

Term Paper Brainstorm

PHIL 194W

due February 4

The major assignment for this course is a term paper. This is an opportunity for you to think about a literary work of your choosing and what it tells us about the relation between literature and the moral imagination. The literary work should be one of personal interest to you, and one which you will enjoy thinking about more deeply. Ultimately, you will present your thoughts in the form of a term paper and an in-class presentation. But your first step is to complete this “brainstorm” assignment, which will help you come up with some possible ideas for your term paper and get some preliminary feedback on those ideas.

Guidelines

Your brainstorm should present a **list of three literary works, accompanied by a specific issue about the relation between literature and the moral imagination that each work raises.** (You may list more than three, but no less.) **You may not include any of the literary works that we are reading in class on your list.**

Guidelines for your literary works: List your works by title and author. Any type of literary work is fair game: you may choose novels, short stories, plays, poems, memoirs, or anything else that might be considered “literature”.¹ You may even choose (and in some cases might want) to focus on a specific section or scene or character from a work. You may also choose to write on a “nonliterary” written work (e.g., a piece of nonfiction writing, or of trashy genre fiction), especially if

¹Should you wish, you may include in your list up to one film, television show, or piece of music; but I’d strongly prefer for you to limit yourself to *written* works.

you pair it with a literary work addressing similar issues. Your term paper will be easiest if you choose a work that you've read, enjoyed, and remember well.

Guidelines for your accompanying issues: Present a specific, well-defined issue related to each of your chosen literary works. Your issue should have something to do with the relation between literature and the moral imagination. You should make clear why the work raises this issue, and why this issue is important to our understanding of literature and ethics. In coming up with your issues, ask yourself: How does this literary work challenge our conception of the relation between literature and ethics? In what ways does reading the work expand (or contract) our moral imagination? Does the work engage our moral imagination in an interesting or atypical way? Then use these questions to clarify the specific issue that you'd like to think about more deeply about in your term paper.

List your literary works and accompanying issues in your order of preference, with the work/issue you'd most like to write about for your term paper listed first and the one you'd least like to write about listed third. (This is just to give me a sense of your interests; you are free to write about any of your listed examples for your term paper, or even about something entirely different if you wish.)

If you need help coming up with examples of works or issues to write about, email me to arrange a time to come and talk.

Turning it in

Please submit your brainstorm, directly in the provided textbox, on Canvas by end of day on February 4 (or, for all your night owls, by 8 A.M. the following morning).

Grading

The point of this brainstorm is to give you feedback on your initial ideas for your term paper, to tell you what will work and what won't. **You will not, however, be graded on the quality of your ideas;** full credit will be awarded simply for making a honest attempt to complete the assignment.

More specifically, your brainstorm will be graded out of a total of three points; you will receive one point for each work/issue you present.