

Essay 1: Prompt

What does a text do with race? (5-7pgs):

Broadly Speaking:

This first essay is designed to help students start to appreciate what we *do* see when a text is clearly doing overt work with race and representations thereof. This is an exercise in close-reading a text and will require limited external research on the student's part.

Definition of Terms:

A **close-reading** is more or less what it sounds like: the student will choose a particular 'text' and proceed to *read* it *closely* for examples of the kinds of race-based topics that we have been discussing so far in the semester.

Text, in this case, is more inclusive than just a written work. As we are using it here, it can--and in this case, *must*--refer to any piece of purposely composed work designed for mass consumption. Attendant social and cultural meanings are, of course, bound up within the work.

List of Appropriate Texts:

For the present assignment, students will be asked to select a text from those we will have explored during the first four weeks of class.

- *Fullmetal Alchemist*
- *Black Lagoon*
- *Code Geass/Blood: The Last Vampire*

Alternative selections may be acceptable, but must be approved by the instructor (the sooner you act on this, the better).

Specific Instructions:

The general reading of the episode/film in question will necessitate:

A **brief** synopsis and contextualization of the episode within the larger narrative of the series (this will require some research on your part; Wikipedia can be used as a jumping-off point, but the superior essay will draw from other sources, either print or online)

A **thorough** and analytical reading of the specific and relevant events within the episode that help the student explore elements of racialization. The satisfactory essay will simply list events as they occur, chronologically; the superior essay will arrange the close reading of events in thematic progression, either from most salient to least, or vice versa.

The essay will be graded on the rigorousness of its inquiry and interrogation of the episode. Superficial commentary on a character's skin color are not enough. The student must dig deeper to explore what the text is really *doing* with these elements.

This is *not* just a curated tour of the episode, pointing out wherever there is a Black, white, or Japanese character. This is an investigation, compounded by substantiated and educated theorizing on questions of "why" and "what is at stake".

Students may run preliminary concerns or questions by the instructor for clarification.

Sample Questions:

While watching the episodes/film, students will be well served to think about *one or more* of the following criteria:

- Does race or difference occupy a position of narrative significance?
- Is the episode invested in not overtly expressing physiological elements of race, but rather cultural signifiers of difference?
- How does the episode foreground elements of race as a signifier of identity or alterity?
- Does the animated text in question compare favorably or contrast noticeably with Oe Kenzaburo's novella? In your close reading of each, where do you notice the most visible parallels or contradictions?
- Using Levi's introductory presentations of race as seen through so-called "Caucasian features" of certain characters, are there elements of the text that you found in your close reading that seem to challenge or corroborate her assertions?
- Does the text seem to imply a degree of social privilege for certain characters over others? How does it do so? What seems to be at stake in this approach?