

Essay Assignment #1: Literary Analysis of *The Iliad*

Introduction:

Your *Writer's Handbook* chapter "What are the Humanities?" argues that interpretation is the primary method of analysis used by scholars of the humanities, and thus the method of analysis that you will employ as a participant in the Humanities Core Course. It defines interpretation as a process that changes according to one's contexts. Thus, the process of interpretation is not only different for the various humanistic disciplines; but it is different for each person. It is the process by which each person uses their unique world view to find and create meaning.

Your first assignment will be to interpret a poetic work—Homer's *The Iliad*. Because this mode of interpretation is literary analysis, you will be engaging in what Professor Izenberg has called *close reading*—the formal description and interpretation of carefully selected portions of a literary work. When literary scholars close-read texts, they examine how the literary components of a text create meaning (components such as theme, symbolism, diction or meter). The reading is "close" because it examines selectively-chosen portions of a text (paragraphs, stanzas, or even individual words) that are described, and given value, from a specific point of view—from one "reading."

The exciting part about engaging in literary analysis is that the very process of writing often teaches you insightful, surprising, and even paradoxical, lessons about the text. The close reading happens as your writing takes place. You may begin your drafting process on *The Iliad* with a specific thesis in mind, but your close examination of the evidence may lead you to fresh realizations about the text's meaning. The process of interpretation opens you up to the unexpected.

Assignment:

There is a longstanding philosophical and political tradition that argues that humans possess *agency*: the capacity to act in ways that matter—insofar as they act autonomously, without the determining of outside forces such as gods, force, or fate.

In a passage from *The Iliad* (chosen by your section leader), analyze how the characters wrestle with the causes and consequences of their own action. Then defend an argument that demonstrates *how* the passage defines the scope and quality of human agency.

Your paper must be 3-4 pages in length and will be worth 25% of your writing grade.

Links:

Writing Process and Goals
Academic Essay Rubric
Peer Review Exercise