

Paper 2: Joining a Conversation on Realism and Sentimentalism in American Literature

Assignment. Write a ten-to-twelve-page paper that makes a contribution to the discussion of realism and sentimentalism in American literature. The paper should present an argument about some specific, well-defined issue or problem that links realism and/or sentimentalism to American literature. The specific topic for this paper is yours to determine.

When setting up or framing your argument, you will need to explain how your ideas and analysis relate to other, similar studies of realism and/or sentimentalism or similar studies in American literature. These other studies—which will constitute the conversation that you're joining—could be any of the following, for example: literary criticism on the text you're analyzing, biographical information about the author, sociological or philosophical examinations of realism and/or sentimentalism, theories of realism and/or sentimentalism, or theories of literature and/or art that discuss realism and/or sentimentalism.

You'll want to present your own ideas as a contribution to an ongoing but developing conversation. How do your ideas relate to what has already been said? Where do you differ in your view from other, previous views? Where do you agree with and build upon ideas, concepts, or views that have already been presented? What is new, different, or special about your own contribution? How would you explain why your own view matters? Why is it important, helpful, or significant?

Thus, this paper requires research, outside sources, the summarization of other views, and responses to them. You will need to include a works cited page and carefully document your sources according to an accepted style sheet (such as MLA style). The main part of the paper, however, will be your own argument about some very specific aspect of realism and/or sentimentalism in American literature.

You are welcome to explore topics in realism, sentimentalism, and American literature that extend beyond our syllabus. But please make use of what we're studying—the theories examined, the literary texts read, or the issues brought up. Perhaps one of the simplest ways to join a conversation is to think about this class as your audience. Take what they already know about realism, sentimentalism, and literature and connect it to your new contribution.

Proposals. I will accept three different kinds of proposals on or before Wednesday, November 7th: 1) a paper conference with me (please see me to schedule a time); 2) a one-page, typed explanation of the connection you're considering and why; or 3) an e-mail version of #2.

What-I'm-Looking-For. When I'm reading these papers, I'll be asking myself the following questions:

- Does the paper refer to previous, published examinations of key issues related to the topic?
- Does it position its own argument in relation to those previous examinations?
- Does it make an argument about some specific, well-defined issue or problem that links emotion and literature?
- Does it explain in a clear and persuasive manner its interpretation of the texts under examination as well as the previous examinations?
- Does it support its interpretation with analysis and appropriate, direct references to the texts?
- Is it organized clearly enough so that others in the class could follow the argument?
- Does the paper acknowledge its sources using a bibliography and a clear and consistent style of documentation?
- Does it make references to ideas, issues, or texts with which the class would be familiar? Would the paper be interesting to others in the class? Does it make clear what is significant about its own contribution to the discussion?

Writing Workshop. We will have an in-class writing workshop devoted to this assignment on **Wednesday, November 14th**. Please bring a complete rough draft of your paper to class with you. (If you're doing the alternative paper, please bring a complete rough draft of your paper to class with you as well.)

Due Date. Monday, November 19th

Length. 10-12 typed, double-spaced pages

Revisions. After I return your papers (on November 26 probably), please read my comments. If at that point, you would like to revise your paper, please do so. Revisions will be due one week after papers have been returned (roughly, Monday, December 3). A revision must be substantially improved to merit a grade change. To submit a revision, please write a one-paragraph summary explaining why and how you revised and hand it in with both the revised version and the old version with my comments.

Paper Conferences. If you have questions or concerns about your paper or you just want someone to bounce some ideas off of, please drop by the office to talk with me. I enjoy talking with students about their work, so please don't hesitate to meet with me. I'll be in my office during my office hours (MWF, 10:30-11:20, Tue 12:00-1:00). If those times don't fit with your schedule, I would be happy to set up some other time to meet with you.