

English 2200 HU/DV Introduction to Literature—Signature Assignment, Fall 2019

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As you may remember, all WSU General Education (GE) courses aim at introducing students to academic disciplines through important **Big Questions** (BQ). At the same time, GE courses also introduce students to underlying foundational knowledge and intellectual tools that run through all academic areas and are part of the ongoing preparation to address real world problems. To build on this combination of general and disciplinary knowledge, GE courses are designed to culminate in a so-called **Signature Assignment** (SA), which, at its core, is intended to provide you with the opportunity to integrate and apply the knowledge you have gained in our class by addressing the Big Question at the center of our class: what is the principal value of reading and speaking, thinking and writing, about “literature” in a culture of mass consumption and information overload? If “knowledge of books” had once enjoyed enormous cultural authority (as recent as with the generation of your parents and grandparents), today it is often seen as a cottage industry overshadowed by other forms of expression and artistic consumption, ranging from film, TV, to rap and hip-hop music, among others.

Put differently, if the **General Education Learning Outcomes** (GELOS) listed on our syllabus may, esp. at the beginning of our class, not make a whole lot of sense to you, our ongoing work in the class room, and then your signature project, will allow you to connect the dots of the Big Question we have been identifying in our discussions. Connecting and applying in meaningful ways what you have learned (GELO 4); thinking through the implications of your social responsibility to yourself and others (GELO 3); using your creative thinking as an intellectual tool to synthesize existing ideas in novel ways (GELO 2); and demonstrating the breadth and understanding of your content knowledge—the subject matter in our class—(GELO 1) all come together to allow you to engage our Big Question. Think of it not as a big test, but as an opportunity, really, to put into perspective how our Introduction to Literature course has been meaningful to you, now and perhaps in(to) the future.

Here, then, is the title and question prompt for our signature assignment. The double whammy, **Media and the Question of Personal Preference**.

OPTION A: I want to give you the opportunity to write a personal story on your own favorite story—or poem or drama or film, as the case may be—and at the same time think about the form in which you read (or consumed) your personal favorite, or some or all of our other readings in class, for that matter. I would like you to articulate in your own terms (a) which of the stories, poems, plays, or the film on our syllabus is, or has become, your favorite one, and why; and (b)

how the medium of delivery (either in our print anthology; online, on a tablet reader, what have you) determines how (and what) you are reading—whether that is literature or more information- or edutainment-based texts. You need to develop a carefully phrased argument in which you explain **(1)** your own, personal framework of evaluation that has made you choose one particular text over all the others. This framework should include a brief description of your own aesthetic sensibilities (such as your preference of certain styles and narrative forms, for example) and of the themes to which you respond most favorably. Both would, of course, account largely for your pick. At the same time, you also need to describe with some precision **(2)** how your favorite text is both similar to and distinct from the other texts for whom you have a lesser appreciation. This analysis by contrast will enable you to emphasize the formal and thematic features that make “your” text unique and superior to all the others. Finally, don’t forget to fold in the question of media **(3)**: does reading your favorite text—or most other texts, for that matter—change when you switch from one medium of delivery to another? Did your favorite text end up becoming your favorite one, in part, because of the way in which you read (or consumed) it. How would, say, your overall reaction to a poem change if you were to read it on a tablet, rather than a print and bound book, or heard it read out loud in class, on Audible, or perhaps, on the ubiquitous YouTube, either by a fellow student across the country or perhaps the author herself (or on our very own campus)? Then, to broaden your signature assignment toward the end, you might consider the ramifications, for you and your generation, of what it means to live in a world enveloped in a perpetual sound cloud; when time for reading, in any form, is becoming increasingly scarce and when—if you want to reach even higher—the cultivation of a sense of stillness and inwardness have become rare commodities, indeed.

OPTION B: Signature Assignment as a **Final Digital Project** (FDP).

As an alternative to a more traditional, formal essay, you are invited to engage our signature assignment in the form of an FDP, as spelled out in our syllabus, using Adobe Spark, Top Hat, Rush, or similar platforms. If you choose this option, what’s important is that your content maintain the same high standard of thought one would expect in a paper, while delivering that content through a different medium that incorporates sound (narration or music) and visuals (film clips, pictures, footage of you talking, etc.). But in whatever format you end up doing our **Signature Assignment**, you can see that it is a big question, indeed, folded into which are an (infinite) series of smaller questions. It allows you to bite off as much as you can chew! Enjoy—and have some kudos at the end☺!

What to keep in mind?

- (a) Audience. Any successful essay or digital project must be mindful of its audience, as in any conversation. Identify clearly whom you are speaking to—be it a peer who does (or does not) plan to take the class, a younger or older sibling, your teacher or teacher in another discipline, or perhaps a 21st century university administrator responsible for

curricular design. Clarity in specifying your readers will help you to frame the very basis of your argument and observations.

- (b) Range. You are welcome to take a sweeping look at all the readings in our class (and, within reason, beyond) including our more formal readings and class discussions. Engaging and absorbing some of the ideas we shared and refined in our conversations is a sign of your intellectual growth and maturation. Be broad and wide-ranging in your thinking without losing sight of the very core of the Big Question itself.
- (c) Open-endedness and intellectual rigor. Please note that this question is fundamentally open-ended, depending for a “successful” answer only on the precision and the lucidity of your reasoning. At the same time, please note as well that—as with all Big Questions—it is not as easy as it may sound. In order to come to terms with it, you should have a good command of the texts at hand and, furthermore, an awareness of your aesthetic, thematic, generic, and media preferences. To say that you dislike, say, “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister” because of Browning’s “difficult style,” or that you love Susan Glaspell’s play *Trifles* because she addresses “gender issues” is, obviously, not enough. (Comparing and contrasting the text of your choice with some of our other readings in a particular genre might be helpful, too.) That is also true for the media part of the question: simply observing that you are a digital native, which is why you dislike print, or that you prefer reading on a tablet simply because it is more portable—which would be one reason—is insufficient. Your observations need to be more nuanced than that. Got it? – Then, **Good luck!**
- (d) **Due Date:** Monday, 2 December 2019, 9:30 in class, EH #403, and on Canvas, <https://weber.instructure.com/courses/486457/assignments/4164413>
- Length:** Option A: 4-6 typed, double-spaced pages (= 1,000-1,250 words)
Option B: 8-15 slides, depending on your design and the complexity and constellation of your sound track, images & video.