English 319 – Short Paper Assignment Prompts

**Assignments due to canvas by 11:59 pm on Monday, May 4th.**

\*\*When you create your MLA header, please list the prompt to which you are responding below the space allocated for the date, like so:

Your name

My name

English 319

Date

Prompt #1

Your original, unique title (***not*** ‘Prompt #1)

**Prompts (choose one prompt, from among these multiple options, that allow you to choose a focus on close reading, or on contextualization, or on theory):**

Prompts for a **Close Reading-focused paper.**

*The focus in this assignment is on close critical reading of the primary texts. No outside research or contextual material is required. I want you to have the freedom to focus on parts of the texts that interest you, so you have a lot of freedom with this prompt!*

Choose and close read **one scene** (not an entire Act!) in Gurira’s *The Convert* which you think is particularly important to the development of the main dramatic action, the development of a particular topic, or the development of a larger metaphor or message. Develop an argument for why this particular scene is so valuable and what we gain by reading it the way you want us to read it. So, in other words, you’re going to make an argument for why it’s valuable and then a sub-argument for what that value is *relevant*.

OR

Choose and closely read two poems, or two short stories, from the readings of weeks 1-3. Place these two works in comparative framework, and trace a particular topic (eg, violence; gender; colonization; nativism, etc), or literary dimension (eg, imagery; narrative structure; poetic form; view point; orality, etc) as it operates within and across the two texts. If you choose to trace a topic, you will still be expected to engagein some way with the literariness of the literary text. Develop an argument for why this particular pairing of works is valuable, and a sub-argument for what we gain by reading it the way you want us to read it.

OR:

**Prompts for a Context-focused paper**

*The focus in this assignment is on context and background; outside research is****required****. Situating literature relative to its context, or conditions of emergence, can be a tricky task. Too often students treat the history and the text as static entities, so that the history/context comes to be ‘reflected’ in the literary text or vice versa. In this instance we simply find two things we already know and go ‘look, that one matches the other one!’ Instead, I would like you to see text and context in****dynamic*** *relation. In other words, I want you to try to show me how context****illuminates*** *things about the literary text and/or how the literary text****illuminates*** *context. Your essay should help us see how the literary text reveals something about the history/context which we might not otherwise gather from reading the history alone. Conversely, we want to know whether there is anything the history/context can tell us about the literary text that we might not be able to discern from reading the literature alone.*

*Context papers should include at least three outside sources (besides primary texts) and a properly formatted MLA Works Cited page.*

**Prompts:**

Research the history of colonialism in Zimbabwe, or South Africa, or Ghana, or Nigeria, or Uganda, or Tanzania (the six countries from which the literary works we have studied arise). Help the reader see what was distinctive about your chosen country’s colonial history and practices, and how this distinction might illuminate the lived experience of colonial society as depicted in a literary text that you select, from the readings of weeks 1-5. By ‘colonialism’, ‘history’, and ‘colonial practices’, I refer to a variety of dimensions: political/governmental; socio-economic; educational; ideological, religious.

OR:

Research some contemporary cultural/literary materials (poems, music, visual artworks, films, etc), or socio-political documents (speeches, journalism, etc), from one of the countries whose authors we have studied. Read one of the course texts from weeks 1-5, in relation to these contextual materials. Help the reader understand how your selected contextual materials illuminate the course primary text, and consider how your primary text also helps to illuminate the contextual materials. Your selected materials may be from the same period as the literary work itself, for example, you may choose political speeches, music, photographs, etc, from 1970s South Africa, as contexts for discussing Black Consciousness poetry. Or, your selected materials may be from the period that the literary text is concerned with, for example, you might choose an 1890s newspaper article on the Shona and Ndebele uprisings (or, ‘Chimurenga’), to provide context for *The Convert*, although the play itself is written over 100 years later than the events that it represents.

OR

**Prompts for Theoretical Connections-focused papers**

Length: 3-4 pages (MLA)

*The focus in this assignment is on drawing connections between a primary literary text and a theoretical text, especially insofar as we can see these two texts conversing on a specific theme, subject, or historical issue.*

*As with the ‘context’ paper, your goal here to put two texts in dynamic conversation such that you can make a point to the reader about the value of reading those two texts together. The question,****to which your thesis will be a kind of answer****, is: how does putting these two texts in conversation on a specific topic reveal something new or interesting about each? Or, alternately, what do we gain by reading the texts together that we might not otherwise gain by reading them separately?*

**Prompts**

One might say that all of the literary texts from weeks 1-5 articulate a critical account of colonialism, that reflects some form of anti-colonial consciousness. Choose one prescribed literary text from weeks 1-5, and one of the critical theoretical texts from weeks 1-5, and place these in dynamic conversation on the subject of anti-colonial consciousness.

Choose one of these topics: natural environment/land; urban environment; space; race; violence; African feminism; gender; the nation; community; the body; history; religion/spirituality; comedy; revolution; love; the family; progress; tradition; psychological alienation; the people; modernity; capitalism. Choose one prescribed literary text from weeks 1-5, and one of the critical theoretical texts from weeks 1-5, and place these in dynamic conversation on your chosen topic.