

Essay 1: A Short Cross Cultural Analysis

Our first week of reading is devoted to the stories of the various peoples who were living in the Americas around 1492, the accounts of European explorers when they first arrived in the so-called "New World," and the conflicts that erupted between these native peoples and Europeans. The explanations of these conflicts are complex. At the core of these conflicts, however, were *differences* in beliefs and thinking, in action and behavior, in language and modes of representation—in short, differences in culture.

Basic Assignment. Write a short essay that focuses on one of these differences—a belief, a way of thinking, a cultural practice, a typical behavior, or a way of speaking, narrating, representing or understanding. Explain how this cultural difference might have been a point of confusion, mutual misunderstanding, or conflict between different cultural groups.

You might, for instance, take one of the American Indian creation stories and compare it to the ideas about creation that the Europeans brought with them. Or you might analyze an incident or theme or significant detail from one of the many accounts of contact. Or you might compare a native text to a European one. Whatever you choose, pick something that distinguishes one group from the other.

Purposes of the Assignment. This assignment should give you a chance to do a cross-cultural analysis, a skill that will be useful in this class (and in life!). It is an opportunity for you to use writing to help you understand and interpret our first set of readings.

I will use this paper to do some initial assessment of the class's reading and writing abilities. I am interested, first of all, to see how well you read and understand these texts. I also want to get a sense of your abilities as writers. Can you compose a short essay with a central claim that is illustrated and demonstrated with evidence taken directly from the text that you're examining? Can you put together a clear, well-written argument that offers a plausible and persuasive interpretation of an early American text or some aspect of that text? In other words, my expectations for this paper are fundamental:

- A paper topic that follows the instructions above
- A thesis statement or central claim that organizes the argument
- A clear, logical organization
- The use of textual evidence to support your thesis and main points
- Coherent, logical explanation of textual evidence that supports the thesis and main points
- Clear and correct prose
- Accurate documentation of sources

I want to use this paper assignment to make sure that each of you can do the kind of reading and writing expected in this type of class. If you can, this is a simple, straightforward paper assignment. If you struggle with these reading and writing skills, we can use this assignment as a chance to determine what skills you'll need to hone this semester (or to decide if this class is appropriate for you this semester).

The paper should have a good title and page numbers. It should be typed and double-spaced. And it should be proofread carefully for clarity, consistency, and correctness. Please use MLA style to cite your text(s) and provide information on your text(s).

Due Date. Thursday, January 18th.

Length. 2 pages (400-600 words).