

DISCUSSION PROJECT

Overview: For this project, you and 3-4 of your classmates will locate, analyze, and lead your classmates in a 20-minute discussion of a piece of nineteenth-century fiction or non-fiction writing directly relevant to the course theme(s). As a group, you will:

- find a text to distribute to your classmates;
- consult with me at least once during the planning process;
- create a group plan outlining each person's role in the preparations and presentation;
- research relevant historical, scientific or cultural events happening at the time the text was written;
- prepare discussion questions for the class;
- develop your own interpretation to explain to the class in a 5-minute wrap-up to the discussion; and
- create an annotated bibliography and timeline of events to hand in.

Each group member will be responsible for an equal share of the workload, but your group may choose to divide the work into different tasks. Creative approaches are welcome. If, for example, your group wants to include images or sound, use technology, create a multimedia presentation, or select an unusual but interesting text, we can discuss ways to do that. If you need access to any of the audiovisual equipment, please let me know.

Each group will be allotted 20 minutes for discussion, plus 5 minutes for the wrap-up, so be sure to plan the timing of your presentation carefully. It can be difficult to determine exact times for discussion, but you can decide how much time you want to devote to each question or sets of questions. Since you may not have time to discuss every idea you discovered in your research, be sure to decide as a group which ideas are the most significant and which are less important. On the days you are not presenting, you are responsible for reading the text(s) and coming to class prepared to discuss them.

Consultation: Each group will meet with me at least once during the planning process. You may schedule a meeting at any point in the process you choose—whether to brainstorm, discuss any problems that arise, locate useful secondary sources, or show me drafts of materials you've prepared. Don't wait until the last minute to meet with me.

Grading: Your grade for the Group Project will be based on the Group Project Criteria and will be the average of your group grade (based on all the materials outlined in the first bulleted list

above). The entire group will receive the same group grade, unless circumstances warrant. I reserve the right to adjust a group grade if the confidential Group Assessment sheets I collect from your group reflect that one or more members didn't pull their own weight.

Materials to hand in: Each group should hand in one copy of the following materials on the day they lead discussion, unless otherwise noted:

1. A copy of the Story, Essay, etc. to be discussed: Turn in to me on XXX at the latest for approval. Bring copies to class on the class period before your presentation; you may distribute it electronically. Note: Special Collections may need 1-2 weeks lead time to get digital copies made; a paper copy takes less time, but still may take several days to a week, especially if the book is delicate. A more speedy alternative is to bring in a digital camera to capture the pages or to find out if the text is reproduced in a digital archive already. Talk to a librarian to find out more about these options.
2. To help ensure that the workload is evenly distributed, create a short group plan or informal contract that explains what work each group member will be responsible for. (See second bullet point under Hints below to get a sense of the kinds of details you might include in a group plan.) You'll turn in a draft of this on XXX and a final version (because plans often change) on the day of your presentation.
3. A list of Discussion Questions (2 pages maximum): I realize that you may not get to all the questions you have planned or may invent questions on the spot to further the discussion as it evolves, but I do want to see the questions each group has prepared.
4. A Timeline of relevant events from the 5-10 years preceding the publication date of the story or essay (2 pages maximum): Your group is responsible for deciding which events and what kind are the most relevant to the text you have chosen. Your group may decide to include events from the author's life, historical or cultural events that you feel were influential in the text, scientific discoveries or inventions, or major publications that may have influenced the text, or any combination of the above. I do not expect you to make an exhaustive list of events, nor will you be graded on how many things you have included. I'm more interested in seeing how your group chose events to include and how that influenced your interpretation of the text (or vice versa).
5. Annotated Bibliography: Your bibliography should include both a list of the secondary texts or websites you consulted as you worked on this project and an annotated list bibliography of the works you found most useful (5-10 works). The annotations should be concise (2-3 sentences). Please, no more than two websites on the final list, unless you have prior permission. Articles from scholarly print journals that you found online through JSTOR, Project Muse, or such, are FINE to use. The reason I'm asking for both a

comprehensive list of books/website you looked at and a short list of what you actually used is to get a sense of how you narrowed your search once you decided what focus you would take. You'll turn in a working or draft bibliography on XXX.

6. Each group will present a 5-minute wrap-up, where you'll be able to tell the class what interpretation you came up with and why.

Hints:

- *Choose a narrow focus.* After choosing a text, pick one or two aspects of to analyze in depth.
- *Divide the work and define your group roles and expectations clearly.* Assign each group member a research task to be completed before your next meeting (e.g., a particular source to evaluate and report back on or a piece of the timeline to fill in). Or, assign each group member different tasks for the project—who will be in charge of putting together the annotated bibliography? Who in charge of coming up with effective discussion questions for the class? Who will give the five-minute wrap-up at the end?
- *Plan to meet outside of class* to prepare for your group presentation. If your schedules make it difficult for you all to meet, be creative about how you divide up your tasks and use your time.
- *Start now.* Pick a text soon so you can begin the next stage of the process. Stay attuned to your focus—it will help you weed out useless information and close in on informative material.
- *Connect what you learn.* What course themes or questions does your text relate to? How does it approach them similarly or differently to other texts we've read?
- *Seek help.* Consult reference librarians at Special Collections or in the Main Library. These professionals can often help you think of new ways to find reproducible sources or conduct online searches. If you have questions or encounter stumbling blocks at any point in the process, let me know. I'm more than happy to help or to direct you to someone or some text that can.