

Essay Topics

This is a take-home essay exam. Please write an essay on **ONE** of the following topics. The essay should be 1000 words long (+/- 50 words is allowed), typed, double-spaced, page-numbered and stapled, with your name on top left corner of the first page.

Topic 1:

In *The Narrative*, Frederick Douglass uses his own experiences as a slave to demonstrate the treatment of slaves in the South in order to criticize the institution of slavery as a whole. So, the particular injustices he has endured are only significant if they serve his overall purpose. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, on the other hand, Huck sympathizes with Jim as a runaway slave but he does not really criticize the institution of slavery as a whole. One way to explain this is that Mark Twain wrote the novel after slavery was already abolished. So, criticizing slavery as an institution would be outdated. Discuss how the specific historical contexts in which each book was published, and the specific intended audiences that each one has, contribute to this important difference between the two books. Support your claims with concrete examples from the books.

Topic 2:

Imagine that you are involved in a high school district as a parent and you learn that your school is planning to take *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* off their reading list because of the racist language employed in it. You decide to write a petition –in the form of an essay- trying to convince school officials that –despite the racist language- this novel conveys essential ethical messages which are still valid in the 21st century due to its universally humanist position and so it would be very valuable for teenagers to read it. Although this essay should be mostly about *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, I want you to also refer to *The Narrative* to provide historical evidence (since it's a factual story) for the truthfulness of the representation of Southern culture and slavery. Focus your discussion on the central moral issue in the book and support it with other examples.

Topic 3:

In very different ways, both *The Narrative* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* include criticism of the Southern claims to Christianity. While Frederick Douglass shows more concrete examples and expresses his criticism more directly, Huck's representation of religion in the South also carries some negative criticism. For example, Huck establishes a contrast between Widow Douglas and Miss Watson in terms of their interpretations of religion; he is attracted to only one of these interpretations while he is repelled by the other. Discuss how the two books criticize the Southern version of Christianity in order to appeal to the reader's sense of righteousness versus hypocrisy/dogmatism. Support your claims with concrete examples from the books.

Hint: For all three topics, consider Huck's distinction between what 'conscience' dictates him to do as opposed to what he feels the right thing to do.

Format:

- * Since this is an essay assignment, you need to have a proper essay format with a title, an introduction that includes a proper thesis statement, a clearly organized development section and a conclusion.
- * You should also use textual references (quotations) **to support, clarify and/or exemplify your arguments.** If your quotations are doing none of these, it means you are quoting unnecessarily.
- No '**Bibliography**' page is necessary if you are just quoting from the two books.
- *You need to follow the '**5 Rules**' handout in your paper.

Due Date:

You need to turn your paper in on **Monday, February 4**. Ideally, you need to submit your paper in class. However, if you cannot come to class for any reason, you can e-mail me a copy of your paper in the form of an MS-Word attachment **by class time on Monday**.

Reminder:

This is not a research paper. I want to read your personal take on the topics, supported by evidence from the books. So, I don't want you to consult secondary sources. However, if you do consult any, you need to cite them properly.

Plagiarism in the paper will result in failing the class.

*If you need extra help, you can take your paper to the Writing Lab on Monday morning.