Paper 3 and Revision Assignments Sheet

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EngL1201W: Introduction to American Literature

Peer Workshop: April 25

Paper 3 due: April 25

Weight: 15% of grade

Revision due: May 9

Bring a clean copy of Paper 1 or 2, or an extra copy of Paper 3 (whichever paper you plan to revise) to class.

Weight: 20% of 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.

General Instructions: In this course, a “text” refers to a work of prose fiction or non-fiction (short story, novel, autobiographical narrative, or essay), a poem, and a film. Keep in mind that a stronger paper develops an argument about the implicit, rather than about the obvious, messages conveyed in a text and closely examines details. Articulate your argument near the start of your paper, at the end of your introduction. In the body of the paper, convince your reader of 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 and help to evolve your argument. Each paragraph in the body should have a balance of claims and evidence. Your claims should make clear and explicit the implicit messages conveyed by textual details. Develop transitions between ideas and paragraphs so that your argument about the text(s) evolves clearly and logically.

Paper 3: Choose one of the options below.*

1. Write a polished four-page essay in which you argue a specific difference between the treatment of “darkness” in nineteenth-century American literature and in twentieth-century (or turn-of-the-century) American literature. Use one text from each period as exemplary of your argument (two texts: one text created before 1890; one text created after 1890).
2. It is commonplace to state that Americans witnessed dramatic changes in social norms (social roles, beliefs, attitudes, ways of thinking and communicating) from the Victorian era (in the nineteenth century) to World War Two. Use a text to assess this statement. Write a polished four-page essay that argues the specific way in which one text from the second half of the course (The Big Sleep and after) depicts a particular change in American society, the extent to which the text reveals the change to be a radical break from past norms, and the attitude that the text adopts toward this change.

3. Critics generally define “modernism” as characterized by “radical experimentation in literary techniques,” though their views on when this literary mode or movement officially began vary (starting dates range from the end of World War One to 1910 to 1892 to 1880, and some texts written before this are characterized as “proto-modernist”). Write a polished four-page essay that argues the specific way in which one or two post-Civil War texts (first published after 1865—which may include a poem by Emily Dickinson) experiment(s) with literary form, narrative convention, or style of language and the effects or purpose of this experimentation.

4. Write a polished four-page essay in which you develop a counter-argument to one critic’s analysis that you encountered during your research for your group presentation. This essay must be on the one text on which your group presented, and, in it, you must discuss and cite one critical source.

5. Determine one theme (a significant, recurring idea, concept, or argument) that has especially interested you this semester. Write a polished four-page essay in which you argue the specific message conveyed about this theme in one or two texts from the course, including at least one text assigned after February 28. Suggested themes: artificiality, crime, corruption, difference or equality (of race, gender, or class), human essence versus performance, individualism, manhood, (im)morality, motherhood, money, wealth, poverty, oppression, religious faith or practice, sexuality, womanhood.

Revision: Select Paper 1, 2 or 3 to revise and expand into a seven-page essay. In addition to revising the essay’s style of language and to editing it to conform to rules of grammar, you should rethink the essay’s main idea, support, and organization. Formulate a more specific, less obvious argument that requires proving, develop your ideas in each paragraph, including your introduction and conclusion, and consider additional textual evidence that complicates your argument. Your revision must be about the same text(s) as the original. In revising, you may—but are not required to—add one text from any part of the course to your analysis. You must work primarily with one paper, but you may use your ideas in other papers to help you revise.

Guidance: I encourage you to visit me during my office hours (or make an appointment with me) to discuss your Paper 3 and Revision. You should also visit a tutor at Student Writing Support at any stage during the writing process. *I am open to other ideas that you have for your Paper 3 and to modifications of any of the five options above, but you must discuss these with me in person.*
Grades: The grade on Paper 3 and on the Revision will be determined by the usual 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 Paper 3 and on the Revision if you do not follow MLA style for in-text citations in each paper, as well as for end-of-text citations on each Works Cited page.

MLA Style Guide:
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).

Examples of end-of-text citations:


