

Reading Response Assignments

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Introduction: These assignments can be used in face-to-face, online synchronous, and online asynchronous learning modalities. They are designed for undergraduate literature courses and could be adapted for use in both lower- and upper-level courses.

Sample learning goals with which the reading responses can be aligned:

1. Demonstrate mastery of [insert type of literature on which course is focusing].
2. Demonstrate mastery of critical reading, thinking, writing, and research skills to analyze literature.
3. Demonstrate mastery of intersectionality, with a particular focus on antiracism, as it applies to writing on [insert course topic].

Assessment: These assignments are part of the reading response and vocabulary list grade. The grading rubric is included at the end of this document. The reading responses are formative assignments that build students' skills and can be used as scaffolding for a midterm essay and a final research paper.

Assignment Description:

Daily Assignments about the Readings: As you are expected to come to each class period prepared and ready to participate in class discussion, you will complete assignments for every class period and be ready to share your perspectives with the class.

The daily assignments will help you:

- collect your thoughts for class discussion
- will serve as practice for writing the papers
- will function as a record of your reading for the semester, serving as a way for you and me to keep track of your progress in the course.

For each assigned reading, you will complete the following assignments:

Tuesdays: Reading Responses and Vocabulary Lists (part of Reading Responses and Vocabulary Lists Grade; Formative Assessments):

You will compose a **typed** reading response (approximately 250 words) answering the prompt that is posted on Canvas. **In your response:**

- You will quote and analyze passage(s) from the literary work(s).
- Be sure to put your answer in the context of the rest of the work you've read so far to show you've read all of the assigned reading.
- A large part of your learning in this course will occur through class discussions. The discussions will center on these reading responses.
- As you are expected to come to each class period prepared and ready to participate in class activities, you will submit your reading response before class and be ready to share it with the class.

- In addition to the reading responses about the readings, you will also list and define any vocabulary words with which you are unfamiliar and submit them to Canvas.

Thursdays: In-Class Activities (part of Engaged Learning Grade; Formative Assessments):

- During class, you will compose some type of response to an assigned question or topic individually or as part of class discussion.
- Unlike in the discussion posts, which are composed in advance on a computer, in the in-class assignments, you don't need to worry about formal organization in your answers; instead, show me that you have read the material and given it some thought, and brainstorm ideas for class discussion.

Please make every effort to submit the reading responses and vocabulary lists on time and to participate in class discussion. Exceptions will be made for university-sponsored, military-related, religious or ceremonial events, or extenuating circumstances.

Introducing Anti-Racism and Intersectionality: At the beginning of the semester, I assign students to watch the following short video clips to introduce them to two of the major course concepts: Anti-racism and Intersectionality. We then discuss these concepts in class.

- [“How Anti-Racism is a Treatment for the ‘Cancer’ of Racism”](#) (interview with Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, author of *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Dr. Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility*)
- [“African American Women and the Struggle for Equality: the ABCs of Intersectionality”](#) (Brigit Katz, *Smithsonian Magazine*)

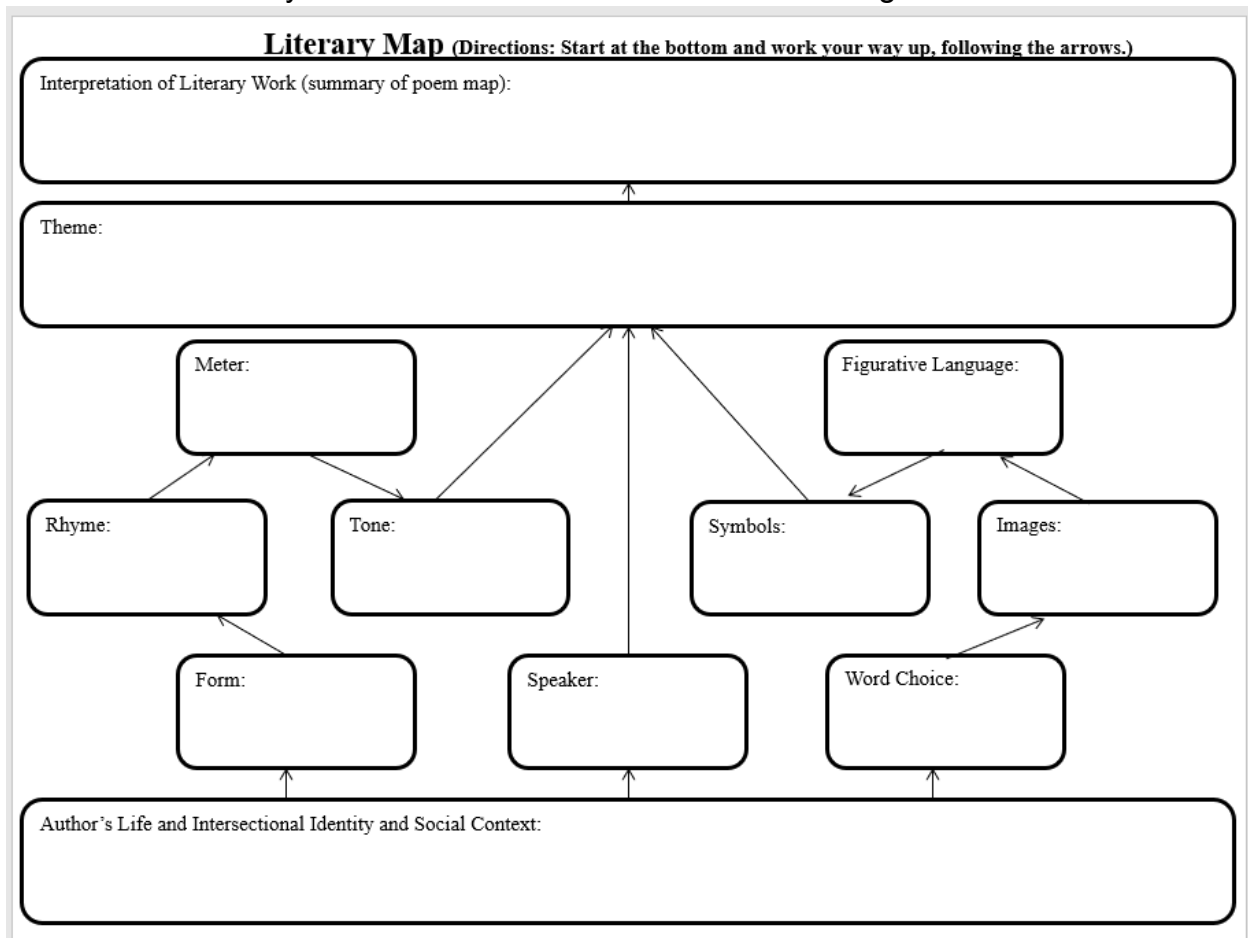
Literary Elements: At the beginning of the semester, we discuss close reading skills via small group inquiry and full class discussion. I post a document that briefly lists and defines the main literary elements involved in close reading to each reading response assignment:

Literary Elements

- **Theme** (main ideas or concepts)
- **Word choice** (words used, arrangement of words, language patterns, etc.)
- **Images** (visual, physical representation of something or mental picture)
- **Figurative language** (language that employs one or more figures of speech to supplement or modify the literal meanings of words with additional connotations; examples: simile (compares 2 distinct things using like or as), metaphor (associates 2 distinct things), personification (human characteristics are bestowed upon anything nonhuman), apostrophe (when speaker directly addresses a person, thing, or idea), etc.)
- **Symbol(s)** (Something that is itself and stands for something else)
- **Form** (Genre: drama {comedy or tragedy}; poetry {type of poem}; prose {fiction or non-fiction and specific type of prose: short story, novella, novel, etc.})
- **Rhyme** (if applicable) (What is the rhyme pattern?)

- **Meter** (if applicable) (mono-one; di-2; tri-3; tetra-4; penta-5; hexa-6; hepta-7; iamb: metrical foot—unstressed syllable followed by stressed syllable—example: iambic pentameter)
- **Tone** (Attitude toward the subject and/or audience)
- **Speaker** (Who is speaking)
- **Author’s Life and Intersectional Identity and Social Context** (Literature, Culture, and History of the time period and region in which the literary work was written)

Literary Map: I have created the following concept map or graphic organizer, which I refer to as a literary map, as a template in PowerPoint, to aid students in learning how to do close readings that integrate both literary elements and the author’s life and intersectional identity and social context into their close readings.



For more information on using the literary map to foster global awareness, see Hilary N. Fezzy, Eri Fujieda, Lynn Amerman Goerd, Heather Kahler, and Ephraim Nikoi. “How Do You Promote Global Learning through the Curriculum?” *Big Picture Pedagogy: Finding Interdisciplinary Solutions to Common Learning Problems*, edited by Regan A. R. Gurung and David Voelker, Jossey-Bass, 2017. pp. 135-150.

Sample Reading Response Prompt:

Topic: Women's writing on slavery and the abolition movement:

Read:

- Phillis Wheatley Peters, biographical note and "[Letter Sent](#)," "[On Being Brought from Africa](#)," "[To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth](#)," pp. 358-360 of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, Vol. 1; [Optional audiobook of "Letter Sent"](#); [Optional audiobook of "On Being Brought from Africa"](#); [Optional Audiobook of "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth"](#)
- Harriet Jacobs, biographical note and from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ([Chapter V](#); [Chapter VI](#); [Chapter XXI](#); [Chapter XXIX](#)) pp. 618-629 of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, Vol. 1; [Optional audiobook of Harriet Jacobs's Incidents \(Chapters 5, 6, 21, 29\)](#)
- I post links to optional video clips about each author and about slavery and abolition from library databases along with a reminder to use one's campus username and password to access the videos off campus. Here are some *YouTube* clips that could be used in lieu of library video clips:
 - [Optional YouTube clip about Phillis Wheatley Peters](#)
 - [Optional YouTube clip about Harriet Jacobs](#)
 - [Optional YouTube clip about Transatlantic Slave Trade](#)
 - [Optional YouTube clip about Slave Narratives](#)

Reading Response Directions: Quote and analyze a passage from each writer (Wheatley and Jacobs), analyzing the literary elements and the themes of slavery, freedom, and/or abolition as well as the intersectionality of race, gender, class, etc., and connect to the social context of transatlantic slavery and abolition (see film clips listed in readings for more information on this topic).

List and define all unknown vocabulary from writings on slavery and the abolition movement.

- You will receive full credit if you complete the vocabulary assignment.
- You can just cut and paste the definitions from [American Heritage Dictionary](#) or [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)
- If words do not appear in these dictionaries, look them up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. To access, [insert directions to access it on the campus library's homepage here]. Since you're off campus, you will need to type in your username and password to access it.

Reading Response Grading Rubric:

Literary Analysis:

10 points: Highly Proficient

Demonstrates primary literary text(s) has been read closely and thoughtfully; Provides complex response to primary literary text(s); References numerous specific textual details; Analyzes language, style, characterization, theme, social context, author's life and intersectional identity

8.5 points: Proficient

Demonstrates primary literary text(s) has been read closely; Provides thorough response to primary literary text(s); References some specific textual details; Attempts to analyze language, style, characterization, theme, social context, author's life and intersectional identity

7.5 points: Developing

Demonstrates primary literary text(s) has been read; Summarizes primary literary text(s) but does not analyze its meaning

6 points: Emerging

Attempts to demonstrate that primary literary text(s) has been read; Responds to general elements of primary literary text(s) but does not reference specific details and is thus incomplete

0 points: No Evidence

Did not respond to prompt

Hilary Fezzey is a Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, where she teaches courses in British and world literature and literary theory in the Department of Writing, Language, and Literature. She received her B.A. from Northern Michigan University and her M.A. and Ph.D. from Purdue University. She has essays in *Re-viewing Thomas Holcroft*; *the Adam Smith Review*; and *Big Picture Pedagogy*.