

SIGNATURE ASSIGNMENT

ENGL 2321, 2326, 2331, 2341, 2351

OVERVIEW

Great literary works aspire to be more than entertainment. By mobilizing the power of language in creative and unconventional ways, literature challenges us to reflect on and reconsider society's most fundamental assumptions. Literary works often transform readers through emotional effects induced by plot, characterization, rhythm, and figures of speech. While it is important to think about literature in historical context, we will miss out on one of its fundamental capacities if we don't ask what it has to tell us about our world and ourselves.

This assignment asks you to develop a thesis-driven argument about an ethical conflict presented in a work or across two works. Your essay should be a minimum of 1000 words.

DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS

WHAT?

Your essay should answer one of the two following overarching questions, depending on whether you decide to discuss a single work or two:

- What complex idea about an ethical conflict does the work present?
- Or what different but mutually illuminating ideas do two works present about an ethical conflict?

Your answer to one of these questions will serve as your thesis statement, a specific and arguable interpretive claim about the literary work or works. To provide a persuasive, richly textured account of this ethical conflict in your work(s), you'll need to consider and smoothly integrate into your discussion the following sub-questions:

- How is the ethical conflict concretely depicted in your work(s)? What are the nuances of that depiction?
- What ethical values are at stake in this conflict (e.g. individual liberty, duty toward others, truthfulness, fairness, etc.)?
- What relation does this depiction establish between individuals and institutions?
- In what sense does the ethical dilemma represent a specific form or instance of a broader social conflict (e.g. does it seem related to societal forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, or religious intolerance)?
- What are the economic, political, and cultural origins of the conflict, as represented by the author or authors?

HOW?

Your argument should be well-organized, original, and plausible. You should aim to educate your readers about the work(s) you examine. Each body paragraph should develop a clear idea that helps you to advance your thesis statement through evidence—paraphrased narrative details or direct quotations—that supports your interpretation of the literary work(s). You should analyze the evidence you present in order to explain *how* it confirms your thesis and to flesh out your interpretation. Be sure to cite any sources that you consult.

SO WHAT?

A good conclusion doesn't simply restate the thesis. Rather, by reflecting on the larger ethical and social implications of the issue that the work raises, you can underline why your argument matters. Consider the following questions as you craft your conclusions:

- In what way is the ethical dilemma you've described in the work(s) related to an important ethical issue that we see playing out today? How does the same or a similar ethical problem show up in the world outside of the work?
- To what degree does this problem resemble those in your work(s) and to what degree has the problem evolved or changed since the work was first written? Is this ethical conflict specific to a certain historical or cultural situation, or is it universal? Is it a local, regional, national, and/or global issue? How are perspectives on this ethical conflict affected by cultural or social differences?
- How has your analysis of the literary work challenged you to rethink your understanding of this contemporary ethical issue or affirmed and extended your previous thinking on this topic?

RUBRIC

The following learning objectives will be used to assess your paper:

Communication Skills, including effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication

Critical Thinking Skills, including creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information

Personal Responsibility, including the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making

Social Responsibility, including intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities

These learning objectives will be considered met if you are able to:

For ***communication***:

- present a clear statement of the essay's purpose or central idea, i.e., its thesis
- follow a coherent organizational scheme or principle
- develop the full potential of the argument

- exhibit proficient application of the rules of standard English

For ***critical thinking***:

- clearly identify and explain the interpretive problem the literary work raises
- base specific analytical points in the evidence of the work
- present an argument that is logically worked out
- draw well-reasoned conclusions or implications from the argument

For ***personal responsibility***:

- describe and analyze an ethical conflict or dilemma in a literary work
- reflect on how this particular literary work has changed, affirmed, or extended one's understanding of this contemporary ethical issue
- suggest an openness to personal development through an encounter with literature

For ***social responsibility***:

- discuss whether the ethical dilemma is an instance of a broader social conflict evident in the public expression of diverse opinions, beliefs, and biases
- think about ethical conflicts in terms of differing scales (individuals, regions, nations, or global communities)
- illustrate the ethical values that animate differing perspectives, and analyze them in historical and cultural contexts, including one's own
- think about ethical and political issues from perspectives other than one's own
- show a commitment to civic engagement through a thoughtful reflection on the story's contemporary and real-world significance.

FOR INSTRUCTORS:

You may wish to set a maximum word count, describe MLA and other formatting aspects in more detail, specify particular works or issues in the prompt, or require that students write about a single work or compare two works.

Please have your students upload their essays to a Canvas dropbox. In addition to grading the essay, you will complete a brief scoresheet (based on <https://vpaa.unt.edu/ccg/rubrics>) that allows UNT to assess the four Core Curriculum learning objectives.