Paper Topics

Choose ONE of the following topics and write a paper addressing it. Be certain that you have a central point to make and that you support what you have to say by quoting from the relevant texts. You can't say everything in your paper; instead, make certain that you narrow down your paper topic and say a few things well. Papers must be anchored in the materials we have studied in this course and must meet the requirements of the assignment. Papers written on topics not anchored in the materials studied in this course will not receive a passing grade unless you receive prior approval. In addition, papers that do not make a recognizable point, do not use appropriate quotations from the text, or do not cite the sources used cannot receive a grade higher than a "D." Papers are expected to be at least 8 pages in length and must be typed in a 10-12 point font, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins all around. All quotations and sources must be cited in proper MLA documentation style. You are also expected to use and cite at least five relevant, recent critical sources in your paper in addition to the primary text and that edition's introductory material (Project Muse and JStor are especially recommended as resources). Please do not use SparkNotes, Cliff's Notes, Wikipedia, or other non-specialist materials as critical sources. Although these can sometimes point you toward more authoritative materials, they provide interpretations and background notes for a more general audience less serious about literature and senior and graduate level English majors. It is a good idea to review the grading criteria for written work at this time.

Note that I am happy to look at drafts ahead of time. Also—there are dozens of relevant texts available online. Please see me for suggestions!

1. In exploration and travel literature, European authors attempt to explain the exotic and the unknown in terms of political, social, legal, sexual, religious, economic, and ethnic/racial institutions familiar to Europeans. Choose ONE of these areas, or a subset of one of these areas, based upon a pattern you have observed in the texts we read in class. You may need to read more about the backgrounds to the period. Then write a paper in which you attempt account for the pattern you've observed. Be sure you have a central point to make and that you support what you have to say by quoting from the relevant texts.

2. Read at least two more works in a particular genre we have studied, such as travel narrative, captivity narrative, slave narrative, or exploration narrative. Based upon your reading, write a paper in which you characterize this genre and how it functioned in its European cultural contexts. You may need to read more about some aspect of the culture that produced the works in order to write effectively on this topic. Be sure you have a central point to make and that you support what you have to say by quoting from the relevant texts.

3. Read at least two more works by authors from a particular cultural tradition we have studied. For instance, your criteria for selection could be based upon national or religious origin. Based upon your reading, write a paper in which you develop a theory about the world view espoused by the collection of authors you chose and how the native people & cultures written about are employed to assert that world view. You may need to read more about some aspect of the cultural tradition in order to write on this topic effectively. Be sure you have a central point to make and that you support what you have to say by quoting from the relevant texts.

4. Identify a theme or rhetorical strategy you have noticed that runs through a number of the texts we have read and thoroughly compare its development using several of the works we have read. You should refer to works written by at least three different authors, preferably from the same general era but from different national and/or religious backgrounds. You may need to read more about some aspect of the cultural tradition in order to write on this topic effectively. Be sure you have a central point to make and that you support what you have to say by quoting from the relevant texts.

5. Propose another topic, but be certain that you get it approved before working on it.