Paper 2 Assignment Sheet

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EngL1201W: Introduction to American Literature

Due:  Tuesday, March 7

Weight:  15% of your course grade

Format: In MLA style, with proper heading and numbered pages; typed, double spaced, in a standard 12-pt. font, with no greater than 1.25-inch margins; stapled.

Instructions: Write a polished four-page essay in which you develop a specific argument that responds to one of the following questions*:

1. **To what extent does the work of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Rebecca Harding Davis, and/or Emily Dickinson uphold and/or subvert an American myth, dominant belief, or ideology?** Focus on one well-defined myth, belief, or ideology (e.g., the myth of the American West, individualism, the difference between civilization and savagery, gender norms, racial hierarchies) and on the literature we have read by any one or any combination of 2-3 of these writers. Be sure to explain how and to what extent the writer upholds or subverts (or writers uphold or subvert) that particular myth, belief, or ideology, and to support your ideas with specific examples from the text/s.

2. **What is the dominant message conveyed by or about one theme, of your choice, in the work of prose we have read by Frederick Douglass, Rebecca Harding Davis, and/or Harriet Jacobs, and/or in a poem (or group of poems) by Emily Dickinson?** For your analysis, you may select any one text, or any combination of 2-3 texts, of the above. If you choose to write on more than one text, you must focus on one theme they have in common, but you may argue that the texts convey different messages by or about this theme. **Note:** one Dickinson poem is “one text.”

3. **How would you characterize the relationship between the narrator and reader established in Frederick Douglass’s Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, in Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, and/or in Rebecca Harding Davis’s “Life in the Iron Mills”? What purpose does this narrator-reader relationship serve, or what effect or significance does it have?** Possible related questions to consider about each text: In what ways and to what extent is the reader asked to identify with, or to differentiate him/herself from, the narrator’s personal experience or point of view? To what extent is the narrator-reader relationship based on an emotional and/or rational appeal to the reader by the narrator? What does the narrator assume about the reader’s values, beliefs, knowledge, or assumptions, and in
what ways does the narrator undercut or endorse these? Is the narrator antagonistic, superior, modest, and/or self-effacing in relating to the reader? Are there any contradictions in the narrator-reader relationship? If so, what is their possible significance?

Articulate your argument near the start of your paper, at the end of your introduction. Then, in the body of the paper (in the paragraphs between the introduction and conclusion), work to convince your reader of how one arrives at this argument through analysis of the text/s. This is not a five-paragraph-themed paper: your argument should not simply be a list of what each paragraph will prove or contain. Instead, organize your paper into coherently developed paragraphs that each center on a main idea that helps to build your argument. Each paragraph in the body should have a balance of claims and textual evidence. The claims should reveal (they should make clear and explicit) the implicit messages conveyed by the textual evidence. Develop transitions between your ideas so that your argument about the text/s evolves clearly and logically.

Guidance: I encourage you to visit me during my office hours (or make an appointment with me) to discuss your paper, and to make an appointment with a tutor at Student Writing Support, at any stage during the writing process. *I am open to other ideas you have for your paper, or to modification of any of the three questions you are required to choose from above, but you must discuss these with me in person.

Grade: The grade on the paper will be determined by the following guidelines:
A—the paper meets all of the basic requirements and has all or nearly all of the additional features
B—the paper meets all of the basic requirements and has several of the additional features
C—the paper meets all of the basic requirements but has few, if any, of the additional features**
D—the paper does not meet all of the basic requirements
F—the paper does not meet any of the basic requirements
0—the paper is plagiarized, or you fail to turn in the assignment within one week of the due date

** You will receive no higher than a “D” on your paper if you do not follow MLA style for in-text citations in your paper, as well as for end-of-text citations on your Works Cited page.

MLA Style Guide:
An example of an in-text citation:
Although James Smethurst argues that Native Son is a “gothic” text, he says that Richard Wright exposes the “limitations” of this literary mode, and that Wright “suggests the need for a new type of African American literature of which Native Son was to be the forerunner” (Smethurst 32).

Some examples of end-of-text citations:


