

Essay Assignment #1: Using Textual Evidence & Close Reading To Express a Thesis

Assignment

Please write an essay that expresses an interpretive, close-reading of Ursula LeGuin's novel, *Lathe of Heaven*. As you write, make sure that the examples given and/or evidence used relate to a single controlling purpose, idea, critical question, or thesis statement. Be sure that you incorporate multiple passages through quotation and/or summary and that you demonstrate the relationship between your analysis of these passages and the overarching purpose/thesis of your investigation. As you write, please be sure to include some discussion of alternative interpretations of key evidence in order to contextualize your own convictions in light of other possible points of view.

For this essay, feel free to use your notes from class discussion, assigned readings, or the D2L posts. Please remember, you are not required to conduct outside research, but you should cite the ideas of others where appropriate, using current MLA guidelines.

The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate that you can read a text closely and independently, that you can present multiple passages from a single text for analysis and interpretation, and that you can conduct a unified discussion, in writing, of a course text while making use of appropriate citation formats and rules.

Requirements:

Please present approximately five (5) double-spaced, single-sided, *stapled* pages.

This essay assignment will be graded for thorough and thoughtful completion of the required objectives and timely submission of the work. In addition the essay will be assessed based on its argument, organization, development, clarity and correctness. Late assignments will be down-graded one third of a letter grade for each class period that they are late (i.e. from a C to a C-). Please note: if you will not be in class on the due date, a D2L drop box will be available so that you can still submit your work on time.

DUE: In class or to the D2L dropbox by class time on Tuesday Oct 4th.

Assignment 2: Shaping a Provisional Thesis Sentence or Critical Question

Overview

In this exercise we will develop a provisional thesis statement or critical question to guide your writing of the first paper, which will be on a topic of your choosing related to Ursula Le Guin's *Lathe of Heaven*.

What Work Should A (Provisional) Thesis Sentence Do?

A good thesis sentence is typically that one single sentence in your paper that most clearly asserts your purpose for writing, focuses what you want to say on something appropriately specific, and even suggests the structure of the paper to follow. Ultimately assertive, thoughtful thesis statements help the reader understand what you think is most important. At the beginning of the process, however, coming up with a provisional thesis serves *your benefit*, by helping you direct your attention to the specific bits of information in the text that you would like to consider for further analysis.

With that said, it is difficult to write a good thesis statement before the paper itself is drafted. That is because much of the thought that goes into writing the paper contributes to, develops, and deepens the ideas you begin with as you write. For that reason the question or statement you begin with should be thought of as provisional; while your final thesis will be adjusted to account for your findings as you revise the paper toward completion.

A Provisional/Working Thesis Sentence Makes a Claim

Please note that asserting your own voice in the form of a claim about the text does not mean that you have to reduce your ideas to an "either/or" "yes/no" position and then take an intractable stand. Rather, your working thesis should help you develop an interesting perspective on the text that you think merits deeper investigation.

This perspective should include an observation, but it ought to go further than mere observation. "Reality is always changing" is an observation about Le Guin's novel, but it is a weak thesis.

"Le Guin's characters consider reality as subjective and in a state of constant change in order to help readers think through some typical Western assumptions about social responsibility" goes beyond simple observation and suggests a body of evidence and an argumentative structure to follow. Why? Because it posits an avenue for making sense of a feature of the text **and** because it makes a claim that is defensible with evidence from the text. Put another way, a working thesis sentence should inspire (rather than quiet) other points of view. In the above example, one might prove that reality is always changing, but the real question readers want explored is, why? Because Le Guin is influenced by Chinese philosophy? Because the book is critical of 1960s Utopian thinking? Because the novel reflects a widespread disintegration of modern civilization? In short, if your thesis is positing something too obvious or something no one else would dispute, then it probably needs to go further.

Alternatives To A Working Thesis Sentence

Sometimes, it is too difficult to begin a piece of writing with an assertive claim. In that case the option is to begin by raising a critical question(s).

If you are interested as a writer to explore, for instance, the reasons why Le Guin has included Heather Lelache as a character in this book (a topic for which you are not yet prepared to make a claim), your thesis might read: "What purposes might Heather Lelache serve in the text? To what extent does Heather Lelache reflect the French origin of her name as "The Coward" and why has Le Guin chosen to portray the only substantial female character in the novel so roughly?"

You'll note that these question, while provocative, do not offer a sense of the paper's structure, yet; but they do direct your attention toward a body of evidence within the text: in this case the passages that deal with Heather Lelache. This sort of beginning question permits the writer to pursue a wider range ideas, without committing to a direction just yet. While this freedom might seem appealing at the start, eventually you will find that the lack of a declarative thesis statement requires *more* work. Once you have spent more time researching your area of interest, you should revise your question into a more focused thesis to help you develop a structure, outline, and sense of what you should be writing about from paragraph to paragraph so that the essay is clear and the reader can easily follow your line of inquiry.

Assignment 2

Part 1: Read at least two of the responses that your classmates posted in the discussion forum for last time ("Assignment 1 posts") and make a response to each. In your responses I want you to give feedback on what the authors have said and how they might shape their interests into a more specific area suitable for a working thesis or critical inquiry.

Part 2: Post your own working thesis statement or critical inquiry to the "Assignment 2" discussion forum. Include a paragraph explaining why you have chosen this particular topic/question/perspective and where you might look for evidence as well as any questions you might want extra help thinking about.

Due before midnight on Wednesday September 21st.