

AML 2011: Paper # 1 Assignment

Assignment:

In this paper, you will need to do a literary analysis. It must be approximately 1850-2000 words (5 ½ to 6 pages). Your literary analysis should tackle one of the following topics, or you may choose to come to speak to me about your potential paper topic. It needs to be in MLA format, and it needs to hit at analysis of the text—not just generalizations about the text. Any assertions you make about an author or his or her ideas need to be grounded in textual evidence. This paper should not require any literary criticism. It may, in minimal points, require minor biography or critical theory (new historicism, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism) to help your points...but only to help your points. The bulk of your evidence needs to come from the texts of the authors you are discussing. Keep in mind, that some of the topics may require you to read beyond what was simply assigned in class.

1. Of all of the authors, how would you contrast the two that are “most-American” and “least-American” in philosophy? What are the points that justify those claims? (you may find it helpful to use the Constitution or Declaration of Independence as references)
2. Which two authors best embody the conflict inherent in Puritanism? What are the elements in that conflict? Why is this conflict in Puritanism even important the settling of the U.S.?
3. How would one trace the different colonizing attitudes of the early settlers across three different explorers’ texts? What does that spectrum teach about the nature of colonization (both its promises and drawbacks)?
4. How does Washington Irving help to sum up the identity crisis inherent in the multiple colonial origins of the U.S. in either “Rip Van Winkle” or “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow?” Does he choose sides in that summation?
5. How does one contrast or compare the outcast narratives of someone like Roger Williams and Equiano against dominant voices like Winthrop and Jefferson?
6. Why does it seem that the concept of a doomsday, judgment, or a radical shift in how things are was important to the settlement of early America? (use two authors as examples)

You will find that discussing your paper with me might help, but you need to come prepared to discuss—I do not spoon-feed paper topics at this level of analysis. What is it about the texts and topic you chose that drew you to it? What specific parts of the text (quotes, word choice, etc) illustrate that?

Your paper must be more than a book report—do not summarize for more than 2 sentences. You need to hit at analysis—rather than focusing on what is happening, ask yourself “why is what is happening important to the idea the author wants to express to me? How does that author accomplish expressing that?” If you tell me something that happened in the text, your next sentence needs to show me evidence of it. Then you need to explain why that event or sentence or quote is important to your argument (how does it prove the thesis?).

Remember, you are explaining and arguing to your reader how the author constructs a text and its underlying theme—you are not telling them what happens in the story. You are telling them why what happens is important to the author's theme.

Authors we have studied:

Columbus

John Smith

Native American Tales

Bradford

Winthrop

Williams

Bradstreet

Wigglesworth

Cotton Mather

William Byrd

Jonathan Edwards

Franklin

Crèvecoeur

John Adams

Jefferson

Equiano

Brockden Brown (notes only)

Washington Irving

Sigourney

But of course, we can you can work on a topic you like—I want you to own your paper, make it yours. Don't just jump through hoops on this one. In wrestling with these topics you are generating your critical thinking skills—your ability to evaluate evidence, judge it, present it, and synergize it into a unified, clear idea that you express to your reader clearly.

Remember—getting your ideas on paper is only half of the point. You are developing your ability to get your ideas out so that other understand clearly what you have to say and can understand your point. That is more challenging than how you may think of “writing a paper.” It requires contemplation, evidence, organization, and attention to format, style, and grammar. You are showing me that you are developing these skills with this paper.

To that point, DO NOT GO TO ANY WEBSITES IN ORDER TO “JUST GET AN IDEA OF WHAT THE TEXT IS ABOUT.” You and you alone must wrestle with trying to figure out what the theme is, and how to explain how the author goes about constructing the written story with elements in order to make that theme happen. I can help you via conferences and office hours, but I cannot help you once you have abdicated the responsibility of a college student. If you plagiarize you will fail the class—as much as lifting one idea or one line without proper citation or context can make this happen—you cannot steal if you do not go looking for it. Avoid the internet as a source of inspiration for this paper—you do not need it for this paper.