Issues in U.S. Literature: Dystopia, Apocalyptic, Horror, & Gender

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Western Illinois University, Spring 2018, Mondays 12:30-3
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General Catalog Description & Prerequisites

Reading and discussion of important works of American literature from several historical periods, with emphasis on their relation to American society and culture.

Specific Description & Goals

Across history and geography, there have been very few women and men who have not wished to change a thing or two about their societies. Domineering and/or incompetent leadership, low prestige and wages for the jobs that matter most, exorbitant costs of health care and basic necessities, unhealthy work conditions and insufficient time for rest, disproportionate burdens in caring for children and the elderly ... the list could get very long. It would be folly to tie every problem we might name to a single source, but this course’s texts reveal that in nearly every human society, sexuality and gender have played special roles in shaping individuals’ vulnerabilities to injustice.

Our aim is not just lament, though, but deeper understanding. In reading a wide range of literature about good and especially bad societies, we will be exposing assumptions that help maintain inequities. How exactly do these fictions suggest the male and the female and the masculine and the feminine are similar and different? What role does biological predisposition play relative to cultural expectations? How have individuals and cultures learned to benefit those of every sex and gender, and where have they failed? Where does it help to emphasize similarities, and where differences?

The course’s major texts start with utopian visions, but quickly move into dystopian and apocalyptic tales. By imagining both the heights to which human cultures might ascend and the depths to which they might fall, these stories make explicit what often stays implicit in our complaints. Ranging from late 19th-century well into 21st-century U.S. literature, they offer dramatic tales of America’s dual capacities for leadership and corruption. In the second half of the course, we will turn to works that also introduce elements of horror, a regularly misunderstood genre that has the capacity to reveal more about the sources of our fears, hatred, and violence than we are sometimes eager to recognize.

Coursework includes a relatively light, often very entertaining, but also very much required reading load; four quizzes; an invitation to utopian and/or dystopian short story writing; an argumentative paper engaging multiple texts; and an outside-text project aimed at further expanding everyone’s awareness of recent fiction. Whether or not you come to this course already familiar with its subgenres or its questions about sex and gender, our aim is to emerge from this semester with a few new texts and authors to enjoy, a heightened capacity for critical and creative thinking, and a new determination to remake American culture in healthier forms.
### Meeting, Reading/Viewing, & Assignment Schedule

**PLEASE NOTE:**
~“READING,” “VIEWING,” or “WRITING” = watch, read, or complete in full BEFORE class
~“IN CLASS” = no preparation required

#### Part One: Definitions & Questions + Creative Writing

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<th>Week</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1st</strong> WEEK, JAN 15**: NO CLASS (MLK, JR. HOLIDAY)**</td>
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<td><strong>2nd</strong> WEEK, JAN 22**: THE BLESSINGS &amp; CURSES OF ESCAPISM</td>
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<td><strong>VIEWING:</strong></td>
<td>~Westworld Season 1, Episode 1 (free here: <a href="https://www.hbo.com/westworld">https://www.hbo.com/westworld</a>)</td>
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| **IN CLASS:** | ~Ursula K. Le Guin’s short story “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1973)  
~Syllabus review, discussion of goals and assignments, and introductions  
~An introduction to utopia, dystopia, and discussion of the Paper #1 assignment |
| **3rd** WEEK, JAN 29**: FREEDOM & HIERARCHY |
| **READING:** | ~Edward Bellamy, preface, ch. 1-5, 10, 20, 25, 27-28, & postscript from Looking Backward, 2000-1887 (1887) http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/624 |
| **IN CLASS:** | ~Defining utopia, dystopia, and related terms (Gregory Claeys, Lyman Tower Sargent)  
~Clips & discussion: The Beach (2000) |
| **4th** WEEK, FEB 5**: SEXISM, ROMANTICISM, & IDEALISM |
| **READING:** | ~Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ch. 1-2, 5-8, & 12 from Herland (1915) http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/32 |
| **WRITING:** | ~Paper #1 (U/Dystopian Short Story): draft due in class (bring hard copy) |
| **IN CLASS:** | ~Quiz #1  
| **5th** WEEK, FEB 12**: NO CLASS (LINCOLN HOLIDAY) |
| **WRITING:** | ~Paper #1 (U/Dystopian Short Story): due in “Assignments,” W.O., 11:59 pm Mon 2/12 |

#### Part Two: A Feminist Dystopia Across Time & Media

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<tr>
<td><strong>6th</strong> WEEK, FEB 19**: WOMEN’S BODIES &amp; THE LITERATURE OF WITNESS</td>
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<td><strong>READING:</strong></td>
<td>~Margaret Atwood, ch. I-VI, The Handmaid’s Tale (1985)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>IN CLASS:</strong></td>
<td>~“Margaret Atwood on What The Handmaid’s Tale Means in the Age of Trump” <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/books/review/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-age-of-trump.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/books/review/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-age-of-trump.html</a></td>
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7th WEEK, FEB 26th: LANGUAGE, POWER, & NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

READING: ~Atwood, ch. VII-XI, The Handmaid’s Tale

IN CLASS: ~Discussion of Paper #2 (Argumentative Essay)
            ~Margaret Atwood, “Happy Endings” (1983)

8th WEEK, MAR 5th: SCAPEGOATING & THE ROLE OF THE READER

READING: ~Atwood, ch. XII-XV + “Historical Notes,” The Handmaid’s Tale

IN CLASS: ~Quiz #2
            ~Discussion of Outside Novel Project

MAR 12th: NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

Part Three: The Argumentative Essay and Other Horrors

9th WEEK, MAR 19th: FEMINISM & THE MEANING OF CHILDREN

VIEWING: ~Handmaid’s Tale TV show, season 1, episode 1 (free Hulu trial: https://www.hulu.com/watch/1067334)

WRITING: ~Paper #2: 2-page plan due in “Discussions,” W.O., 11:59 pm Mon 3/19 (use any format desired to convey what interests you most about Atwood’s novel, its TV adaptation, its social implications, its shift in meaning since the 1980s, its use of dystopia, etc.)

IN CLASS: ~Select Outside Novel Project texts and groups (set up discussions on Western Online)

10th WEEK, MAR 26th: APOCALYPTIC LIT AS ALARM VS. MIRROR

READING: ~Richard Matheson, ch. 1-11, I am Legend (1954)

WRITING: ~Paper #2 (Argumentative Essay): full-length draft (even if still very messy) due in class

IN CLASS: ~Writing workshop (bring hard copy of full-length drafts to class)

11th WEEK, APR 2nd: MONSTROSITY, RACE, & SEX

READING: ~Matheson, ch. 12-21, I am Legend


IN CLASS: ~Quiz #3
12th WEEK, APR 9th: COOKING IT RARE, OR, A BRIEF INTRO TO HORROR

IN CLASS: ~Get Out (2017)

Part Four: Word + Image = Comics, or, How Not to Become a Zombie

13th WEEK, APR 16th: FLAME WARS & WOMEN WITH RIFLES … & KATANAS …

IN CLASS: ~Outside Novel Project: group time for discussion of reading so far

14th WEEK, APR 23rd: MASCULINITY & INTERSECTIONALITY

READING: ~Kirkman et al., ch. 5-8, The Walking Dead: Compendium One
IN CLASS: ~Quiz #4 & course evaluations

15th WEEK, APR 30th: PRISONS DON’T MAKE THE BEST HOMES

IN CLASS: ~Outside Novel Project: more discussions and time to plan for presentations

FINALS WEEK, MAY 7th: OUTSIDE NOVEL PROJECTS

IN CLASS: ~Outside Novel Project: presentations (written components—one copy per group—due in “Discussions,” W.O., before class)

Texts for Purchase

PLEASE NOTE:
*Prices below are rounded from recent amazon.com new prices—that site has free 2-day shipping for students. In many cases, used copies can be purchased less expensively (also try bookfinder.com).
*I am happy for students to use complete electronic versions of texts so long as they use appropriate citation methods when writing papers and can accept occasional challenges in finding a given passage.


Outside Novel Project options (all very recent; pick ONE with your group—see details on p. 6)

- Atwood, Margaret. The Heart Goes Last. Anchor, $11. 9781101912362.
More Recommended U/Dystopian, Apocalyptic, & Horror Novels

William Morris, *News from Nowhere*  
Mark Twain, *Captain Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven*  
Jack London, *The Iron Heel*  
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*  
Adolfo Bioy Casares, *The Invention of Morel*  
Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*  
H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*  
Walter M. Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Liebowitz*  
Madeleine L’Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*  
Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*  
Sheri S. Tepper, *The Gate to Women’s Country*  
Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, *Year of the Flood*, *MaddAddam*  
Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games, Catching Fire, Mockingjay*  

Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*  
H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*  
Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*  
B.F. Skinner, *Walden Two*  
Isaac Asimov, *Foundation* series  
C.S. Lewis, the space trilogy  
George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*  
Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, Sirens of Titan*  
Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*  
Larry Niven, *Ringworld*  
Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*  
Joana Russ, *The Female Man*  
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, “Paradises Lost”  
Orson Scott Card, *Ender’s Game*  
Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*  
Samuel Delany, *Triton*  
Octavia Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*, *Parable of the Sower, “of the Talents*  
Nicola Griffith, *Anmorte*  
Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*  
Frank Herbert, *Dune*  
Nancy Kress, *Beggars in Spain* and sequels  
Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140*  
Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow, Children of God*  
Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*  
Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake, Year of the Flood, MaddAddam*  
Molly Gloss, *The Dazzle of Day*  
Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*  
Jo Walton, *My Real Children*  
Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games, Catching Fire, Mockingjay*  
Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation*  

Grading Criteria

I will figure final grades using the university scale (A, B, C, D, or F, with pluses/ minuses) and the values below (with minor adjustments as needed). Please note the “My Grades” function on the course website, which lets you track assignment grades and estimate your current overall grade at any point.

- 40% 4 quizzes (10% each)
- 15% Paper 1 (U/Dystopian Short Story)
- 30% Paper 2 (Argumentative Essay)
- 15% Outside Novel Project

Brief Looks at Main Assignments

**Quizzes:** These will neither be picky, insignificant-detail interrogations, nor such easy affairs that one could prepare sufficiently by reading summaries. The idea is that most people who recently covered all assigned reading and viewing with good comprehension will average 70-80% of the points available (i.e., earn a “B” or better). Please keep in mind that each quiz only covers material since the previous one and will focus more heavily on primary than secondary texts. Students sometimes worry about the quizzes initially, but generally agree they provide valuable accountability during the course and allow for higher-quality, greater-depth discussions. My best advice is to get the reading and viewing done well in advance, then go back over it, your journals and in-class notes, and my “discussion notes” or other handouts. Checking your understanding and comparing reactions in outside-class conversations with classmates can also be very helpful.

**Paper 1 (U/Dystopian Short Story):** Write a 700-800 word utopian and/or dystopian short story inspired by your learning in weeks 1-4. Create a focus character or set of characters to place in the world you imagine. Based on who they are and the unique elements of your ut/dystopia, ask yourself what advantages/disadvantages your characters have. Think about where they are physically and
mentally at the beginning of your story vs. at the end. Remember that situations can get better, worse, or end more ambiguously. Ultimately, 1/3 of the grade will assess the depth of your characters and setting; 1/3 will be based on the power and specificity with which you engage one or more specific problems in your society through the innovations of your fictional one; and 1/3 will concern your writing clarity and mechanical polish.

Paper 2 (Argumentative Essay): Write a 1200-1300 word argumentative essay that develops a risk-taking, non-obvious claim about Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale. You may engage the Hulu TV adaptation as well, but this is not required; either way, the novel should be central. In grading this assignment, 1/3 will represent the significance of your thesis and its expansion on (not simply repetition of) our in-class discussions; 1/3 will reflect the specificity and appropriateness of textual evidence you select; and 1/3 will concern your writing clarity and mechanical polish. Further assignment details and examples will be available well in advance.

Outside Novel Project: Partnering with 2-3 classmates, you will select one of the recent novel options listed on p. 5. Your first job is to create fictional personas with which to represent diverse social media responses to the text. Utilizing a format like that of Goodreads or Amazon reviews, Reddit or Facebook posts, or even Twitter threads, create a discussion that might be initially superficial and humorous, but soon unpacks a couple of the most substantial disagreements that readers may have about your text. Because of the informality of these writing contexts, I will not grade grammar or mechanics for this project, but I do expect you will need at least 1000 words collectively to do it well, and quite possibly twice that. The second part of the assignment is to utilize this mock social media exchange in creating a dramatic presentation for our finals week meeting. Each student should take up a fictional persona; how much you quote the written project and how much you improvise is up to you. In any case, aim for 2-3 minutes long per member of your group. 1/3 of the grade will evaluate your written social media exchange; 1/3 will concern your in-person presentation’s entertainment value and polish; and a final 1/3 will be tied to your individual responses to my impromptu questions that day about the novel. Keep in mind, also, that the grades for your written social media exchange and your presentation will consider the depth of connections you can draw between your novel and our other course material. The more people you make want to read your book over the summer, the better. ☺️
The following is part of all of my syllabi. Please read it carefully, but keep its generality in mind.

**My Teaching Philosophy and Expectations of Students**

The better we understand each other’s expectations, the more quickly we can develop a good working relationship. Here are a few key elements of my teaching philosophy:

~I want students to engage me and each other authentically and maturely. I hope this course will spark your curiosity in many ways, and that happens best when students honestly and tactfully share reactions to controversial topics. I intentionally raise such issues because a public university classroom is a uniquely valuable setting in which to explore and learn from frank, respectful disagreement. I aim for us to develop a classroom community that everyone appreciates and that extends beyond its walls.

~Just as critically, I expect students to be professionally responsible. You should approach this course as you might a challenging, rewarding job, one with tasks that are yours alone. I well understand that it is very hard to balance multiple classes, paid work, childrearing, and other responsibilities, but my roles include challenging you beyond your comfort zone and honestly assessing your academic work (not your value as a human being). Having a good sense of how your work stacks up, both in terms of strengths and weaknesses, is critical for your future decisions. Do your best to remember: a grade is a snapshot of a brief moment (and even one semester is brief); it takes a lot of these together to begin to illustrate your abilities, and your entire college/grad school GPA will never convey those as fully as the recommendation letters you enable professors to write about you. Those usually matter far more.

~While we will be studying fields in which I am relatively expert, I approach this class as a learner, too. Wisdom is not just knowledge, but humility, a deepening awareness of how much one does not know. I spent over a decade earning my graduate degrees not to hoard power, but to be in a position to empower others. You show you are ready for that with your simultaneous investment. In short, what you get out of this course will be directly related to what you put into it, during and beyond classtime.

**Attendance & Participation**

My courses differ substantially from those requiring regurgitation of memorized information. Our goals include learning new interpretive approaches, understanding diverse people and ideas, expanding critical thinking and creativity, strengthening analytical and writing skills, and learning from each other’s unique backgrounds. Thus preparation for each session, regular on-time attendance, and thoughtful discussion participation are crucial. Except in extreme circumstances, each class missed beyond 3 (with tardiness or early departure counting as 1/3 class) will automatically lower the final mark by 1/3 grade (e.g. missing 4 classes changes a B to a B-). Extensive absences will result in an “F” for the course.

**Classroom Courtesies**

Please excuse yourself when necessary; transitions are the best times. Please mute cell phones and other potential distractions; obviously, laptops and electronics should not be used during in-class quizzes. Finally, please wait to put away materials until we call it a day; I will respect your schedules as well.

**Communication**

While there are occasional errors, I do my best to build a trustworthy syllabus that won’t need major adjustments. Please read it thoroughly; it answers most routine questions. Also, keep in mind that unless you expect to be gone for multiple class meetings in a row, I don’t need to know about illnesses, transportation problems, work conflicts, or the other ordinary challenges. When you have a question not addressed on the syllabus or in class, please ask after class or in office hours. If that isn’t possible, email is the next best option (far faster than voicemail). My goal is to respond within 2 business days, but if my answer is detailed, I may ask to shift the chat to office hours. Finally, be aware that I sometimes use email to make class announcements, so ensure I have an address you check daily.
Frequently Asked Questions

1. Q. Can I make up the quiz I missed?
   A. Yes—but only within the next week (whether in office hours, during the next class meeting’s break, or immediately afterward). Also, I only offer this opportunity once per semester, barring extreme circumstances (which do not include having to work, car breakdowns, deaths in friends’ families, etc.).

2. Q. Can you tell me what I missed in class?
   A. Not really; the experience of most of our conversations and even my presentations will be difficult to replicate in other forms. However, I can say that almost every week, I hand out some form of “discussion notes,” and I usually post these on the website (under “Content”) soon thereafter, if not beforehand.

3. Q. What should I write about?
   A. What do you care about? What has grabbed you and evoked some sort of emotional response, whether positive, negative, or in some combination? I regularly encourage students to engage texts and questions that have significant personal resonance; most people do their best work when it means more than a grade. If you’re having a hard time getting at what you care about, seek out conversation—not just with me and peers, but also with family, friends, and others who know you well. Sometimes having to introduce your learning to those unfamiliar with the material helps the most in figuring out what excites you.

4. Q. How does your grading scale work?
   A. My system may mean your grade is higher than you think. Western Online will compute your current course grade using my formula, but it’s simple enough to do yourself. The maximum possible points for the course is 100, so divide your total by that (or by the points available as of a given date), then multiply that number by 4. This puts your score on the 4.0 scale, which I then translate to a letter grade. The same process can be used for any individual assignment. So, for example, if you earned 8 out of 10 points on a quiz, you would divide 8 by 10 (=.80), then multiply that by 4 (=3.20), and that would be between a B and a B+. At the course’s conclusion, when consistent effort and other contributions to the class’s success warrant it, I sometimes bump up a borderline grade.

5. Q. Do you want a hard copy of my paper, and when will it be graded?
   A. Please submit papers via the course website only; if it should be inaccessible as a deadline approaches, emailing the paper and then posting it the next day is fine. My goal is to return papers online within a week of the due date. Late papers usually take longer; please alert me of such submissions with an email.

Further Writing Assignment Guidelines

In addition to utilizing the argumentative essay revision guide at the end of this syllabus, it is worth familiarizing yourself with a good style guide. I use MLA style most often, but other styles (Chicago, APA, or another with pre-approval) are fine as long as they are consistently applied. Please use this page setup on all assignments, unless specified otherwise: 1” justified margins on all sides; size 12, Times New Roman font; and double-spacing. Finally, provide a cover page including paper title, course title and my name, your name, and date, as well as a list of works cited or a bibliography. Unless instructed otherwise, all assignments should be submitted online as a docx, doc, or rtf file.

The Writing Center

“The U.S. Bank WIU-QC University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The writing center is located in QC Complex 2219. Call 309-762-9481 for an appointment and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.”
Late Work

Barring extreme emergencies or prior arrangement, I will deduct one-third of a grade for each week (or portion thereof) that an assignment is late. If you anticipate special difficulty in meeting a deadline, please discuss this with me privately and well in advance so that if warranted, we can consider special arrangements. Readings and assignments are in many ways cumulative, so it is important that you keep up; at the same time, we lead busy lives and occasionally other priorities intervene. Balancing those realities, my policy aims to make being on-time important without making a rare delay devastating.

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are among the most serious violations of a student’s integrity and of relationships with the instructor, fellow classmates, and the university. In the humanities, plagiarism most often involves presenting another person’s specific words or ideas as one’s own, whether by copying or closely paraphrasing, and without citing the source. Please be aware that such an offense will at minimum result in an “F” on the assignment and in many cases leads to an “F” for the course. In many of my courses, I briefly review proper citation, but if you have questions about how to credit an idea or information source, ask. If you are unsure about definitions or consequences of academic dishonesty, consult WIU’s Student Academic Integrity Policy at http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php.

Counseling Services

“Confidential counseling services are available for WIU-QC students. Time management, stress management, balancing work and family, study skills, low self-esteem, relationship problems, depression, and anxiety are some examples of issues that students may address in personal counseling. Students may call 309/762-1988 to make an appointment with Counseling and Career Services.”

Accommodations

“Students with disabilities: In accordance with University values and disability law, students with disabilities may request academic accommodations where there are aspects of a course that result in barriers to inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement. To file an official request for disability-related accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 309-298-2512, disability@wiu.edu or in 143 Memorial Hall. Please notify the instructor as soon as possible to ensure that this course is accessible to you in a timely manner.”

Sex Discrimination/Title IX

“University values, Title IX, and other federal and state laws prohibit sex discrimination, including sexual assault/ misconduct, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. If you, or someone you know, has been the victim of any of these offenses, we encourage you to report this to the Title IX Coordinator at 309-298-1977 or anonymously online at: http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php. If you disclose an incident to a faculty member, the faculty member must notify the Title IX Coordinator. The complete Title IX policy is available at: http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/policies/titleIX.php.”

Student Rights & Responsibilities

For further information on expectations for both students and university personnel, please see http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php.
Dr. Hamner’s Argumentative Essay Revision Checklist

The Introduction

1. **Hook:** Does your introduction (including the first sentence) efficiently grab readers’ attention without being silly, exaggerated, or disconnected? Is the shift from it to the paper’s thesis natural or abrupt?

2. **Thesis:** Is it clear what sentence(s) convey the paper’s central claim?
   - **Strengthening your thesis:**
     - Is your claim obvious or subtle? Boring or daring? Outlandish or plausible?
     - Is your claim vague or specific? General or precise?
     - Is something significant clearly at stake in your argument? Have you provided a sense of why it matters whether your reader buys or dismisses your claim?

3. **Map:** Does the introduction preview the order in which the paper will examine the evidence?

The Body

4. **Main Points:** Can you summarize in a single phrase the main point and/or task of each body paragraph, or are some paragraphs’ goals or relevance to the thesis unclear?

5. **Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences:** Within a given paragraph, do the topic sentence and concluding sentence fit, without being identical? Do they provide meaningful links between paragraphs?

6. **Organization:** Are there any paragraphs that don’t make logical sense in the organization of the essay—e.g. too-short/disconnected “lonely” paragraphs or too-long/repetitive “bullying” paragraphs? Should any be removed or integrated elsewhere? Can you reorder so the argument’s force grows more naturally?

7. **Textual Evidence/Quotation:** Is there sufficient evidence from specific texts (at least one quotation per body paragraph, as a general rule) to back up the argument’s main points? Are there appropriate page number citations? Does the paper introduce quotations with a sense of their original context? After quotations, do you offer interpretations of their meaning or just expect readers to hear them as you do?

8. **Minimal Summary, Maximum Analysis:** Except in briefly introducing unfamiliar key text(s), does the paper avoid plot summaries? Does your interpretive and analytical work remain the focus?

9. **Reasonable Specifics, Not Generalities or Overreaches:** Does your paper resort to vague generalities that might describe any text? (“The author uses lots of description to help readers understand.”) Does it include gross overstatements that cost you credence? (“In this story everything is about death.”)

The Conclusion

10. **Closure:** Does the conclusion bring the essay to a meaningful close or end abruptly? Does it avoid exact restatement of the introduction, but still reinforce your main points? Does it suggest how the essay’s main ideas might be expanded into other contexts and why it matters that your reader take them seriously?

Mechanics & Style

11. **Grammatical & other mechanical issues:** Has at least one strong writer proofread your paper?
   - **Among the most common problems (beyond spelling, capitalization, basic punctuation):**
     - Pronoun reference: are the referents of your pronouns clear? Do they agree in number?
     - Run-on sentences and fragments: is each of your sentences a single, complete thought?

12. **Stylistic issues:** Have you presented your work in the most professional, attractive manner possible?
   - **Among the most common problems, especially for less experienced writers:**
     - Verbal “fluff”: is every word and phrase doing real work toward demonstrating your thesis? Have you eliminated as much repetition as possible? You want the “impact per word ratio” as high as possible.
     - Have you stayed in the present tense while writing about literature, film, or other artistic texts?
     - Have you provided an accurate, unique, provocative, inviting title?
     - Does your paper fit the length and formatting requirements?