

Transatlantic Novel Fall 2015
Discussion Starters

“Discussion Starters” give me a sense of what interested you (and what confused you), and also serve as a bit of a prod to make sure you keep up with the reading assignments. Half of the class will have a Discussion Starter due on any given day. I’ve divided the class into “Green Team” and “Purple Team,” but to be clear, you DO NOT have to work with a team for these assignments; this just lets you know when your particular assignments are due. Once you’re on a team, make note of it on your syllabus so that you know when you have assignments due.

IMPORTANT: Discussion Starters are due in hard copy (printed) at the **BEGINNING** of class on your assigned day. If you cannot come to class, or if you forget to bring your paper (or forget to turn it in), please complete one for the next class meeting (on the next assignment). Writing (or handing me) your paper after we’ve already had the discussion is not helpful for me (or you).

Your Discussion Starter is not a formal response paper; it does not need an introduction or thesis. Here is what you should include in each Discussion Starter:

Quotation

Include **ONE** quotation from the day’s reading or viewing assignment. You should cite it properly in MLA style (see reverse for MLA style overview). You should then follow up after it with some discussion, of about 2-4 sentences. Why is this quote important? What is interesting/confusing/etc. about it?

Questions

List 2 (or more) questions you have that you think would be good to discuss in class. Try to develop open-ended questions (not just “yes/no”) to help us expand discussion.

Connections

A big goal in the class is to draw connections both within the course material and to outside of course material. Write a paragraph discussing any connections you can make with other texts in the course, or with texts outside the course, or with “real life” things – news stories, legal cases, local organizations and events, etc.

Your paper should look like this:

Student Name

Text title

Date

Quotation with analysis [Quote plus a paragraph]:

“blah blah blah blah blah” (123). This quote seems important because I was really offended by this part because.....I am wondering if....What is going on this passage....is it possible that the author means....

Questions for the class [Try for two; more is great!]:

1. Why does...Is this.....What is the significance of.....Do you think.....
2. What do you think of...What would you do if.....Is this author doing.....Why does this character.....

Connections [a paragraph]:

This book made me think about a person I know/a news story I read/a legal issue....

This story connects with this other story/poem/film we’ve read in class, or the other discussion we’ve had in class...

This story connects with this other story/poem/film from outside of class....

You need to complete five (5) Discussion Starters (as assigned) over the course of the semester. With the discussion starters, you want to demonstrate to me not just that you have read, but that you have thought about the reading. To be an active reader, you need to do work before you come to class to help yourself understand the reading. Don't just say (to yourself or in your discussion starter), "I didn't understand the reading." Focus. Struggle. Work with the text. If you don't understand something, articulate what it is that you don't understand. Be specific in your questions about what is confusing about the text. I want to encourage you to slow down. Merely skimming the reading is not enough. Writing your discussion starter is way to push your thinking, to answer your own questions, and to develop starting points for classroom discussion about the text.

You have five opportunities to write these, so please take note of comments I make on the Discussion Starters I return to you, so that you know how to improve for future Discussion Starters.

Finally, please be sure to follow these guidelines:

- Discussion Starters should be typed.
- Include your name at the top.
- You DO NOT need to use outside research sources – this is your response.
- You DO NOT need a works cited list for these papers.
- The writing should be standard college-level, free from grammar and spelling problems. You may use "I" in your response, and you may (and should) ask questions. Don't forget to use MLA style for quotes from the text. You should be using complete, grammatical sentences throughout the one-pagers.

MLA style basics for citing a quote

Below I have provided an example of a quote integrated into my own writing, with proper citation:

In *Oroonoko*, the narrator explains, "for, as I said, he [Oroonoko] understood *English* pretty well" (37).

So you put quotes around the quoted material, and then put a page number in parenthesis at the end, with the period all the way at the end (so it's clear that the page number goes with that quote). Sometimes you need to include both the author and the page number like this: (Behn 37) but in the example above, it was clear from the introduction to the quote which text I was using, so I only needed to include the page number in the citation at the end of the quote. For successive quotes by the same author and in the same story, you only need to include the page number. For your Discussion Starters, the example I have above should suit your needs.

Also note that when I introduced that quote, I said that the narrator said it, not Aphra Behn (the author). Be very careful to properly attribute quotes, and especially careful about the difference between author and narrator when you're working with fiction (which is pretty much every text this semester).

You can also see that I inserted square brackets to explain who the "he" was in this quote. Sometimes that is clear from your introduction; other times, it is easier to use square brackets for any additional/explanatory information. Finally, note that the word "English" is in italics here – that's because it's in italics in the original. Be sure you're correctly reproducing the quote – weird spelling or formatting and all – when you use a quotation. And of course, in your analysis of the quote, you'll want to comment on any curious details of this sort.