

Signature Assignment – English 3450 (Short Story)

This is a 2-part assignment involving both the critical analysis of a single short story and your reflection on the larger ethical and social issues that the story raises.

The first part of the assignment involves a 3-4 page critical analysis in which you identify an ethical and/or cultural problem or conflict in the story that allows for different interpretive positions. In developing an argument that explains the *literary* significance of this problem or conflict, consider the following questions: How would you describe the essential moral conflict or dilemma of the story? What ethical values are at odds with each other? Does the story take a position on the ethical conflict it presents? A closely set of questions relates to how the story imagines social conflict: In what sense does the ethical dilemma represent a specific form or instance of a broader social conflict? What are the different cultural perspectives that appear to underlie this conflict, and why are they at odds with each other? What are the economic, political, cultural origins of the conflict, as represented by the author?

Your essay should present a clear, coherent, and well-written argument that draws on evidence from the story to support its claims. It should also show how the essential elements of short fiction (plot, character, theme, and setting) contribute to the meanings of the story. Finally, you must use at least one secondary source. This source should be an article-length work of literary criticism, history, or theory that helps you to articulate your ideas and/or to contextualize your argument.

The second part of the assignment, approximately 2-3 pages, involves stepping back from the literary text itself and reflecting on the contemporary or real-world significance of the ethical and social conflicts examined above. First, consider the larger ethical implications of the story: Is this a conflict capable of resolution, and if so, what might such a resolution look like? To what extent does the ethical dilemma derive from a specific historical-cultural situation and to what extent is it universal? How would you seek to resolve the conflict? (Your answer to this last question should defend your proposed solution and discuss its possible implications). Then, make a case for the ongoing cultural relevance of the story. Where do we see the same, or analogous, issues or conflicts playing out today? Has anything changed or evolved in the nature of the conflicts you write about? How has the story illuminated or broadened your own perspective on your world?

Your argument here may be more speculative than in the first part of the assignment, but it should still be clear, coherent, and well-written.

The assignment will provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate your progress toward the four Core objectives associated with this course:

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

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

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

Successful assignments will demonstrate that these objectives are being met, in that they will:

- clearly identify and explain the interpretive problem the story raises (critical thinking)
- base specific analytical points in the evidence of the text (critical thinking)
- position the essay argument in relation to the context or perspective provided by a secondary source (critical thinking)
- present an argument that is logically worked out (critical thinking)
- draw well-reasoned conclusions or implications from the argument (critical thinking)
- present a clear statement of the essay's purpose or central idea, i.e., its thesis (communication)
- follow a coherent organizational scheme or principle (communication)
- develop the full potential of the argument (communication)
- demonstrate mastery of the rules of standard English (communication)
- show insight into diverse cultural perspectives and differences, including one's own (social responsibility)
- display an ability to assume a cultural perspective other than one's own (social responsibility)
- reflect a combination of values, skills, and knowledge about various regional, national, and/or global communities (social responsibility)
- show a commitment to civic engagement through a thoughtful reflection on the story's contemporary and real-world significance (social responsibility)
- suggest an openness to personal development (i.e., a broadening of one's own horizons or a revision of one's attitudes) through an encounter with literature (social responsibility)
- describe and analyze the ethical conflict or dilemma of the story skillfully (personal responsibility)
- propose, explain, and justify a possible solution to the ethical problem the story presents (personal responsibility)
- discuss the possible implications or consequences of that solution (personal responsibility)

Please submit your completed essay through the English 3450 Canvas site.