English 124 Advanced Composition

Professor Luna

**Writing about Literature: Story Analysis (Essay #1)**

Analyze the first portion of *Love Medicine* by Erdrich. Think about what you have read and encountered in the novel so far.

*What do you think about it?* Begin with an interpretive question about the novel: “What does \_\_\_ mean?” Meaning, how does it connect with your real-world experience? Then frame a thesis which answers that question. Your goal is to provide a greater understanding of the novel for future readers, so they can better enjoy it.

*How to do I approach the assignment?* First off, you should write about anything in the story that interests you. There are many ways to approach this assignment, but please be sure and begin with your personal response. Remember, although your personal response will help you form an analysis, in order to for you to be thorough and rigorously critical, you must examine your response analytically. You must interpret the story and develop ideas about it in light of a consciously formulated response.

Here are some approaches to this assignment. These are intended to help you begin your analysis, not to frame your complete argument. Please be sure and use these as a way to begin thinking about your own interpretation.

* So far, how do the elements in the novel (characters, setting, incidents, ideas) fit into your ideas about life, your values?
* Which values, beliefs, ideas of your own does the story challenge or cause you to reevaluate? How do you think Erdrich wanted you to respond?
* What in the story gives you pleasure? What do you find disturbing? What do these responses tell you about Erdrich’s intentions? What do they tell you about yourself?

*How do I conduct research for this essay?* I don’t want or expect you to do outside research for this essay. I want to hear your voice, to formulate your own ideas and thoughts about the novel. The only entry on your “Works Cited” page should be Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*. You should use the novel as your sole support.

*What should the essay include?* As with all essays from here on out, you should have the following:

Your title. For an essay about literature, you need to have these elements in your title:

* Your own unique title suggesting your key insight.
* The name of the author(s) of the work(s).
* The title(s) of the work(s)

For Example: The Prescription Behind *Love Medicine* by Erdrich

Thesis statement. You need to include a clear and concise thesis statement. It should include:

* Your limited subject
* Your distinctive approach to the to that subject
* The name of the author(s)
* The work(s) of literature being discussed

For Example: In *Love Medicine*, Erdrich describes the environmental surroundings of each character to reveal his/her own perception.

Essay Body. Divide your thesis into component points, at least three but more likely four or more. Each point should develop the thesis further. The topic sentence in each paragraph should make an arguable claim which supports the thesis and furthers your analysis. Then provide evidence from the text to support each of your claims in all of your body paragraphs. Conclude the essay by reiterating your thesis in light of what you discovered in your analysis.

* Three to five points in the thesis to support your analysis
* Topic sentences that directly support each point from the thesis statement introducing each body paragraph
* Evidence from the text which supports each paragraph claim and globally supports the thesis in each body paragraph
* Analysis after each piece of evidence that explains the significance of the evidence and its support of the paragraph’s claim and thesis
* A conclusion that reiterates the thesis and explains the discoveries made through the analysis

Specifically for Essay #1

* Word count: 600-700 words (3-4 pages)
* Rough Draft Due Sunday
* To be submitted on the Week 5 Peer Review Board

*What to do and not to do. . .*

Make generalizations about the literature: what are the larger issues the author is trying to display? What is the author saying about people, the human condition in general? Why? What conclusions can you draw from them?

Do not outline the plot. We have already read it. Assume your readers have already read the plot; do not spend time explaining what, *but rather* why? And what it all means. You readers may need help understanding what the events in the story mean but not what they are.

Use solid evidence. You must support your claims with solid evidence. That only comes from one place—the story itself. Be sure to quote, paraphrase, and summarize thoroughly. You can argue anything you want as long as you support it with textual evidence.

Use MLA format. You need to cite all outside evidence in MLA format. You need to construct a “Works Cited” page. Page formatting must also follow MLA guidelines. Please refer to the MLA guide handouts and resources.

Use the third person point-of-view. You are the writer. You are the author of the thought behind the page, so there is no need to say “I.” It is stronger to use declarative sentences than including the personal pronoun “I.” For example, which sentence carries more force: (1) “Toole breaks barriers and uses his characters reveal social injustices,” or (2) “*I think* Erdrich breaks barriers and uses his characters reveal social injustices.” The second suggests that the writer is unsure of his/her position. The first is strong and forces the reader to listen and consider the argument.

Use the historical present tense. When writing about literature, we always want to use the historical present tense. For example, we say, “In *Love Medicine,* Erdrich describes [not described] Ithe reservation and illustrates [not revealed] its physical features to the reader vividly.” Even though the literature may have been composed in the past or an author may be deceased, they both (work and author) are part of the living art, so they should be discussed as so.

*\*Remember, your goal is to provide a greater understanding of the novel for future readers, so they can better enjoy it.*

(Adapted from Tim Paggard’s English 124 Advanced Composition, Essay Assignment #1: Story Analysis)