

## ***Response Paper Assignment***

In a short essay (2-4 pp, double-spaced, 12 pt type) provide an analysis and interpretation of some aspect of the assigned reading. Your goal with this assignment is not to explain your personal reactions or to list thoughts that have come to mind. Your aim should be, rather, to: (1) explain the motivations that might have led the writer in question to make some particular choice—about what to include in a story or about how to tell the story; and (2) to relate that particular choice to the larger aims or design of the work.

In performing this task, your job is to do something like what a color commentator does in sports broadcasting. A color commentator helps us to understand what we should pay attention to in the play on the field—why an athlete may have performed some action, what makes some move significant, why some play is impressive. So, too, you should try to understand and explain why a writer made the specific choices he or she did and to help your reader see why that matters.

To best perform this task, you should look for some particularly striking or curious detail. (It is often best to begin with something that puzzles you and to try to understand why it might be there.) Once you have selected a particular detail on which to focus, you should consider what may have motivated the writer to include this detail *and* how it may relate to other aspects of the book. Your premise should be that literary texts are coherent and complex works that reflect the artist's overarching design and purpose. You want to find the thread that helps you see the larger pattern and then to explain briefly other ways that pattern can be seen.

In doing this work, you should strive to be detailed and specific. You want to point to particular items in the text (key lines, events, images, symbols, etc.) and to discuss their distinctive implications. As much as possible, you should avoid referring to general or vague impressions. It is almost always helpful to quote from the text and to explain the implications of particular lines.

Another, often useful strategy for approaching a response paper is to consider, where appropriate, how a secondary or supplementary text casts light on a primary reading. For example, if you read Richard Slotkin on the myth of the frontier, you might consider how his theory helps us understand what happens in the narrative of Daniel Boone or in Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. Likewise, if you read Kenneth Greenberg on the southern slaveholder's concept of armor, you might consider whether Greenberg illuminates the story told by Frederick Douglass or by Zora Neale Hurston.

Please make use of parenthetical citation for all quotations. That is, when you quote, provide a page number in parentheses at the end of your sentence, and at the end of the essay include a list of works cited with bibliographical information. See Booth, et al. *The Craft of Research* for more guidance on citation.

