Essay Assignment

Due Dates:
Wednesday, 7 September – In class: Selection of topic texts
Wednesday, 5 October – Paper Proposal Due
Wednesday, 23 November (Optional): First Draft Due
Final Exam Period – Final Draft Due

Weight: 20%

Subject:
On Wednesday, 7 September, you will have the opportunity to choose one author from our syllabus. The text(s) we read from this author will serve as the primary topic for your paper. A list of your choices appears on page 4 of this document.

There are two caveats. First, no more than two people may choose the same author. The selection process will occur in random order. In order to maximize the likelihood of choosing an author you will enjoy working on, you may wish to take advantage of the days before 7 September to peruse the syllabus and the anthology and find a few options you believe are suitable for you.

Second, while the final draft of your paper is not due until final exam week, the paper proposal is due earlier in the semester. This means that if you choose an author whom the class will study later in the semester, you may need to read the text on your own within the next few weeks.

Purpose:
Write an essay about the text you choose. Broadly speaking, the topic of the essay should be the course theme - see the suggested questions in the course description on the syllabus. You will, of course, want to narrow down your specific topic quite a bit so that you can find an effective thesis.

As the introduction to your syllabus describes in more detail, we practice several methods of reading and interpreting literary texts in this class. For this paper, you will choose one of those methods and apply it to your essay.

- Textual Analysis:
  This method examines textual elements of the work(s) in question and analyzes how those elements contribute to the meaning of the work(s). You might look at a poem’s rhythm and meter, at metaphorical or symbolic language, at literary allusions, tone, mood, etc.
Sample thesis statement: The description of Jimmy Doyle's association with the other characters in "After the Race" shows that the relationship between the characters acts as a microcosm for national relations at the time.

- **Contextual Analysis:**
  This method involves emphasizing the historical, cultural, or literary contexts which produced the work and in which it is situated. You might find a contextual element which has a clear influence upon the text. Or you might argue that the text influenced its culture, or evaluate how successful it is in trying to do so, etc.
  Sample thesis statement: The Love Suicides at Amijima portrays the socially-mandated oppression of women in 18th century Osaka.

**Paper Proposal:**
The proposal, which should be approximately one page and should not exceed 1.5 pages (formatted the same as the actual paper, see below), explains the argument you intend to make and how you plan to go about making that argument. You should have a working thesis, and you should describe any preliminary research you’ve done or thoughts you have. At this point, you do not need a full outline or a plan for how your paper will be structured and organized, but the thinking you’ve done so far should lead you to that point.

**Submission Instructions:**
On each due date, you must have your document printed out and ready to hand in at the beginning of class that day. Be sure your paper is properly formatted, and if it is more than one page, be sure the pages are stapled together.

In addition, prior to handing me a hard copy, you must have submitted an electronic copy to me via email: kirsche3@unlv.nevada.edu.

Late papers will be penalized by one full letter grade for every 24 hours (or portion thereof) that they are late. [THIS IS A REALLY BAD REASON TO EARN A POOR GRADE ON YOUR ESSAY – DON’T LET IT HAPPEN TO YOU!]

**Paper format and other requirements:**
Use standard MLA formatting: 1” margins on all sides, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, proper heading and headers. You can find more information on MLA formatting at the Purdue OWL website. (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)
You should also look at the properly formatted sample paper on the course website. Make sure your paper looks like the sample.
Your essay must be a minimum of 2000 words (this is approximately 6 - 7 full pages). You must also have a properly formatted Works Cited page, and all quotations in your essay must be followed by correctly formatted parenthetical citations. If you’re not familiar with this process, see the Purdue OWL cite.

Any paper which fails to meet these requirements will earn a failing grade for this assignment.

**Other Useful Pointers:**

- On my website, I have two helpful handouts I strongly recommend you read, called “General Writing Guidelines” and “Using Quotations.” They are available here: http://faculty.unlv.edu/kirschen/handouts/writing.html. While I refer to the ideas here as “guidelines,” you should consider them firm rules. Deviating from them will likely have a negative effect on your essay grade.
- I study literature, and I’m here to help you. Feel free to set up a meeting with me if you are having difficulty getting started or if you’d like feedback on the quality of your work in progress.
- Also feel free to take advantage of the writing center or your research librarians.
**Topic Choices:**
Voltaire – Candide
Molière – Tartuffe
Chikamatsu Monzaemon – The Love Suicides of Amijima
William Wordsworth – Preface to Lyrical Ballads & any/all poems in your anthology
Samuel Taylor Coleridge – “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”
Sherman Alexie – “Class” (may also include Smoke Signals)
Gerald Vizenor – “The Last Lecture”
W. B. Yeats - any/all poems in your anthology
James Joyce – Dubliners
Chinua Achebe – Things Fall Apart
Alifa Riyaat – “My World of the Unknown”
Naguib Mahfouz - Zaabalawi
Rabindranath Tagore - Broken Ties