

THE SHORT STORY

First Essay Assignment

Due Monday, May 23, before class.

This assignment (and all others) should be double-spaced throughout and paginated. Please use a standard font in a standard size, with standard margins. *Every essay should have an original title.*

The task is to provide a close reading of one of the stories we've read so far, by connecting a focus passage to the narrative as a whole. I have provided suggested focus passages from "The Yellow Wallpaper," "The Open Boat," "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," "How I Contemplated the World from the Detroit House of Corrections and Began My Life Over Again," "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," and "The Metamorphosis." You are welcome to choose your own focus passage from any of the stories we've read.

Analyze the passage very closely as the means to producing an overall interpretation of the story.



The likely—but not the only—format for a successful response begins with an introductory paragraph that includes a thesis about the story in question. The thesis (whatever the format) is an interpretive claim. Next, the essay introduces the focus passage, citing all or most of it in a block quotation. The essay will then interpret the passage closely and connect it to the rest of the story, citing, paraphrasing, and/or summarizing other relevant passages. Finally, the essay will conclude by spelling out more fully the implications of the analysis.

Citations should always be followed by the page number(s) in parenthesis.

Feel free to contact me by email with questions about the assignment. I am also happy to give feedback on your work in progress.

Keep in mind that you can revise this assignment.

Suggested Focus Passages

“The Yellow Wallpaper”

The front pattern *does* move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!
Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.
Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.
And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so (336).

“The Open Boat”

There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heart-felt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat, there was this comradeship, that the correspondent, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life. But no one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. (215)

“The Man Who Was Almost a Man”

He was glad that he had gotten out of killing the mule so easily, but he was hurt. Something hot seemed to turn over inside him each time he remembered how they had laughed. (868)

“How I Contemplated the World from the Detroit House of Corrections and Began My Life Over Again”

I work on my lesson for Mr. Forest. I have filled up eleven pages. Words pour out of me and won't stop. I want to tell everything . . . what was that song Simon was always humming, and who was Simon's friend in a very new trench coat with an old high school graduation ring on his finger . . . ? Simon's bearded friend? When I was down too low for him, Simon kicked me out and gave me to him for three days, I think, on Fourteenth Street in Detroit, an airy room of cruel drafts with newspapers on the floor. . . . Do I really remember that or am I piecing it together from what they told me? (593)

“A Good Man Is Hard to Find”

She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, “Why, you're one of my babies. You're one of my children!” She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. (621-22)

“The Metamorphosis”

Was he a beast, that music so moved him? He felt as if he were being shown the way to that unknown nourishment he craved. He was determined to creep all the way up to his sister, to pluck at her skirt and in this way to indicate to her that she should come to his room with her violin, for no one here was rewarding her playing as he meant to reward her. (427)