

Rethinking Thoughts; or, a Modest Attempt to Reinvent the Teaching and Learning of Literature in Higher Education (to be renamed if at all possible) – Wednesday, July 18th, at 2:30

SUBJECT:

A 71-minute conference discussing non-traditional assignments in Literature classes: what they might be; their value; how their value can be proved.

SOME CORE ASSERTIONS:

- College course work should try to interest students
- Course work should be fun
- Standards should be rigorous
- A challenge should be implicit throughout
- We should try to guess how course work prepares for the next generation or so

- Student built wiki of content definitions or descriptions or analyses
- On-line or library exhibitions
- E-pub essay collection of best work

POSSIBLE MODES OF PEDAGOGICAL ASSIGNMENTS AND DELIVERY:

- New Media in general
- Epubs
- Newsletters (consecutive and one-offs)
- Youtube
- Twitter
- Tumblr
- Cell phone movies
- Audio podcasts
- Traditional, on-line, and Twitter exhibitions

2. A thought experiment

Let's say Kinsella is going to offer a new course on the writings of George Orwell, Virginia Woolf, or Anthony Burgess – almost anybody – even Shakespeare. If the course is offered at the 3000 level, he will probably ask students for about 24 pages of polished writing (2 seven-page essays, 1 ten-page essay). He will provide some guidance on possible topics, but not too much; that's just the way Kinsella is. His goals for these writing assignments, surely, are to have students reread texts; think carefully and critically; create a sophisticated argument; and write in clear and effective prose.

But what if he decides to replace one or more of these essays with non-traditional assignments such as one-off newsletters, on-line exhibitions, media documentaries (for podcasts or Youtube), or any other cool assignment we can dream up.

DISCUSSION STARTERS:

1. Building toward dissemination

Consider the possibility of *publishing* a course experience. Every aspect of this course would build toward disseminating what students learn during the semester. Assignments of varied length, difficulty, and topic would employ

- An end-of-term, one-off newsletter (need a better term for this)
- Youtube or podcast "essays"

- Should there be equivalencies between his old 24-pages worth of writing and the new assignments?
- Should the new assignments attempt to achieve goals similar to those of the old assignments, or are there other noteworthy goals to be chased?
- Can we suggest why any switches should be made?

Can we measure the usefulness of any changes over time?

3. Tweeting an aesthetic experience

At an agreed upon time outside of class meetings, (nearly) all members of a class read a specified story, poem, dramatic scene, tweeting their reactions, questions, and thoughts to other class members.

4. Rubrics

Is it possible to develop a rubric measuring and providing feedback for non-traditional

assignments? Would such a rubric really be useful? What would it look like?

5. Collaboration outside of the program

Do any of these methodologies create opportunities for Literature majors to complete projects with COMM, HIST, PHIL, ARTP, ARTV, or LANG majors (to name only the other majors in the School of Arts and Humanities)? How?

Notes