

Fall 2020

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Literary analysis essay

Intro/rationale

The ENG 3120 Literary analysis essay will analyze (break down) some (sharply focused) aspect of any work we have explored this semester: such as themes, narrative structure, characterization, figurative language, ideology (gender, race, class, etc). In this essay, you will combine the knowledge and skills we've been cultivating semester long into in a clear, persuasive, and [argumentative essay](#) ↓ that analyzes one or more works of literature, using appropriate quotation and citation. Ideally, this analysis will grow out of one of your top [close readings](#). Remember: [close readings are literary analysis](#) ↓. What this essay will do, is to take your analysis and tell the story of it: with a beginning, middle and end as outlined below, and infused with a thesis, or argument grown from your analysis/exploration of the text, supported by ample (a balanced amount of) textual evidence. (The stronger the claim, the stronger the evidence needs to be to support it.) Remember: a thesis needs to be substantial or strong enough that someone else would argue against it. Your job as the essayist is to support the thesis strongly and substantially.

Assignment prompt

Compose an essay on one or more of the works we've read in class with an introduction, body, and conclusion—aka beginning, middle, end—that tells the story of your thesis and why it is true (if not true with a capital T, true with a little t; if not *the* truth, perhaps *a* truth). The essay should be not loosely arranged particulars (not a Frankenstein creation) but rather a coherent whole: a living organism, with a face (introduction), neck (transition to the body), a proportional body (supported with **specific** evidence from the text at hand), legs (transition to the conclusion), and finally, the kicker, the feet of the essay (which leaves your reader with a memorable kick). The breath or life of the essay is infused with your enthusiasm and energy for the text at hand and your thesis. (See: [Anatomy of an ENG 3120 essay aka Tummy Man](#) in the [syllabus](#).)

The body of your essay will **not** be supported by outside literary criticism; it **will** be supported by evidence **you** draw from the text at hand thus representing your own, unique analysis. This should feel liberating! You are plunging the depths of your own knowledge and experience to unearth what the literature brings to light rather than looking to other "experts" for "answers." **You** are the thinker; writer; literary analyzer.

You **are** encouraged though, to use *historical* sources to help you understand how the work(s) fit into the political and cultural context—especially the [QED](#) ↗. Cite any historical resource including the OED in [MLA Style](#) ↗.

You can assume that any background issues discussed in class constitute our common/community knowledge and thus do need not be cited.

I am happy (perhaps borderline ecstatic) to [discuss](#) paper ideas and drafts.

Learning outcomes

- Demonstrate knowledge of relevant historical and cultural contexts, including literary movements, major social trends, significant political events, and canonicity.
- Identify and analyze relevant genres and forms.
- Understand and practice the skill of close textual reading.
- Acquire and employ a [basic vocabulary of literary and critical terms](#) ↓ ↗.
- Practice comparative analysis of two or more works.
- Write a clear, persuasive, and argumentative essay interpreting one or more works of literature, using appropriate quotation and citation.

Success criteria

- Approximately [1,500 words](#) ↗ (5-6 pages Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1-inch margins on all sides)
- Demonstration of academic writing conventions and Standard Written English, including organization, mechanics, [MLA Style, and citations](#) ↗ when necessary
- Effective organization of your ideas
- Completeness and rhetorical effectiveness of argument (including an [appropriately narrowed and focused thesis](#) ↗)
- Presentation of evidence from the text to support that thesis, that moves beyond plot summary, in order to:
 - analyze concrete details, textual elements and/or language fully and precisely
 - vary use of quotation, paraphrase, and summaries of examples as needed
 - explain the significance of supporting evidence
- The best papers will demonstrate originality, critical thinking, freshness of insights, and depth.

Supporting resources

- how to write an [argumentative essay](#) ↓
- guidelines for [close readings](#)
- how to do things with words: or, how to write a close reading [close readings are literary analysis](#) ↓
- [anatomy of an ENG 3120 essay aka Tummy Man](#)
- [the QED](#) ↗ (Oxford English Dictionary)
- dictionary for [basic vocabulary of literary and critical terms](#) ↓ ↗
- [MLA Style, and citations](#) ↗
- how to write an [appropriately narrowed and focused thesis](#) ↗

Grading

- This assignment will be assessed using the [attached rubric](#) and is worth 30% of your final grade.
- Failure to cite any words/ideas/research will result in an automatic zero for the assignment.

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