

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 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 on the next page – what I call "divisions.") For more information on thesis and divisions and topic sentences, see Glossary (#1a on "Course Documents"). Your paragraphs 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 (see below). 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/myth of _____ is illustrated by _____, _____, 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.

Reasons and Evidence Sheet: Mid-Term

Reasons	Evidence and explanation: Specific quotes, examples, and/or descriptions which support your reason.
<p>Sample starter sentence for reason:</p> <p><u>(insert main idea/point of paragraph – “love of nature,” “emphasis on using reason” etc.)</u> suggests/ illustrates/ shows/ reveals a connection between contemporary America and <u>(insert 1 literary movement or 2 cultural ideal, depending on your topic)</u>.</p> <p>This could (should?) be a topic sentence for your paragraph.</p> <p>Example: A love of nature suggests that contemporary America retains a characteristic of transcendentalism. Or An emphasis on using reason reveals contemporary America’s connection with the Enlightenment ideas of Franklin. Or A belief in American exceptionalism informs Whitman’s <u>Leaves of Grass</u>.</p> <p>1.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Literary Example: (hint – use direct quotes from primary source)</p> <p>a.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Contemporary Manifestation Example: (hint – advertisements, movies, historical events, essays, books, etc., all make great examples.)</p> <p>a.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Explanation: (how are these two ideas connected? Which words or ideas from the literary example connect modern American?)</p> <p>b.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

<p>2.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Literary Example: (hint – use direct quotes from primary source)</p> <p>a.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Contemporary Manifestation</p> <p>Example: (hint – advertisements, movies, historical events, essays, books, etc., all make great examples.)</p> <p>a.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Explanation: (how are these two ideas connected? Which words or ideas from the literary example connect modern American?)</p> <p>b.</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>3.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Literary Example:</p> <p>a.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Contemporary Manifestation</p> <p>a.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Explanation:</p> <p>b.</p> <hr/> <hr/>

Thesis statement: (Thesis must be written below and handed in with final copy)

Research Essay Assignment Sheet

Assignment: Write an argumentative essay that answers one of the questions below.

1. You can develop and extend an idea of your own or one that's been explored in a topic sentence or in class – just check with me before beginning draft.
2. How does the life and aspirations of Christopher McCandless (as reported in Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*) connect with the ideas of Transcendentalism?
3. Interested in Thoreau? Read the essay "Generation Sell" by William Deresiewicz (#17 on the Course Documents page) and connect it to the social criticism in *Walden*.
4. In the essay "It's Emerson's Anniversary and He's Nailed 21st-Century America," Adam Cohen argues that "Emerson's vast body of work is credited with playing a large part in shaping the American character." While Cohen focuses on contemporary America, a similar argument can be made about his own age. Choosing a specific aspect of Emersonian thought, show how other 19th century writers, either by agreeing with him or disagreeing with him, prove that Emerson "nailed" the 19th century as well.
5. Everyone groans when reading those good ole' Puritans. What the heck are they doing in a literature class? You'll answer that question by writing an essay arguing why the Puritan writers are essential in understanding and appreciating later American writers (i.e. 18th and 19th century). Choose a specific reason, and then explore how this shown in later works.
6. American is often touted as a nation of malcontents – and that's good (how can we improve if we're satisfied?). Can this be traced in our literature? In particular, follow a specific critique of American culture through 1) the colonialists to antebellum writers; or 2) just the colonialists or just the antebellum writers. Remember to focus on a particular critique.
7. Jane Tompkins, in *Sensational Designs*, argues that literature "offer[s] powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment" (xi). Given this view of literature as a reflection of a culture, what can you say about Americans? Express this in a single word or phrase and use readings from the colonists to the 19th century to prove your point.
8. Look for a connection or difference between the works of two Transcendental writers (Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Dickinson – and see Hawthorne, Melville and Poe as well).

Thesis should state what the connection is, and divisions should explain what proves it.

Clunky Example: These works are united in their emphasis on _____. This is shown by _____, _____, and _____

Possible topics:

How does Emerson's "The Poet" connect to Whitman?

Is Dickinson's nature the same as Emerson's?

Does Melville agree with Transcendentalism? How can you tell?

9. Trace the different myths of nature from the Puritan, through the Enlightenment and then the nineteenth century.
10. Trace the American treatment of the "Other" from the Puritans on through the mid nineteenth century.
11. How has the American view of God, as expressed in its literature, changed from the Puritan period to the 19th century?
12. Is the body separate from the soul? It seems that American writers agree to disagree. Examine two writer's views on this subject – you could contrast or compare their beliefs.
13. Explore the idea of American exceptionalism, first codified in Winthrop's "city on a hill" metaphor, through the 19th century. Was this view challenged or supported by the writer's we've read?
14. Prove the following statement: Though set in the Puritan period, *The Scarlet Letter*, as a historical novel, reflects more on the period it was written (mid 19th century). To effectively answer this question, address three (or so) nineteenth-century themes the novel addresses – themes which often directly oppose Puritan values.
15. Too many choices? Sorry, just trying to help.

Requirements: (min. 1000 words – though most essays are longer) As with your previous essay, the basics need to be covered: title, introduction, thesis statement with divisions, body paragraphs and a conclusion. **You must include at least two secondary sources to support your idea (if a secondary source is not included, the highest grade you earn is a "D").** And since you'll be citing from the textbook, of course you'll include a works cited

sheet as well. Do I have to even mention that it needs to be typed and double spaced and follow MLA format? I didn't think so.

Feedback

You cannot hand in your work unless it is discussed in a conference with me at least one day before the final draft is due. Check my office door for appointment times: if none of the available times work for you, we'll make other arrangements.

Research: Choose carefully here. Be prepared to read several essays/chapters/excerpts from books before you find material that will help your essay. Sorry to emphasize the negative, but avoid just "sticking in" a source because it's required: I expect you to use a source to support an idea you're making.

You are expected to understand and avoid plagiarism. Be SURE to review the definition of plagiarism and use MLA documentation. See course site for more

The "Supplemental Readings" > "Secondary Texts" page on the course site offers suggestions and a few links to sources.

General encyclopedia (Britannica, etc.) articles, as well as "Google" and other open web sources are usually not considered scholarly and should not be used (there goes Sparknotes . . .)? Instead, use books (see "Secondary Sources" on the Course Site for a start) or a source from one of the college's databases, accessed by clicking on Library Links on the Course site to the right. Check with me before using any internet source that is not from our databases.

Suggestions: To help you complete the best work, you'll note that the writing is due in parts and you'll get feedback before the essay is graded.

I've also included suggestions in this packet (read the definitions of divisions, thesis statements, division statements, context, and body paragraph in the Glossary [#1a on "Course Documents"]) and on the the course site covering planning, revision, adding sources, and proofreading that should help you write an essay that clearly presents your thinking.

Due Date: See syllabus.

Grading Criteria:

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

Organization: Have a clear thesis statement which suggests how a particular question is valid. 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 (these errors include sentence fragments, run-on sentences, verb-tense error, subject-verb agreement error, unclear phrasing/tangled wording, documentation, formatting, and spelling/wrong word error).

Final Assignment – Essay #3 American Literature I

Educational scholars have long noted that a crucial part of learning involves self-reflection. We've read an extended example of such an examination in Thoreau's *Walden*. Instead of going to a pond and writing a book, for a final assignment, you'll come to class and reflect upon what you've learned from the class material in an essay. Use this as an opportunity to really think about the readings and the knowledge you've gained (or haven't – be honest) from the course.

Avoid merely repeating what you've written in your essays – though you may draw ideas from them. You should begin by reviewing the syllabus and textbooks to refresh yourself with the readings, and then consider the in-class discussions, group work, course site, body paragraphs, etc. for specific examples of your intellectual growth (or wilting – again, be honest).

Requirements

Specifically, you'll write an essay (title, intro, body paragraphs, conclusion) that explores the three major "things" you've learned from this course. These could range from writing to reading, from a point about a specific writer, to a generalization about the literature itself: let your conscious be your guide.

No specific word count is necessary, just remember to explain yourself -- and remember to write a complete essay.

You can (and should) bring in a short outline and list and/or list of quotes/specific examples that will prove your point. Arguing that American literature connects with current life? You'll need specific examples.

Grading Criteria

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

Organization: Have a clear thesis statement (see Dr. Bordelon's Glossary for all words in bold), which states what you've learned. You must also include a clear division statement which is then developed in separate body paragraphs with clear topic sentences.

Content: Paragraphs that use specific quotes and examples and a full and complete discussion of why and how – the explanation and/or reasoning – that particular quote or example proves the point of your paragraph.

Proofreading: Sentences that are clear and no more than 4 major errors. (Major errors include sentence fragments, run-on sentences, verb-tense error, subject-verb agreement error, unclear phrasing/awkward/tangled wording, and spelling/wrong word error.)