EWP 111 Sample Sequence

While literary texts are the focal point for many of the assignments listed here, the texts ultimately serve as a means to teach the outcomes. Class discussions, informal assignments, and even the more formal assignments listed here engage the texts broadly and as a means for students to practice developing a claim that distinctly addresses the “so what?” question.

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# COURSE DESCRIPTION

In English 111, we will use literature as our primary object of study to develop the skills of critical thinking, meaningful engagement with a variety of cultural texts, and good writing at the college level. Our course will primarily focus on critically reading and writing about fiction by authors from diverse backgrounds who have often been considered transgressive, taboo, and even banned or censored.

Regardless of your discipline and future career goals this course will provide the tools and skills to think critically about the world, cultures, cultural products and landscapes you navigate while preparing you to articulate your thinking through written language. Your career at UW and beyond will require you to produce a diverse range of writing that varies in research methods, argument form, organization, tone, complexity, and styles for different audiences. However, in the context of any academic discipline you will be asked to clearly articulate your ideas and provide compelling scholarly evidence to support your claims. As such, this class will do its best to prepare you with the academic toolkit you need to be successful in UW academics. The goals of English 111 are to:

* Write for different audiences and different contexts;
* Synthesize complex texts and enter into an academic dialogue with those texts;
* Craft complex, analytic, persuasive arguments; and
* Develop a set of writing habits and strategies for revising your work.

***Banned and Contested Literature: Engaging with the Taboo***

This section of 111 will investigate literary and cultural products that are often considered taboo, forbidden, transgressive, provocative, and have been banned or contested. While we will certainly practice close-reading of several literary texts, we will also be examining the rhetoric, structure, and format of what is considered taboo, forbidden, transgressive, and provocative. For example, we will engage in complex discussion topics such as:

* What rhetorical situations/writing makes literature taboo, transgressive, or provocative?
* Can literature be dangerous? Who decides?
* Are there limits to what children or students can be exposed to in the classroom?
* Should all literary or cultural products be available for consumption?
* Should books be banned? Can we be offended by literature?
* How does provocative literature shape our understanding of the world and our own identities?

Engaging with literature in this way will allow us to cultivate skills and methods of rhetorical analysis and scholarly writing at the college level. In this class we have four themed weeks dedicated to representations in literature that often lead to texts being banned or contested:

1. Representations of sexuality / gender
2. Representations of state violence / surveillance
3. Representations of race
4. Representations of state religion / power

**Short Assignment 1:** Personal Reflection

This course examines what it means to engage with provocative subjects, how objects that are culturally taboo emerge, and how what we deem is taboo shifts over time. When choosing to engage any topic, but especially ones that are that potentially taboo or provocative, authors make specific rhetorical choices when creating texts that challenge social standards.

Using notes from class discussions about the shifting and various definitions of “taboo,” “provocative,” and “transgressive,” write a **personal reflection** that examines your relationship with a cultural object that is/was controversial. In your reflection, be sure to provide cultural context for what makes this object taboo, and your own interpretation of its value. Most importantly, be sure to include analysis that examines not only your opinion of the topic, but also how your **interaction** with this culturally taboo object helped build your knowledge in some way. How did you know this object was controversial or provocative? Did your opinion on its controversial nature shift or remain the same? Are there multiple ways to look at this object? What does that mean for us as a society as we interact with a range of cultural objects?

**Requirements:**

* At least 2-3 **specific** examples of how this cultural object is seen as provocative/taboo/transgressive
* Analyze how that history/cultural context influenced your own relationship with the object
* 2-3 pages
* 12 pt Times New Roman
* Double-spaced
* 1-inch margins
* Proper MLA heading
* To write this paper successfully, you must have **interacted** with (read, watched, worn etc.) the **cultural object** yourself. Avoid writing about a topic that you are only tangentially aware of (for example, you have only ever read articles about the object or had discussions with family, friends, or community members about it etc.). **This has to come from your direct experience.**

**Suggestions to structure your reflection:**

* Focus on one cultural object
* Start by defining what provocative/taboo/transgressive means to you (feel free to isolate one particular word if it is more appropriate)
	+ Is something that is provocative bad, for example?
* Then, consider your relationship to the object:
	+ How would you describe it? What is it about the object specifically that makes it provocative or taboo? Is it taboo for everyone?
	+ What are the conditions that make up the mainstream narrative surrounding it and its history? (in other words, why did you think/how did you know this was a taboo or bad thing?)
	+ Why did you have this heightened relationship to this object?
* As you conclude, consider: Is this object/ practice taboo for everyone? If there is conflict in the interpretation where and for whom does it exist? What is at stake in choosing to censor or not censor this cultural object? What did you learn about yourself by engaging with this object?

**Possible Topics:**

* Music with explicit lyrics
* Violent or highly sexual content in films/TV shows
* Books you weren’t allowed to read
* Body art (piercings, tattoos)
* Forms of self-expression (religious clothing/personal style)
* Language use
* **Remember:** something that is provocative or taboo can differ drastically depending on the cultural context. The extent of its provocative nature can also vary. Think of objects (books, movies, TV shows, music, forms of expression) that have been restricted or censored in your life to a certain extent.

**Writer’s Memo:**

For this assignment and all that follow, please write a writer’s memo at the end of your essay

The Writer’s Memo should:

* Be ½-1 page double-spaced
* Briefly articulate what went well
* Briefly articulate areas of concern
* Articulate the major outcomes you see in **this assignment** and explain how you know
* Pick 3 outcomes you want to be assessed on (suggestion: pick 2 that might be weaker and 1 you think you did well)

**Short Assignment 2: Synthesis and Analyzing Rhetorical Choices**

At this point, we have discussed at length both *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson and the made-for-TV movie based on the short story. Using your reading notes, homework, and class discussions, make a claim analyzing which version more effectively communicates Jackson’s argument about the danger of clinging to outdated tradition, laws, and the violent nature of humanity.

As you start to craft your response, be sure to frame your analysis within the context of a contemporary audience (this might lead you to comment on whether or not her message/critique is timeless). As you craft your argument, focus your analysis on the **effectiveness of the rhetorical choices made in the different mediums**. Specifically note how tone/structure/rhetorical appeals/style/diction/content, differ across the different mediums and how that shift influences the effectiveness of the argument. Conclude with an argument for which version is more likely to be considered provocative and why **given the current cultural moment.**

**Requirements:**

* Draw from specific examples from each text
* Start with a clear, claim that articulates which text is more successful in conveying the intended argument
	+ Your argument can pick one side or you can go argue they are both provocative for different reasons (example: you may find that there are portions of the film that are more provocative, but there are portions of the story that are more provocative than the film overall)
		- The film is more effective because… OR the story is more effective because…

OR

* + - The story does \_\_\_\_\_ better, but the film does \_\_\_\_\_ better in arguing….
* 2-3 pages
* 1-2 specific examples from each piece (pick the best--short page limit!)
* 12 pt Times New Roman
* Double-spaced
* 1-inch margins
* Proper MLA heading and citations

**Key questions to consider:**

* What rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) are evident in the film that differs from the text? What effect does the difference produce?
* What specific, stylistic aspects contribute to/influence the provocative nature of either text?
* How does the word choice/plot structure in the short story transfer to the film? Are there differences? What effect do those differences produce?
* Is this provocative/taboo for you? If you think neither version is provocative, why?
* Remember: while you are definitely engaging the content as part of this rhetorical analysis, your main focus will be on the **rhetorical choices** made between these different mediums. In other words, analyzing HOW the message is communicated/constructed and whether or not that is effective.

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**Short Assignment 3: Annotated Bibliography**

As we have discussed in class, you will research the cultural, historical, and social context and reception of your individually selected texts. In this assignment, your task is **to find 3-4 sources that engages your text and write an annotated bibliography**. You must include at least one formal academic source (journal article, book, peer-reviewed research) and one “less academic” source (newspaper or magazine article, etc.) Importantly, **along the way**, you will be able to start developing the line of inquiry you want to explore in the Proposal (SA4). Your annotated bibliography should **be 250-300 words per source**, should be in MLA format, and should be written for a general academic audience.

For each source, use the following questions to guide your writing:

1. Very briefly, what is the overall argument or claim of the writer? Is he or she generally successful?
2. Who makes up the intended audience of the writing?
3. How does the source provide cultural, historical, and/or social context for your text?
4. How does this source relate to your other sources on the topic?
5. How is this source useful to you? Posit the ways in which you might incorporate this source into your writing. For example, the source might provide evidence to support one of your mini-claims or might offer a counter-argument.

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**Assignment 4: Cultural & Historical Context Presentation and Write-up**

This assignment asks you to synthesize previous assignments (reading logs, annotated bibliography, synthesis exercise) and start formulating a formal argument and plan for how your paper will take shape. T**his assignment asks you to make the move from reading, understanding, and analyzing your selected contested text to researching the cultural and historical context of its production. The move from reading to understanding the larger debates surrounding your text through research will prepare you for your final assignment and satisfy the research component of the ENGL 111 course outcomes**. This presentation and proposal, paired with your research from the annotated bibliography assignment, will serve as the foundation for you to complete your critical book review essay as the final major assignment before the portfolio.

By now, you should have considered how your contested text relates to the overall thematic category of “representations of violence,” “representations of sexuality,” etc. Using this as a jumping off point, paired with your research, how might you best explain the historical and cultural context of the work to an unfamiliar audience to introduce the “why and how” your text has been discussed as contested or transgressive?

**Part 1: Cultural & Historical Context Presentation**

1. Prepare a 5-7 minute presentation on the historical & cultural framework that produced your work. Make sure you address the multiple sides of why your text was contested or considered transgressive. Start developing your argument for why and how the text might be productive or unproductive as an object of study? What’s important to your argument moving towards the final assignment? What would an audience ABSOLUTELY HAVE TO KNOW about the debate to have a sense of your text’s relevancy?
2. Then, write a ½-1 page assessing and analyzing the various rhetorical choices you made in putting together this presentation (You will submit this and any presentation materials on canvas)

\*\*This presentation may take the form of a powerpoint presentation, reading an extended write up, a handout of quotes or selections from your sources and text, bring in objects associated with your topic, or anything you feel can serve as an aid for your audience. Be as creative as you like!

**Part 2: Write-up (2-3 double spaced pages)**

***Your 2-3 page write-up should:***

1. Articulate a tentative claim you can build on in your major paper about your text, its historical and cultural context, as well as its “contested-ness”.
2. Explicitly address the stakes of the claim (why your argument matters)
3. Identify the possible opposition to your claim and the multiple perspectives on your text, and point to how you might address them (who is wanting it to be censored)
4. Give a very brief overview of the sources you plan to work with
5. Contain a tentative, general outline- what shape do you imagine assignment 5 taking? What structure would work well, given the parts of your complex claim? What will you highlight?
6. Works cited

**Writer’s Memo:**

For this assignment and all that follow, please write a writer’s memo and copy and paste the following rubric with the appropriate outcomes at the end of the memo.

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**Major Paper Assignment: Critical Book Review Essay**

**Prompt:**

This assignment asks you to engage with the questions we have posed and debated throughout this class thus far. What makes a work transgressive, taboo, contested or banned? What cultural, social and historical forces come to bear on a work’s “contested-ness”? What are the pros and cons of reading and encountering these texts? Should these be taught? Can children read them? Are there limits to self expression, etc.?

Put simply, this assignment asks you to reflect critically on your chosen text, thematic category, and the social and material conditions of the text’s production to develop a compelling, complex claim and supporting essay that speak to the themes of the course, your research, and your text. The subtleties of the argument and your ultimate position is up to you but you are required to address the categorical theme, research and read analytically from your text in some way.

**Structure*:***

All reviews begin with bibliographic information: the author’s name, the book’s full title, place of publication, publisher, edition, date, and pagination. This should be in MLA citation format.

1. In 1-1.5 pages, introduce the book and context of its production. Give your initial appraisal of the work, including your key observation on the text in regards to how it relates to the overall categorical theme of “representations of violence,” “sexuality,” “religious themes” etc. You might begin with an anecdote, a challenging question, or a key observations about the text and societal or cultural climate of its production to provide context for your complex claim and the text itself. This key complex observation about the categorical theme and the book itself will be your complex claim.
2. Follow with 2-2.5 pages of descriptive analysis, close reading, and careful evaluation of the text with your complex claim and stakes in mind. You may choose treat various topics separately, or you may weave these different components together creatively. Either way, make sure to always connecting back to your complex claim through analysis.
	1. Make sure the paragraphs in this section:
		1. Describe the book’s publication and cultural context in a bit more detail than the introduction and analyzing this in relation to your claim
			1. Be sure to give your reader enough historical and cultural context to fully understand the debates about the text’s “contested-ness”
		2. Address the author’s argument or goals in writing the book, and how that informs or relates to your position on the transgressive, taboo, or contested elements of the work articulated in your complex claim.
		3. Describe the author’s aesthetic and rhetorical choices in the book, and give your appraisal of their validity and effectiveness for a reading audience. Here you might also comment on the text’s organization and genre form.
			1. For example, what does a particularly graphic depiction of violence contribute to your text’s value etc.?
		4. Analyze how audiences encountered the text and responded and analyze how this informs your own position and complex claim (if possible)
3. Conclude. Summarize, recontextualize, or readdress your overall complex claim and position. This might also be space for your final thoughts on the “contested-ness” of the work, value or lack of value of transgressive texts, comments on various audience’s relationship to literature, etc.

**Your paper should:**

1. **Be structured around a clear and persuasive complex claim, backed up with multiple sources**
2. **Articulate your stakes: why does your argument matter to the larger debates about contested literature, censorship, book banning, freedom of ideas?**
3. **Acknowledge and address counter-arguments or multiple perspectives (your argument should not operate in a vacuum)**
4. **Utilize sources in strategic, focused ways**
5. **Provide a road-map that gives the reader appropriate expectations about the content and flow of your paper**

**Requirements:**

* 5-6 double spaced pages (1500-2000 words)
* 12 pt. Times New Roman
* Double-spaced
* 1-inch margins
* Proper MLA heading and citations
* Based on a unique and complete stake-driven claim of your own, clearly articulated and supported throughout the text of the paper
* Strategically pitched to an academic audience
* Thoughtful incorporation of evidence from 3-4 outside sources
* Well organized
* Consistent tone and rhetorical style throughout your own paper
* Sources are in dialogue with one another. Remember that texts in a larger rhetorical situation share intertextual relationship with one another.

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List of Possible Texts for Individual Project

You are expected to complete the text you select by week five and complete the four required reading logs (one a week). I would suggest breaking the text you select into four chunks and complete a reading log for each portion.

Each text can be selected by only one person on a first come first serve basis. Email me your top two choices and I will respond with the one that has not yet been claimed. The list will be posted as a discussion board on Canvas and as texts are selected I will remove them from the list. Please be sure to check the discussion board before emailing me. If there is a text you want to do that is not on this list, check with me first.

**You are required to have a text selected by Tuesday, January 12**

A final note, texts are grouped by the theme in which they are most often viewed as provocative/taboo/controversial, but there will definitely be some overlap. You do not have to focus solely (or at all) on the theme associated with the specific text. That being said, if you see several themes intersecting in one text, try to limit your focus to no more than two themes.

**Gender and sexuality**:

*Howl* by Allen Ginsberg

*Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel

*50 Shades of Grey*by E.L. James

*Gossip Girl*by Cecily Von Ziegesar

*The Bluest Eye*by Toni Morrison

*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*by Sherman Alexie

*Forever*by Judy Blume

*Perks of Being a Wildflower*by Stephen Chbosky

*The Chocolate Wars* by Robert Cormier

*Song of Solomon*by Toni Morrison

*Lolita*by Vladimir Nabokov

*Push* by Sapphire

*Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs

*Orlando: A Biography* by Virginia Woolf

*Go Tell it on the Mountain* by James Baldwin

**Representations of Race**:

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

*Beloved* by Toni Morrison

*Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison

*Native Son* by Richard Wright

*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe

*The Color Purple* by Alice Walker

*The Spook who Sat by the Door* by Sam Greenlee

*Corregidora* by Gayl Jones

*Pimp: The Story of My Life* by Iceberg Slim

*The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah

*Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

*The Brief and Wondrous life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz

*White Teeth* by Zadie Smith

*Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

*Soul on Ice* by Eldridge Cleaver

**The State and Violence**:

*American Psycho* by Bret Easton

*In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote

*1984* by George Orwell

*Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley

*Lord of the Flies* by William Golding

*Animal Farm* by George Orwell

*Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury

*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey

*The Diary of Anne Frank* by Anne Frank

*Slaughterhouse Five* by Kurt Vonnegut

*Catch-22* by Joseph Heller

*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

*Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk

*The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini

*The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood

*House of Spirits* by Isabel Allende

**Religion:**

*Harry Potter Series* by J.K. Rowling

*Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver

*Scarlett Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

*The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce

*The Golden Compass* by Philip Pullman

*On the Origin of the Species* by Charles Darwin

*The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie

*Bless Me Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya