

English 342: The Contemporary Novel

Essay #2

Length and Due Dates

Length: 4-5 pages

Formatting: Please submit essays on 8.5" by 11" paper, titled, paginated, typed and double-spaced, with one-inch margins. In the upper right hand corner of the first page, include your name, the course number, the assignment, and the due date; this information should be single-spaced. You may use a 10 or 12 point Arial, Bookman, Century Schoolbook, or Times New Roman font for your papers. When citing sources, please use MLA format.

First Draft Due: Friday, May 23, by 12:00 p.m. in hard copy at Padelford A-305 or via E-Submit

Final Draft Due: Friday, May 30, by 12:00 p.m. in hard copy at Padelford A-305 or via E-Submit

Assignment

You may write on one of the following topics:

- 1) Both Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean's *Violent Cases* alternate between past and present and contain flashbacks within flashbacks. Compare and contrast the novels' treatment of time, focusing on why the authors manipulate time in specific ways.
- 2) *Ceremony* and *Violent Cases* integrate various texts into their narratives. Silko blends Laguna chants and traditional stories with the Euro-American novel form, while Gaiman and McKean feature posters from gangster, adventure, sci-fi, thriller, and noir films. Compare and contrast how intertextuality functions in both novels. How do the various texts inform each other? Why do the authors combine particular types of texts?
- 3) How and why does *Ceremony* attempt to articulate a mixed-blood identity?
- 4) Analyze how space functions in either *Ceremony* or *Violent Cases*. Potential areas for exploration for *Ceremony* include the types of spaces Tayo moves among, the design of particular spaces, the relationship between mythical and physical spaces, or the historical and cultural contexts of specific spaces. For *Violent Cases*, consider the space of the frame and the ways in which it shapes and/or fails to contain text and graphics.
- 5) Why is or isn't either *Ceremony* or *Violent Cases* a postmodern novel?

Guidelines

- 1) Although I have provided topics, you will need to narrow the topic and develop a specific argument. An essay on space, for example, may address any one of the potential directions I have defined. An essay on mixed-blood identity could focus on Silko's use of a hybrid literary form, or it could concentrate on characters who serve as emblems of change.
- 2) If you would like to write on one of the comparative topics but focus on only one text, you may do so. If you would like to propose an alternative topic, speak with me before proceeding.
- 3) Let your argument dictate the organizational format of your essay. Just because the novels have a particular narrative order does not mean that your essay must follow that order.
- 4) If you choose a comparative topic, remember that effective comparison/contrast essays highlight how similarities and differences reveal something important about each novel. As you develop your essay, consider how each novel "unlocks" the other. Ask yourself why it is important to examine these novels together in relation to the topic.

- 5) Close textual analysis will serve as your main source of evidence. In supporting your argument, you will need to pay attention to the novels' language, structure, and themes.
- 6) Remember that you are writing to an audience who has already read the books. Therefore, your essay should not offer plot summaries. Instead, any reference to the novels should support your analysis.
- 7) Do not forget the arguments posed in readings, class or the electronic bulletin board. A review of the readings and the postings on a particular text may help you to ask key questions and shape your analysis. You will, of course, cite specific words and interpretations borrowed from classmates or other authors.
- 8) If you're having difficulty devising an approach to the essay, or if you want to discuss ideas-in-progress, come to my office hours or email me to set up an appointment.

Grading

I will use the attached grading scale to evaluate essays. Failure to submit essay drafts will result in a 10-point deduction from the final grade; I will also deduct 10 points per day for late essays, as the ability to develop an argument within time limits is an integral aspect of the essay assignment. I will make exceptions to the lateness policy only in cases of documented illness or family emergency.