

American Literary Traditions Second Paper Assignment

The second paper is due AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS on **Tuesday, April 19th**. This date is **very** close to the end of the semester, and I will not have a lot of leeway in terms of grading and returning these papers, so it's important that you turn it in on time. That said, if you have an issue, talk to me. As with our previous paper, there is no reading assignment scheduled for the day the paper is due; we will use the class time to prepare for the final exam. Be sure to bring your textbook that day, as you'll need it for the exam review activity (and you'll definitely want to be there for the exam review!).

This paper assignment is quite similar to the first paper assignment, so you should build on what you learned from that one. I **strongly** recommend that you review your previous paper and my comments so that you can write a strong second paper. If you have questions about my comments, or don't understand something that went wrong in that paper, please come see me. I am available in office hours, and am willing to make an appointment to discuss your paper. Please schedule this as soon as possible so you can get going on your paper!

The paper should be a focused piece of writing of about 4-5 pages in which you make an argument for why **one** particular piece that is currently on the syllabus should – or shouldn't – be included in our survey course. You may choose ANY ONE piece that we have read at any point in the semester; the only piece that is off-limits is the piece you chose for your first paper. Check the syllabus for specifics of all the possible reading assignments, or ask if you have a question.

The new additional possibility for this paper is that you may instead opt to make an argument that some piece of writing that is NOT currently on the syllabus in fact should be on the syllabus. For instance, if we overlooked your very favorite poet, or you read a tremendous essay that you think would be perfect for the course, you can use that as the topic of your paper. If you choose this option, you must supply me with a copy of the piece in question, either electronically or in hard copy. **Please be sure to talk to me before you pursue this option.** I want to make sure you're on the right track.

Develop your argument by thinking about these questions: Why is this piece necessary (or unnecessary) to the course? How does it fit (or not fit) into the overall progression of American literary history? You will want to use the text itself to make your argument. Consider both the style and content of the piece – what does it say and how does it say it?

This paper should make an ARGUMENT about a text. You need to come up with **reasons why we should (or why we shouldn't) read this text.** Typically, your paper should have 3 to 5 reasons for why we should read the text. Not all of these examples will work for all of the texts, and please note that you do not have to use ANY of these particular examples. These are just samples to get you going:

- It gives us insight into historical events (be specific about the events)
- It shows us how people lived (be specific about what people, time, or specific activities)
- The form/style is notable (what specific form, what specific style)
- The author him/herself is notable (why?)
- The publication of the text is notable (why?)
- It provides details we might not otherwise know (what details? Why wouldn't we know them?)
- The writing style/form is particularly beautiful, or challenging, or easy, or difficult....
- The content is particularly disturbing, or surprising, or confusing, or unusual.....
- The characters are very realistic, or not realistic, or exciting, or relatable.....

- The setting is an important place, or an imagined place, or an especially well described place....
- It gives us an example of how to make an argument, or write a poem, or express an emotion...
- The story/characters excite readers (how?/why?) and make us want to keep reading....
- It gives examples of TULIP, an important concept for understanding early American literature
- It demonstrates the “five I’s” of Romanticism, an important movement in 19th-century American literature....

Here are some generic samples of what a thesis for this paper might look like:

- Story X is an important part of American literature because it provides insight to historical event Y, includes a fascinating description of behavior Q, makes an important argument about the issue W, and is an interesting reading.
- Poem B should be included in our survey because of its unique rhyme scheme, its powerful descriptive language, its reflection on its culture, and the importance of its author during her lifetime.
- It’s important to read the letters of individual Z because they tell us about the finer details of life during C, they reveal surprising information about W, and they are a great example of B.

Things your paper SHOULD NOT do:

- The paper should NOT be a plot summary. We all know what happened in the text; I want to see your analysis of and response to the text.
- This is NOT a comparison/contrast essay. You should focus on ONE and only one text.
- The paper is NOT a straightforward “analyze this story” paper.
- This paper is NOT an analysis of metaphors or a profile of a character, although you might have a paragraph that does one (or both) of those things as a specific reason or example to support your argument.

Some Basic Reminders:

Your paper should start with an introduction. Clearly state your thesis – what claim will you argue in your paper? You should follow with your “evidence,” which will include QUOTES from the text that you are responding to, and interpretations of the text. Your paper should end with a conclusion that wraps up your analysis.

You MUST use quotes from your text. You may also include quotes from research sources, although additional research is not necessary for this paper. In any case, you MUST properly cite all sources (including texts from class). I will not accept papers without a Works Cited list. Seriously. When I see sloppy MLA style in a paper, I get cranky, and you really don’t want to make me to be cranky while I’m grading your paper. Find a handbook and use MLA citation properly. It’s not that hard.

On Using Sources:

You DO NOT need to use outside sources for this paper. If you have read the text you're writing about, you should be able to make an argument about whether or not it's worth reading.

You must cite all sources that you use, including online sources. Remember that "using" a source includes DIRECTLY QUOTING, PARAPHRASING, AND USING IDEAS from any source. There is nothing wrong with "getting help" from other writers, just be sure to acknowledge it by using quotation marks and/or author/page citation. Please take the time to give proper credit to the work of other authors. It is a matter of respect – for yourself, for other authors, for your classmates, and for me.

All policies on plagiarism apply to this paper and all papers in this course. Please note that according to UMass policy, turning a paper for one class that you wrote for another class is plagiarism too. If you plagiarize in your paper, you will receive an "F" for the course, and you are subject to other discipline (including expulsion from the University) at the discretion of the instructor and the University. Instructors are required to report every case of plagiarism to the Academic Honesty Board, which keeps a record of all cases. Please remember that unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism.

Five pieces of advice that I hope you will heed:

- 1) Be sure you are making an argument about the text (not about a person, or about a theme). This is not a plot summary or a comparison contrast or a book report.
- 2) Be sure you are using the text (quotes from the text) to demonstrate your claims. Is the writing beautiful? Provide a quote that shows that and talk about the quote! Is there a character who is compelling and fascinating? Provide some quotes that show specifically how this character is interesting, and discuss those quotes!
- 3) Be sure to cite all quotes (from the primary text and any other sources) appropriately, using MLA style citation (including in-text citations of individual quotes and a Works Cited list at the end).
- 4) I strongly recommend you create an OUTLINE to help you establish and develop the points you want to make; you want to make one point per paragraph, and those paragraphs should be in some sort of logical order. An outline can help you develop this essential aspect of your paper.
- 5) Start early. Keep revising. Go to the Writing Center. Ask for help!

For additional information:

Please note that the handout for the first paper included two more pages listing "Helpful Hints" and "MLA Style." I'm not reproducing those again, but you should definitely review that information, as it still applies. If you need a copy of the assignment with that information, it is available on the course web page. If you have questions, please ask: Bridget_Marshall@uml.edu