)

Your thesis should read something like

The ideas in Puritan/the Enlightenment/Transcendentalist (pick one) literature are prevalent in American today. This is illustrated by _____, _____, and _____.

OR

The American ideal of _____ is illustrated in _____, _____, and _____.

3. Can you prove that? (body paragraphs)
4. What's it all mean? (conclusion)

What you can bring in

- Textbook/s
- Reasons and Evidence sheet
- Typed Works Cited page
- Outside source
- Loose leaf paper
- extra pens (which have an annoying habit of running out of ink when you're writing a test)
- Cookie for reward and/or solace

In Class Directions

- Write in ink
- Skip lines on the page so you can make corrections (and so I can make comments)
- Write on one side of the page (see above)
- Submit Reasons and Evidence sheet with your work

Grading Criteria

To receive a passing grade, you must successfully complete the following:

Organization: Have a clear thesis statement which sets out your argument. You must also include a clear division statement which is then developed in separate paragraphs with clear topic sentences.

Content: Paragraphs that use specific quotes and examples from the story to prove your point – AND a full and complete discussion on why and how that particular quote or word proves your point. **REMEMBER:** examples do not speak for themselves – the core of a good literary essay is in your commentary and explanations of the examples.

Proofreading: Sentences that are clear and no more than 5 major errors. Correctly documented sources: if you include secondary sources, they need to be correctly cited.

Major errors: Sentence fragments, run-on sentences, verb-tense error, subject-verb agreement error, unclear phrasing/tangled wording, documentation, formatting, and spelling/wrong word error.