

Nineteenth-Century Literature in England

Blog: Reading Responses Assignment

What do I have to do?

This class officially begins on May 8, when you will need to start posting your reading responses on our course website (though you are welcome to begin doing so before this date if you wish). You will be required to post five substantive reflection pieces in response to your reading. There are two lists of reflection prompts: you need to **pick two from List A** and **pick three from List B**.

In your blog reading response posts you need to **respond substantively**, showing **evidence of your reading** and thoughtful engagement with the texts. These are not difficult formal pieces of writing; you should feel free to use the first-person “I” and write about the readings using your own thoughts and responses. However, **do not just summarize what happens!** Remember that we have all read these texts; we’re interested in *what you think* about them.

These prompts are designed to inspire your thinking, not to limit you, so feel free to take your own initiative in your responses.

In addition to your five posts, you should also **respond to at least one of your peer’s posts in a comment**. Do you agree? Disagree? Have other thoughts to contribute? You’re welcome to refer to someone else’s post in your own if you want to engage with their thoughts on a text (if you do so substantively I will count this in lieu of a comment.)

How do I post?

Our course website for your blog posts and assignments is duqengland.annagibson.com. I will add each of you as contributors so that you can post.

- Go to: <https://duqengland.annagibson.com/wp-admin/>
- Log in using your Duquesne Email Address and the password I gave you.
- Click on “Posts” on the left-hand menu
- Click on “Add New”
- Give your post a title and type your post content into the box. (Tip: consider writing the content in a word processor first so that you don’t lose your writing!)
 - If you want to include an image in your post, click on the “Add Media” button above the text box and upload an image. Make sure you include a reference to the source of your image somewhere in your post.
 - If you want to include a URL to a site, click on the little link image in the menu above the text box and add a URL.
- Select a post category from the right-hand “Categories” label to match the post prompt to which you are responding (or select “Other Post” if you want to post about something else)
- Consider giving your post some “tags”—single words that relate to the topics you’re writing about. (This is optional.)
- Click “Publish”
- Double-check that your post has appeared on the website by clicking “view.”

To comment on another person's blog post, use the comment box on the main blog page.

How long should a post be?

Okay, so the annoying non-answer to this is: as long as they need to be for you to engage thoughtfully and substantively with the text(s). Plot summary, general thoughts about literature and life, and other material not relevant to your responses to and analysis of the text don't really count, but I understand that sometimes, in this kind of assignment, you might want to get a bit creative. That's fine. Just make sure you spend some time on the matters outlined above. Roughly speaking, you should aim to write at least 300 words per post (that's about a page of double-spaced writing in Word, in a normal typeface like Times New Roman).

Do these have to be my ideas?

Yes, of course! **Do not plagiarize!** I want to know what **you** think about the text, not what the editors of Shmoop or Enotes or Someone Who Wrote An Online Essay thought about it! Plagiarism—which includes taking ideas from other people and passing them off as your own—is a serious offense and grounds for failure of this entire blogging assignment (and, in egregious cases, of the class!). I also have to report plagiarism to the Dean. If you did some research about the text and learned something interesting that you really want to talk about, *cite it*. If you have any questions about plagiarism and responsible citation, just let me know.

When are these due?

You should plan to complete all the reading for this class before we depart, and I would encourage you to do your blog posts before departure, too. You need to post at least THREE of your five responses before we depart on May 21, and all posts should be completed by June 14.

A final note:

Remember that these posts are in addition to your journal writings about your reading. I know this seems like a lot of work, but remember that, because this is a three-credit class, we need to accomplish a semester's worth of work in just a short span of time!

What am I being graded on?

An A-grade response will:

- Meet all of the requirements listed in this assignment sheet
- Be written clearly and concisely, using appropriate grammar, sentence structure, and spelling
- Demonstrate that you have carefully read the text(s) by using evidence from and/or references to the text when appropriate
- Practice critical and analytical thinking about the text (rather than plot summary)
- Offer your readers a thoughtful, creative, or otherwise engaging read!

Blog Reading Response Prompts

List A: Choose TWO of the following three prompts:

1. Write a reading response to *Pride and Prejudice*. For this response you can EITHER choose a short but significant scene or passage from this novel and write a close-reading response in which you analyze the significance of this passage in the novel as a whole. Pay attention to language, point of view, tone, characterization, setting, and other elements of the author's writing to help you offer your own interpretation of what you think is interesting in this scene. OR you can identify one aspect of the novel to analyze. This might be a thematic element, a pattern of images, narrative point of view, a way in which the novel seems to engage with another text you have read. Reflect upon your response to this element. Be very careful not to just summarize the plot; your job here is to offer your own interpretation of one element of the text.
2. Write a reading response to *Oliver Twist* using the same guidelines as above in A1.
3. Choose two texts you have read and write a post in which you compare and contrast how they portray London. Use examples from the texts.

List B: Choose any THREE of these:

1. Choose two of the Dickens texts you have read (*Oliver Twist*, "A Christmas Carol," one of the essays from *Night Walks*). Write a post in which you reflect on how Dickens presents one of the following social topics: poverty, crime, childhood, moral duty, race, population, urbanization, the workhouse, or another topic of your choice related to social life. Use evidence from the texts in your response.
2. Imagine you are a nineteenth-century visitor to London (who you are is up to you!). You have read selections from *Bradshaw's Illustrated Hand Book to London and its Environs* and one or two of the other Victorian texts on our reading list. Write about what you anticipate as you prepare for your trip. Refer to one or more of the readings (or other readings you have done) as you give us an impression of what you plan to do or how you feel about your trip. You can decide to write this by fully inhabiting the voice and mindset of a Victorian traveler OR, if you prefer, by just writing about what you think you *would* have anticipated if you were such a traveler.
3. Choose one or two of the photographs by John Thomson or illustrations by Gustave Doré. Write a "close reading" response to your chosen image. Pay close attention to details, tone, mood, composition, etc., much as you would in a close reading analysis of a literary text. What strikes you as significant? What does the image make you think and feel? Either embed the image within your blog post or provide a URL to the image, giving it a title if it has one. You might consider making connections to other texts.
4. Alfred, Lord Tennyson based his famous poem "The Lady of Shalott" on existing versions of Arthurian legend. An earlier text that refers to a similar story from Arthurian legend is Sir

Thomas Malory's "Fair Maid of Astolat." How does reading Malory's narrative influence or change your interpretation of Tennyson's poem?

5. Choose one of the two Wordsworth poems ("Lines Composed Upon Westminster Abbey" or *The Prelude*, Book 7, lines 1-260). Write a response to the way Wordsworth depicts his relationship to London. What strikes you as significant about his language choice, formal choices (e.g. meter, rhyme, rhythm, line breaks, etc.), his imagery, diction, tone, etc.? What picture of London does he seem to you to be presenting? What does the poem make you think about?
6. Choose one of the two "Sherlock Holmes" Arthur Conan Doyle short stories you read. Why do you think it is significant that Sherlock Holmes is a detective working in a city like London? What role does the city seem to play in the story? What do you think might be the relationship between detection and the urban world?
7. Many of the texts we have read deal with the contrast between poverty and wealth in nineteenth-century London, especially our Dickens reading; excerpts from Henry Mayhew, Elizabeth Banks, Reynolds's *Mysteries of London*, and others. Write a blog post about how two of the texts you've read consider class or wealth or poverty in nineteenth-century London.