

English IVAP Spring Novel Analysis

You will read one of the following novels and write a minimum 2000 word (6+ pages with an average of 325 words per page) literary criticism. Your novel will determine your topic, but essentially, you will choose some critical aspect of the novel to explore. This is your opportunity to shine—to write something worth reading (many essays can be good essays, but are not necessarily worth reading...). You will employ MLA standards of formatting, documentation, and works cited.

THIS IS NOT A BOOK REPORT OR A RESEARCH PAPER! What does that mean? It means you will not merely summarize your novel, nor will you look up what other people say and report on the various dialogues out there about your book. That being said, it also doesn't mean you won't do *any* research, as you may need to read some material in order to get a better grasp of your novel's themes and/or issues.

You will read your novel and decide on something that peaks your interest or is something you would like to explore. You may choose to analyze the manner in which the historical context contributes to a character's development; the way the setting affects the theme; gender roles; class structures; social commentary; alcoholism; poverty; symbols; among others. You get to decide, but it should be something that is ARGUABLE (hence worth reading) and is not necessarily a reading others have done. Why bother stating that the tent is a place for women in *The Red Tent* when that is obvious? Come up with an *arguable*, *interpretive*, and *original* point.

An excellent website that has some wonderful tips for determining a topic and writing a critical paper is www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature.html. Use it. It's amazing.

The novels from which you may choose:

- Adams, Douglas *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*
- Atwood, Margaret *The Handmaid's Tale*
- Boo, Katherine *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*
- Bronte, Charlotte *Jane Eyre*
- Chen, Da *Colors of the Mountain*
- Gaines, Ernest J. *A Lesson Before Dying*
- Guterson, David *Snow Falling on Cedars*
- Hardy, Thomas *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*
- Hurston, Zora Neale *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- Kesey, Ken *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (the novel not the play)
- Lahiri, Jhumpa *The Lowland*
- Maguire, Gregory *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*
- Smith, Betty *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*
- Young, William P *The Shack*

All of the above novels are wonderful books—some of my favorite modern novels (I don't read boring books and I hate it when people recommend or make me read boring books). However, some content in each of them may be offensive for some people. Please choose wisely. Read the book summary at amazon.com (DO NOT USE IT AS A SOURCE!) to determine which novel may be the best for you. If in doubt, ask me.

A grading rubric will be forthcoming so you know how you will be graded. In any case, this assignment is not meant to be a bane to your existence. It is, however, designed to get you thinking critically about your world and the things you read. Plus, it can be fun to argue something no one else has discussed. Finally, it takes you into the AP exam with 2 novels solidly under your belt.

YOUR PAPER IS DUE THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 2016
YOUR PAPER WILL BE 80% OF YOUR SPRING FINAL EXAM.

Major Schools of Literary Criticism

The following is a PARTIAL list of critical approaches to studying literature.

Biographical and Historical Criticism

These approaches constitute what the New Criticism would consider the “Old Criticism” (i.e., old school):

- *Biographical criticism*: Draws on details from the life of the author to explicate the meaning of a literary text.
- *Historical criticism*: Examines how literature reflects and is influenced by the historical milieu surrounding its production, ie. social criticism (satire), political criticism

Mythological / Archetypal Criticism

- Studies genres and individual plot patterns (archetypes) that recur in the myths, religion, dreams, private fantasies, and works of literature (i.e. the savior, the evil stepmother, the tragic hero, the wise mentor, etc.)
- Sees these recurrent genres and plot patterns as repeated types of experience in the lives of very ancient ancestors which are inherited in the collective unconscious of the human race.

Sociological Criticism (Marxism)

- View works of literature or art as the products of historical forces that can be analyzed by looking at the material socioeconomic conditions in which they were formed.
- Marxism generally focuses on the clash between the dominant and repressed classes, seeing the products of a given culture, such as its literature and art, as expressing and reinforcing the worldview of the dominant class.

Gender Criticism / Feminism

1. *American feminism*: Focuses on women writers and on ways in which women are portrayed in literature.
2. *British feminism*: Focuses on sexual difference and sexual politics.

Cultural Studies

Considered the most recent and cutting edge of the schools of literary criticism, under this heading, two schools can be distinguished:

- *New Historicism*: Drawing on the disciplines of political science, government, and anthropology, is concerned with questions of how *power* is distributed in a culture and how the power of the dominant class is both reflected and resisted in both “literary” and “non-literary” texts (New Historicists actually reject the idea that literary texts are intrinsically different from so-called non-literary texts).
- *Post-Colonialism*: Focuses on both colonialism and the changes created in a postcolonial culture in third-world countries after the decline of colonialism. Postcolonial critics face the twin challenge to both resurrect their own third-world cultures and to combat the preconceptions on the part of the West about their cultures.