

## Essay 2 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 19<sup>th</sup> century writers, either by agreeing with him or disagreeing with him, prove that Emerson "nailed" the 19<sup>th</sup> 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. 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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. 1250 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 on the course site (read the definitions of divisions, thesis statements, division statements, context, and body paragraph in the Glossary [#1a on "Course Documents"]) and on 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).