

CLOSE READING *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

Assignment

In this 3-4 page paper, you will use the close reading skills we're practicing in class to perform a literary analysis of *Wuthering Heights*. This essay should be a text-centered analysis, focusing on how minute elements of the text—its form, its word choices, its literary devices—contribute to a theme you identify in the novel.

Drawing together your analysis of specific passages in the text, **the paper must be driven by an argumentative thesis that synthesizes your observations into one coherent thematic reading.** You are welcome to choose any facet of *Wuthering Heights* that interests you, but you may also work off of one of the five prompts I have listed below. You should consider these prompts to be springboards for you to craft your own questions and interpretations.

While I will ask you to offer *some* summary to give readers context for your analysis, this assignment should not be merely a summary of the text. Assume that your readers have already read the novel (though it's been a while, so you may need to remind them of the details), but refrain from simply telling them what the story is about. This paper is also not an opinion piece. Refrain from evaluating the story (telling readers whether it is good or bad), and instead focus on answering questions about why and how the story works.

Possible Topics:

1. **Doubling Down:** Like many Victorian novels, *Wuthering Heights* employs the device of doubling – forcing comparison between two similar characters or settings in order to highlight something about one or both. Choose one pair of doubles and explain how the similarities and differences they highlight in one another help to get across a theme you see in the novel. The most obvious examples include Catherine Earnshaw and Isabella Linton, Heathcliff and Edgar Linton, and the two houses themselves, but there are many other less obvious choices that could make for an interesting and nuanced interpretation.
2. **Frame Game:** As we've discussed, *Wuthering Heights* employs a frame narrative in which the history of the Earnshaws and the Lintons is told. First, think about how the novel would be different if this device wasn't used. How *could* this story have begun, and ended, if not for the frame? Then think about the frame narrative's presence and all of its various elements (Lockwood as tenant at TG, Nelly as narrator, etc). How do certain aspects of the frame help elucidate a particular theme in the main narrative of the novel?



3. **Nature/Nurture:** Where does *Wuthering Heights* come down on the issue of nature vs. nurture when it comes to individuality? To what extent are our personalities biologically determined by our parents, and to what extent are they the product of our upbringing? Consider how each character is shaped by these two forces, and then select one or two “case studies” to explain your interpretation of the text’s stance on this issue. In your introduction, you should explain why this character/these characters are most representative of this complex issue to justify your choice(s). Remember, this is a complex issue, and it’s likely that the text’s stance will fall somewhere in the *middle* of the two poles of nature and nurture – not simply on one side or the other.
4. **Rom Com Material?:** *Wuthering Heights* has been made into a film many times. The first, in 1939, billed it as “The Immortal Love Story.” But is the love between Heathcliff and Cathy fully reciprocated on each side? Use the text to argue for your interpretation, as well as how these characters’ relationship contributes to an overall theme about romantic love in the novel.
5. **Goth Girl:** To introduce this text, we watched a clip from the 2007 film version of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*. In this clip, we saw Austen lightly spoofing the popular Gothic novel genre, which is defined by dark and sometimes supernatural settings, fiendish anti-heroes, damsels in distress, and abuses of power. *Wuthering Heights* is widely considered to fit within this genre of the Gothic, but do you think Brontë, like Austen, is also critiquing the Gothic genre? If so, what in particular is she critiquing, and how harsh is her tone? What is her *message* (theme) regarding the Gothic genre?

Format

Your essay must be double-spaced in MLA format with 1-inch margins, 12pt. Times New Roman font. (See the first page of the “MLA Doc Format, Explained” handout on ICON)

Due Dates

A **partial rough draft** is due to ICON (Microsoft Word files only) before class on **Monday, February 26th**. This draft should include your intro paragraph that ends with your thesis statement, one full body paragraph, and your remaining topic sentences. You should also bring 2 copies to class on the 26th for a workshop.

The **final paper** is due on **Friday, March 9th**. The paper must be turned into the ICON dropbox before class begins.