

COURSE JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

THE COURSE JOURNAL

World Literature 271 is a ‘W’ course because one of its goals is to help you improve your writing. Regardless of what writing instruction I can give you, the best way to improve your writing is to write and write often. Simply writing lots of words, sentences, and paragraphs can lead to surprising improvement in your writing--the more words, the better. The magic is that the words you write don’t have to be read by anyone else to help your writing skills improve.

To understand how this works, compare writing a great number of words to practicing the piano between piano lessons. The piano teacher does not have to listen to each practice session in order for the student to improve; in the same way, someone else (an instructor) does not have to read the words written for the writer to improve. **But in each case the student will improve in proportion to the practice time that he or she invests.**

Therefore, dedicating yourself to this assignment can do more to improve your writing than anything I or any book can do. In addition, writing about a piece of literature is a very effective way to understand it. I remember that in many of my college literature classes, the assignment was the same: keep a journal of my reactions to the readings.

I dreaded the assignment. Many times when a new journal entry was required, I struggled to force myself to WRITE about what I read—it was hard work; I had to do more with my thoughts than just think them. But once I began to write, I often found that I did not want to stop. More importantly, actually writing about the literature infused it with a clarity and an appreciation that only reading and thinking about it would not have offered.

Goals

The goal of a Course Journal entry is to consider the literary work in question and write as many sentences and paragraphs as possible within the time limit. Your journal response might include your general reaction to the literary work, questions you have about it, your reaction to discussion postings, or revisions to your earlier thinking after having the benefit of additional time for reflection.

Writing a journal entry requires a special time set aside to write original sentences and paragraphs about the readings we’ll be covering. Plan on about **fifteen to twenty minutes per journal entry**, with about two to three entries per week.

To make a journal entry, first read the selection in question and then write an honest reaction to it. What did or didn’t you understand? What did you agree or disagree with?

What questions would you ask the author, given the opportunity? What inferences can you draw about the culture in which the selection was written? Did you enjoy the selection? Why or why not? Go deeper than deciding whether a selection appealed to you or not. What's important is WHY you found it appealing or unappealing. Responding to this second-level question can refine your thinking, your knowledge of yourself, and your values.

One key to being successful is to let the words flow quickly. Disregard spelling and punctuation; just be sure you can make out what you have written at a later time because I may ask you to share a general sense of a journal entry or you may want to return to an entry to revise it.

Also please keep in mind that you can be absolutely honest with yourself because no one but you will read the content of your journal entries without your permission. It's best to view your journal entries as conversations with yourself, the author, and the selection.

Specifics

- You need not worry about correcting spelling/readability/sentencing errors, nor be concerned that someone else will read what you have written. Just be sure you can make out what you've written.
- A minimum of fifteen minutes minimum per journal assignment. (Please see the tentative list of journal assignments below).
- You may hand-write and/or type your journal entries. Please be sure to accurately number and date each journal entry.
- Keep all pages together in a notebook or on a computer
- As you write a journal entry, please remember the goal is to produce a large quantity of words within the time limit. Disregard spelling and punctuation; just be sure you can make out what you have written at a later time.
- At first, expect to sit a bit, waiting for the ideas to come. If you are patient, in time your mind will begin to generate content that your pen can record. A fifteen to twenty-minute writing session can yield from half a page to several pages of writing, depending upon your mood and perseverance.

Tentative Course Journal Entries (Some of these literary works will also provide topics for online postings.)

- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*—2 journal entries
- The Hebrew Bible—2 journal entries
- *The Iliad*—2 journal entries
- *The Odyssey*—2 journal entries
- *The Qur'an*—2 journal entries
- Life in the Middle Ages—1 journal entry
- Dante's the *Inferno*—3 journal entries

- *The Thousand and One Nights*—1 journal entry
- *Don Quixote*—2 journal entries
- *Hamlet*—3 journal entries
- Open Journal entries 2-4

You can use the following questions as journal prompts:

- What was your initial reaction to the selection?
- What did or didn't you understand?
- What did you agree or disagree with? Why?
- What questions would you ask the author, given the opportunity?
- What inferences can you draw about the culture in which the selection was written?
- Did you enjoy the selection? Why or why not?
- Where do you think the story will go next? Where would you take it if you were the author?
- What theme does the selection suggest? In other words, what does the selection suggest about the nature of life and experience? Try to state this in a sentence.
- Does the selection respond to any of our beginning questions?

How does the world work?

Who or what is in charge of it?

What is the nature of that "Who"?

What is our relationship to that "Who"?

What does that mean for us as humans?

It may be tempting to see assignments such as our course journal—assignments that an instructor will not read--as less important. Nothing could be further from the truth with the journal assignment. Your enjoyment and understanding of our readings, as well as your improvement in writing, will be a direct result of your dedication to this assignment. Please see it as a course priority because this assignment will truly be self-rewarding: Those who dedicate themselves will enhance their writing skills and their lives; those who don't, won't.