

Reading Response Guidelines

Developing your skills at asking substantive, productive questions about literary texts takes practice. To encourage this practice, I ask you to compose and submit a response question to me before each class session. By **10 a.m** every Tuesday and Thursday (unless otherwise noted), you're expected to email me a question. Your email **MUST include F16LIT103 in its subject line**, so it gets filtered appropriately in my inbox. These responses won't be graded – they're specifically meant to be low-stakes attempts, and even the first steps toward an essay. I generally won't even respond to them, but I will use them (anonymously) to structure class discussions. They are also a good place to try out ideas for essays! I will let you know if they are not substantive; after a point, if you submit too insubstantial questions, they'll stop counting.

So what does a substantive response look like? For one thing, it makes specific mention of aspects of that day's reading (i.e., prove to me that you've done the reading!). Moreover, the response raises a point or asks a question relating to *interpretation* rather than *fact*. You might consider the following as a basic blueprint:

- a quote from the reading (or reference to a specific feature of it)
- a comment or question about how you might connect this quote/feature to the meaning of the text as a whole

A response does not have to be more than a sentence or two long to accomplish this. Below are some examples of substantive questions/comments that could easily prompt essay-length analyses:

Why are the poem's lines indented in such a way. If you notice, even "Praise him." is in keeping with the line made by the preceding lines' gradual slope. Does the staggering or waterfall of lines contribute to the poem's subject? They could be striving to be "counter," "dappled," and "swift" so that the poem can similarly be one "whose beauty is past change."

Why are food and eating such recurring themes in *Bartleby*? What symbolism or metaphor does that imagery convey?

The story is told from the first person point of view, but there is an omniscient narrator here that at times is throwing me off..."she sometimes imagined a rather dark man with crude stripes painted on his face and sunken belly" (17)...here we see that the narrator, Ruth, knows the thoughts of her fellow characters...are we supposed to take this narrator as being unreliable? She seems to be absorbing the thoughts of other characters, but I have not yet seen her reflect on her own thoughts...

It is hard to pinpoint any "narrator" in Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants." Is it feasible to claim that a story exists without any narrator, or do stories (even like Hemingway's, which is almost entirely dialogue,) inherently depend on some "teller?"

Below are some examples of unsuccessful questions. Note that these questions are not *bad questions*, but are rather directed not toward interpretation but unattainable or purely personal responses.

How does having an enigmatic central character change the way a story is read? Does the reader feel more or less attached to the storyline when one of the characters is unknowable and unreadable?

How should we read a really short story compared to a short story that's a little longer? Should we pay extra attention to the really short one and think of it like every word matters more, or should we give equal weight to both? I was just wondering this when reading the two texts for today.

Ways of Thinking About Words

Technical features (how the words/sentences are put together & how they compare to conventional rules)

- Punctuation
- Syntax
- Grammar
- Spelling
- Structure/Spacing: end-stopped lines
 - enjambment
 - line-breaks
 - caesurae

Sonic features (how the language sounds, what its words feel like to say or hear)

- Alliteration
- Assonance
- Consonance
- Meter/rhythm
- Rhyme

Figurative techniques (what kinds of abstraction and associations are the words invoking?)

- Metaphor
- Simile
- Symbol
- Synecdoche/metonymy
- Personification

Structural elements (how is the text as a whole put together)

- Sequence of elements
- Repetition
- Order of events (story)
- Order of disclosure of events/details (plot)
- Narrative features: narrator's perspective (1st, 2nd, 3rd person)
 - scope of narration (limited/omniscient)
 - dramatization

Intertextual elements (how does this text draw upon ideas from other texts?)

- Allusions
- References
- Parody/Satire
- Genre expectations

Cultural/historical resonance (how does this text reflect the world around it)

- Historical references
- Biographical concerns
- Political preoccupations
- Philosophical concerns
- Slang, jargon, buzzwords
- Technology