

Essay 2: In-Class Synthesis

Purpose: To synthesize two readings, finding connections that are not readily available on the surface.

Objectives: As a result of this assignment, you will be able to read critically, identify the main ideas of a written text, compare major ideas between two “unrelated” texts, identify an important thematic connection between the two sources, construct an argument about that connection, select and discuss points from the two sources that support your argument, paraphrase and quote correctly (MLA format).

The Essay

The overall purpose of this second essay is for you to create an argument about a major, specific idea you see coming up in both “Welcome to the Blueblood Milltown” by Howard Mansfield and “The Breast” by Alex Kuczynski. You need to discuss this argument, using both the texts (quote from them) and your own observations about the texts/topic to help you support it. You should all have a good sense about an idea the readings share, based on the freewriting I had you do to prepare for today’s class, and you can use that freewriting to write this essay. As you know, there is more than one possible idea that both readings share. To create an argument about the idea you see coming up in both readings, you need to say more than “both readings bring up the idea of...” What you need to do is to *say* something about the idea you see coming up in both readings. This, again, I have asked you to explore through your freewriting.

This essay needs to be 5-7 well-developed paragraphs long. You should have an introduction with a thesis (your thesis should be your argument about the idea both readings share), and a conclusion. In addition, you will need body paragraphs that support your thesis. For evidence to help you explore your thesis, you should explore and discuss the significance of wording and ideas from both texts. It is important that this essay be unified around one main idea—not several. Subtopics are used to support the main idea rather than to compete with it.

Given the extensive prewriting you have already done to prepare, I would expect that you could spend 2/26 organizing and drafting the bulk of your essay. You can spend the class on 2/28 revising (rechecking organization and other global issues, revising introduction and conclusion and other common revision activities) and editing the paper, writing a final draft of it. I will collect the essays and prewriting on 2/26, but will not offer feedback since this activity is meant to replicate an essay exam and not an out of class paper.

Rubric: Look to the course rubric in the syllabus. I will pay particular attention to the effectiveness of your thesis as a complex argument, the effectiveness of your organization, the specificity and use of your evidence from the two texts in exploring your argument, and your ability to quote and cite sources correctly. Since this is an in-class essay, I will not expect your spelling to be perfect; if you really struggle with spelling, don’t waste your time looking up the exact spelling of every word.

Considerations:

Keep the following in mind:

- Remember that it is not necessary in this type of assignment to discuss each reading to the same extent. You might find, given your argument, that you want to focus more on “Blueblood” than “The Breast” or vice versa.
- Your essay should not be a list of all the similarities you can find between the two readings. This is the most common mistake students make in writing a synthesis. In your prewriting, you should have chosen one idea (or two related ideas) common to both readings and you should have a sense of what you want to say about this idea. The body of your paper needs to be the discussion of this idea. If you have not already prepared in this way, and have only a list of connections the two readings share, you need to spend 2/26 doing this freewriting to focus on one idea.
- Organize your essay in a way that allows you to compare the two readings thoughtfully. Avoid the “two-lump” or the “tennis-ball” methods of organization that we’ve discussed.

Audience: Consider Kuczynski and Mansfield to be your audience. You are putting them into conversation with each other, and you are stepping into this conversation through your writing.