

HIS1007 Book Essay Instructions

Book Essay General Instructions (50 points each)

- Students will write 3-4 page response essays to the prompts below.
- Each essay should be a critical reflection on the book, focusing on what the student learned about the time period by answering the questions in each prompt. Each paper should show substantive engagement with the text (and not just the topic).
- You may use either MLA or APA style formatting. [For help, see extra handouts on the course site or email Professor Mueller!]
- While there are three books included in the course, only two essays are required. You may choose which essay to forego, or you may optionally write the third essay to replace the lowest grade of the other two.
- Please note that the third book choice, *The Things They Carried*, by Tim O'Brien, contains graphic language. If you prefer to avoid this content, make sure to complete book essays one and two.
- Each paper will be worth 50 points for a total of 100 points toward the course total.

Week 4 - Book Essay I Prompt: *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

- Benjamin Franklin is known not only as a Founding Father but also as a creative genius. How did Franklin's autobiography help you better understand him as a person? What does the book tell you about the formation of the United States? What does it tell you about life in early America? Most importantly, how does Franklin's life and legacy help you better understand the question of "who were the early Americans and why do they matter?"

Week 8 - Book Essay II Prompt: Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*

- How does Solomon Northup's account describe slavery in the antebellum United States? What does the book tell readers about slavery, slaveholders, and slaves? How does the book explain the sectionalism of the 1840s and 1850s? Be sure to extensively refer to the content of the book.
- NOTE: The text uses terms such as "colored" and "Negro" in historical context as it was written in the 1850s. These are not acceptable terms to be used in contemporary writing. If not directly citing the text, use modern terms such as black or African American.

Week 14 - Book Essay III Prompt: Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*

- O'Brien's book is considered a modern literary classic, but it is technically a work of fiction informed by the author's experience. How does the connection between O'Brien as a Vietnam War veteran writing about the war influence the perspective? How does the author depict the lives of the common American soldier? Which did you find more upsetting, O'Brien's coarse language throughout the text or his telling of the man he killed (p.118-124)? Be sure to extensively refer to the content of the book.

Book Essay Questions for Students to Consider

General

- Is your essay at least 3-4 pages?
- Do you provide critical reflection focusing on what you learned from the book?
- Do you include substantive engagement with the text?

Argumentation (25 points)

The paper must make a persuasive argument, rooted in the content of each book, along with any relevant primary and secondary evidence drawn from the class.

- Is your persuasive argument clear?
- Do you use clear, articulate sentences to develop a strong and clear argument?
- Have you used evidence from the book to support the argument?
- Is secondary evidence used to support the argument? (not required, but nice!)
- Do you connect the argument of the book to the topics covered in the class overall?

Use of Evidence (15 points)

- Do you adequately focus on the text?
- Have you used examples from the book to support your points?
- Have you included direct citations from the book? (You must.)
- How many direct citations from the book have you included?
- Although outside research is allowed (and encouraged!), it is not necessary. Are outside sources used?

Formatting and Grammar (10 points)

- Do you use proper formatting consistently for MLA or APA, following requirements for:
 - ✓ 12-point font,
 - ✓ 1-inch margins,
 - ✓ double spacing,
 - ✓ proper page numbers for MLA or APA style,
 - ✓ name block & title (MLA) OR title page (APA), &
 - ✓ works cited page (MLA) OR references page (APA)?
- Have you included accurate citations *within* the text of the paper?
- Have you included accurate citation(s) on the Works Cited page (MLA) or References page (APA)? (*Be sure to cite the version of the book you are using and any other sources you decide to include for quotes or additional research.*)
- Does your essay include strong sentence structure?
- Have you avoided unclear and awkward sentences, which obscure the meaning of the text?
- Are there miscellaneous typos, punctuation, spelling, grammar, etc. issues?

Additional Considerations - Reacting to Reading

When you are reading assignments in HIS courses, you may encounter viewpoints that your instructors do not advocate. You may also encounter words or images that your instructors would not use. You should know that your instructors choose textbooks and other materials because of their value in helping students learn to read and to write, not because the worldview represented in the materials. Our purpose is not to shield students from encounters with various viewpoints but to help them handle such encounters as educated and culturally literate citizens.

When you encounter words, images, or viewpoints that disturb you for moral or religious reasons, we suggest that you take the following steps. First, make sure that you understand what the writer is saying. You need to make an honest effort to understand and evaluate the writer's ideas. Only then are you in a position to think critically about these ideas. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does profanity or an immoral suggestion automatically make what you are reading “bad”?
- How should we react to ideas or word choices with which we do not agree, whether in our reading or in conversation with others. Second, try to understand the writer behind the ideas.
- What do the ideas, the word choices, and the images say about the writer?
- How is the writer's thinking incorrect or faulty?
- How and why do you think the writer arrived at convictions that you do not share?

Please be prepared to discuss with your instructor any difficulties you encounter in assigned material on the basis of the above questions.