

Prompts for Essay # 1: Realism and Naturalism

Directions: Choose one of the prompts below and compose a 3-4 page essay (typed in Times New Roman 12 pt. font, double spaced) exploring and answering the question. You may choose one aspect of the prompt to focus on (you don't need to answer all parts).

- 1) How does Walt Whitman's poetic style reflect his democratic values? Consider his long lines, lack of rhyme, abundant catalogs (lists of individuals, objects, or places) and use of repetition: how do these devices aid in making his poetry a kind of secular American scripture celebrating the "richness and variety" of American life?
- 2) How is Emily Dickinson's view of the natural world similar to/different from Whitman's? While both poets are highly influenced by a Transcendentalist view of Nature as morally regenerative, is Dickinson's relationship to Nature as positive and embracing as Whitman's?
- 3) Choose two or more poems by Dickinson that explore the same theme (such as, but not limited to: mortality, the natural world, love or desire, faith). How is the theme you have chosen treated similarly/differently in these poems? How can you account for this variation in treatment?
- 4) In what ways can Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* be considered Whitmanesque? Especially consider Twain's attitude toward man's relation to the natural world and society. Similarly, what purpose does Twain's doubling of characters between races and classes have?
- 5) Compare the use of irony between Bret Harte and Ambrose Bierce; how does the differing tone and temperament of the two authors influence your reading and interpretation of their highly ironic stories?
- 6) Choose two works of Naturalism by different authors: how do authors such as Steven Crane, Jack London, and Edith Wharton portray human motives and interactions as essentially animalistic and primitive? What does this suggest about their views of civilization and the products of industry and commerce?
- 7) Compare the depiction of the natural world, human nature, or the use of irony between a work of Realism and a work of Naturalism (it would be best to focus on one theme that is seen in both works). How are similar devices used in both works (such as acute observation of physical phenomena, human psychology, and colloquial speech) but to different affect?
- 8) Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Henry James's "Daisy Miller," and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* can be seen as portraits of women in peril and constrained/limited by their society. Are the problems these women face fundamentally the same? Consider how tone in these works contributes to the reader's interpretation of this conflict. Choose at least two works.
- 9) *The Awakening* contains elements of Regionalism, Realism, and Naturalism. Identify these by choosing exemplary (representative) characters or scenes from the novel and basing your distinctions on close analysis. Similarly, how does Chopin's use of "local color" influence the reader's interpretation of the novel (esp., how does it define the tone)? Can one of these literary movements be seen as dominant in the text?
- 10) In what way does clothing confer or identify power/social status in two works we have looked at (such as *Huck Finn*, *Maggie*, and "Daisy Miller"). Is this identification fluid, changing, and difficult to interpret, or is it stable and easily read?