

Interpretation of Literature 8G:1/Smith: Essay #1

For your first major essay, you will practice your interpretation and close reading, using them to present your particular reading of a text. You may choose your approach from the options listed below.

This assignment is intended to be all about **your interpretation**, rather than your use of outside sources. Options one and three, in particular, will most likely require you to use only the primary text. Please don't look to sketchy internet sources for your ideas. If you're having trouble writing, or even just coming up with a topic or thesis, talk it over with me during office hours.

Option ONE: Write an analytical essay that presents an original interpretive argument about one of the works we have read, supporting it with your own thoroughly elaborated discussion of relevant quotes from the text(s). Some potential prompts:

- Analyze a specific type of imagery you notice in one of the texts we've read.
- Discuss interpretation *in* a text: write an essay that considers one or more examples of a character in a text doing various sorts of "reading" (interpreting a text, a situation, another person, a social structure, etc).
- Think through the relationship between text and context: discuss the way(s) in which the imagined world of a text comments on the real world of the author and/or audience.
- Use an idea you discussed in one of your reading responses as a starting point, and expand your thinking and analysis to essay-length form.
- Come up with your own question to write about, and propose it to me by Feb. 21

Option TWO: Write an essay that incorporates your own major, putting that subject into dialog with the text.

- Focus on passages in the text that portray, discuss, or are relevant to a topic or discipline with which you are familiar. For example, you might discuss *Zone One's* references to medicine, public health, psychology, politics, economics, popular culture, philosophy, urban planning, marketing, linguistics, etc.
- Based on the relevant passages you find, what does the novel have to say about your topic or discipline? How does its approach relate to the perspective you have developed based on more formal disciplinary training? What similar principles do you see at work? How do fictional portrayals enrich, change, challenge, or otherwise interact with what you already know?

Option THREE: Write a creative piece that responds to the text.

- Include 2-3 pages in which you (for example): rewrite a portion of a text, taking events in a direction of your own; rewrite a scene from a different character's point of view; continue the narrative beyond the original text; generate a letter, news report, journal entry, etc. that fits the world of the text.
- Follow up with 2-3 pages in which you discuss what you wrote and why—analyze and interpret your own work.

Choosing a text: At this point in the semester, we have read several poems and the novel *Zone One*. Any of these would make a great text to interpret for your essay. However, between now and the essay deadline in Week 8, we do have several examples of different genres and time periods. If you would like to glance ahead at upcoming readings and choose one to serve as the basis of your essay, let me know.

Important Dates:

- Essay Assigned: **Monday, Feb. 17**
- Proposal Due on Dropbox: **Friday, Feb. 21** by 5 p.m.
- Rough Draft Due in Dropbox: **Friday, Feb. 28** by 5 p.m. (please upload two or more pages containing at least a “skeleton” of your essay—in other words, a basic outline of your points, passages you plan to read closely, etc).
- Workshop: **Monday, March 10** (please bring 2 hard copies of your draft to class)
- Final Draft Due on Dropbox: **Wednesday, March 12** by 5 p.m.

Other Requirements:

- The essay should be **1200-1500 words (around 5-6 pages)** in length.
- It should be **double spaced**, using **12 pt font** and **MLA formatting**.
- Although, you may use only one source, please include a **Works Cited page**. For help with formatting, please refer to the example sheet on ICON, or the Purdue OWL website.
- The paper should be **clearly written, free from errors, and written in a professional tone**. It should have a **strong thesis statement, fully developed ideas** supported by evidence in the form of well-placed **quotes from the text**, and **logical organization with clear transitions**.
- Capture the reader’s attention with **an intriguing introduction**, and leave the reader with something to think about in your **conclusion**.
- Don’t forget to give your work a **title!**

Although this is an academic paper for a literature course, this kind of writing exercises skills that you will need for future courses, future writing projects, and other important tasks after you get your degree. Going from an initial reading of a text to the construction of an original thesis about it forces you to examine details, to fit seemingly disparate pieces of information into a larger framework, and to be creative and original in your thinking. Organizing your paper and picking quotations to use as evidence helps you to learn what makes an argument convincing to a reader, as well as simply what makes your writing both easily comprehensible and interesting.