

English 213: C19 US Writing and Culture / 2017-18
Essay 1 – 2500 words
Due: Term 1, Week 10

The following questions are intended to offer platforms for your own thinking. You are encouraged to develop your own topic in consultation with myself by the end of week 7.

Remember to use a descriptive title (as in standard academic articles) for your essay.

1. Many of the texts we have read this semester turn to the ghostly and supernatural to critique either the ideals or the practice of the “Declaration of Independence.” Compare how two texts make use of the ghostly and to what political or social ends.
2. In “Rip Van Winkle,” Rip wakes up to a post-revolutionary world that is both eerily similar and very different to the pre-revolutionary world. Many other texts we have read this semester similarly wonder how much the revolution has changed and if that change is for the best. Choosing one or two texts, develop an interpretive argument that considers how texts grapple with the meaning of post-revolutionary life.
3. Susan Buck Morss argues that “The actual and successful revolution of Caribbean slaves against their masters is the moment when the dialectical logic of recognition becomes visible as the thematics of world history, the story of the universal realization of freedom.” Develop an argument about how one or two texts have challenged accounts of world history that place white men at their centre.
4. Maria Mies has argued that there is a relationship between the colonization of Caribbean women and the housewifization of middle- and upper-class European women. Develop an argument about the relationship between race and gender in one or two of the texts from this term. Some questions to consider include: to what extent can gender be a basis for solidarity and to what extent does race override that possibility? To what extent is gender constructed through race and vice versa? How is race gendered?
5. Many of the novels we’ve looked at this seminar have set a national or local issue in relation to an international one. Write an essay that examines how the author places the two in conversation and to what ends.
6. Write an essay exploring the role that the frontier plays in one or two of the texts we’ve examined this term.
7. Write an essay considering how one or two texts from this term’s reading have tried to challenge romantic ideas about the plantation and slavery.
8. Amy Kaplan argues that throughout the 19th-century “the language of domesticity suffused the debates about national expansion.” Write an essay exploring how questions of gender and domesticity were used to negotiate questions of the US’s expanding empire and/or fights within the nation.

General Essay Guidelines

Assignment. No matter what the prompt is, I'm looking for an essay that (a) argues an interpretive thesis, (b) marshals and analyzes textual evidence to support that thesis, and (c) does so in a logical and persuasive way with prose that is largely free of errors in usage. Do you have to write a traditional, five-paragraph style essay? Nope. There are a 1001 ways to write a compelling essay for this course, though all have in common the qualities above.

Sources. In general, don't use secondary sources other than the ones provided in the class and discussed in the essay prompt. For language inquiries, use the Oxford English Dictionary, also available online. What about Wikipedia? Wikipedia can be a good place to start to investigate a topic, but it's seldom a good source to rely by itself. In other words, if you need to learn something, you can start with Wikipedia, but don't finish there.

Citation Style. Please include a works cited page and use parenthetical citations for in-text references and quotations. Follow MLA guidelines for these citations and for the works cited entries. To save paper, you may put the works cited right after your argument rather than on a separate page.

Grading. I will never grade on the basis of whether or not I agree with what you're arguing. I grade on how convincingly and logically you argue. Remember, too, that this is an English course. Therefore, the clarity, grammatical correctness, and sophistication of your prose matter

Plagiarism. Generally speaking, plagiarism is the intentional or the unintentional use of someone else's ideas or words without proper documentation. Please familiarize yourself with the university's policies. The penalties and processes described in that document apply in this course. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, no matter how seemingly insignificant, please ask an instructor.

Advice It Would Be Smart to Heed. A strong essay should always:

- § answer the prompt, not restate it and then ruminate on it over the course of 6 pages;
- § boast a thesis statement that poses an argument rather than an observation;
- § include topic sentences indicating the argument of their respective paragraphs rather than summarizing plot;
- § boast paragraphs built around a unified concept/argument that in turn clearly relates to the thesis;
- § boast paragraphs that develop that concept in an organized way;
- § show how textual evidence supports its claims (i.e., showing is different than telling; overuse of adjectives and adverbs is usually a sign a paper is telling rather than showing);
- § follow all directions, including using proper MLA style.

Parting advice: Think about what you're writing. Don't write on autopilot. And, if at all possible, get feedback from your tutorial leader once you have a draft. Often, what students think of as a finished essay is really a rough draft of a strong finished essay.