

# Essay 3 Assignment Sheet: Biographical-Historical-New Historical Criticism

Donath -- English 102

Congratulations! You're on your third essay of the semester! Biographical, Historical, and New Historical approaches to literature, such as Marxist Criticism, offer additional frameworks for finding significance in the text.

## **Assignment:**

Write a four-to-five page ~~essay~~ (2) on one of the works listed below. As always, first read the work closely. Then begin extensive research on the author's life, noting prevailing cultural assumptions at the time the work was written; write down connections you suspect about the text and the biographical and historical context, as well as any ideological elements the text reflects. Keep track of bibliographic information as you work, using at least three outside sources, with no more than one Internet source. (Encyclopedias and similar reference tools are good places to begin your research, but don't use them as your principal sources. DO ask the librarians in the reference department to help you; that's why they're there!) Refer to MLA guidelines for citation and Works Cited format. Choose one of the following:

- “Riot: 60s” by Maya Angelou (Handout)
- “I Saw in Louisiana a Live Oak Growing” by Walt Whitman (*Lit.* p679-680)
- “Arabi” by James Joyce (*Lit.* p842-846)
- “A Hanging” by George Orwell (*Lit.* 1224-1228)
- “Battle Royal” by Ralph Ellison (*Lit.* p269-280)
- “America” by Allen Ginsberg (Handout)

### **Important Dates:**

- **M 2/24:** For homework read the work and write a personal response to it in your journal; then do a close reading and note details about the language itself in your journal.
- **W 2/26:** Bring to class a rough outline that indicates a possible thesis, including several connections between the text and the author's life and/or important historical events.
- **MIDTERM CONFERENCE:** TWO typed copies of Essay 2.1 due.
- **W 3/19:** Essay 2.2 due (highlight or underline changes/additions; staple original draft on back).

- You still want to read the text more than once, or twice; write in your book. Record your initial responses to the text during the reading process—ask questions and suggest possible answers. Take note of details in the language choice/structure. Even before you start your research, question what types of events or circumstances during the author's life may have shaped the text.
- As you begin your research, note what, if any, aspects of the author's life seem to resonate in the work. Look for direct quotes in both the work and in sources about the context in which it was written that capture an idea or that illustrate an example especially well. (Keep track of where you find them!)
- Continue to ask questions about the possible connections between the text and the bio-historical

context; consider creating a timeline.

- Focus on one or two major aspects of the author's life, the historical period, or the ideological assumptions behind, and outline your thesis statement—with reasons and evidence of course.