Ten English Homework Assignments
Response to Readings – Directions and Examples

Overview: Each of these ten different homework assignments requires you to first **actively read** an assigned text and then **critically** think about what you have read. You will express your comprehension of the text through one of the options below (your teacher will tell you which format to use each night). Some of these assignments may be used more often than others, depending on what kind of text the class is currently reading. For instance, the **Character Investigation** works well with a novel or short story, while a **Précis** lends itself better to a non-fiction article or speech. Below you will see directions for each assignment followed by an example of that assignment. Most examples use the text *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck (literary text) or “I Have a Dream” by Martin Luther King (non-literary text.) Proper sentence structure, punctuation, and academic vocabulary should be used on every assignment, regardless of which of the ten formats you are using. Homework Assignments are worth 10-20 points each. Late homework will not be accepted. **DO NOT LOSE THIS PAPER! YOU WILL NEED IT ALL YEAR!**

1. **QUOTATION ANALYSIS**

**Objective & Explanation:** The purpose of this activity is to interact with the text by analyzing significant quotes in order to explore the author’s development of plot, character, or theme (in literary texts), or the author’s support for an argument (in non-literary texts.)

**Directions:** As you are reading, keep track of what you feel are important or meaningful quotes from the text. Then, choose the three quotes that you feel are most significant, or that best prove you understood the entirety of the reading assignment. Then:

A) Write the quote down (**include page and proper quotation punctuation**);

B) Establish the context for your quote in 1-2 sentences (**who is talking to whom? When and where in the story does this quote occur? What is being discussed prior to the quote?**)

C) Explain the quote and analyze its significance in 3-4 sentences (**Why is this quote important? What is really going on here?**)

**Example of Quote Analysis:**

A.) **Quote 1:** “Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place. . . . With us it ain’t like that. We got a future” (17).

B.) **Context:** In this passage George is speaking to Lennie. Before George and Lennie reach the ranch, they camp for the night in a beautiful clearing and George assures Lennie of their special friendship.

C.) **Analysis:** This shows that George refuses to see himself as just another drifter like all the other ranch hands. He and Lennie share a dream and this is what keeps them going. Furthermore, this conversation functions as a mantra that George repeats to help Lennie and himself stay focused on their dream of one day having a place of their own.
2. NOVEL QUESTIONS: LEVELS 1,2,3 Questions

Objective & Explanation: Novel questions are your opportunity to interact with the text as you read. The act of thinking of higher level questions will make you a stronger reader and allow you to intelligently discuss the text with the class.

Directions: As you complete a reading assignment, note significant passages (try using stickies). You will choose one or two passages to ask questions about, and then you will answer your own questions. Be sure to cite the page number of the answer wherever possible. You will write a total of five questions and answers, using the format below:

A. Ask and answer two “Level 1 Questions”: Level 1 questions focus on content or the “what” of the reading. These can deal with basic understanding of events, plot, and character.

B. Ask and answer two “Level 2 Questions”: Level 2 Questions focus on the author’s style and ask the “how” of the novel. These can focus on the author’s use of literary devices

C. Ask and answer one “Level 3 Question”: Level 3 Questions are universal questions that ask the “why” or “so what” of the text: the tone, themes, and universal meaning of the reading.

D. Ask one “Bugs Me Question”: The “Bugs Me” Question is a chance to ask the author a hypothetical question, something that doesn’t make sense to you or that bothers you when reading; no answer is needed!

Example of Novel Questions:

A. “Level 1” Questions: (content or “what” of the reading)
   Q1: What does Lenny look like?
   A1: Lenny is a large, lumbering, childlike migrant worker with a mental disability (13).
   
   Q2: What happens to Lennie’s puppy?
   A2: Lennie accidentally kills his puppy in the barn because he uses too much force (55).

B. “Level 2” Questions: (author’s style or “how” of novel)
   Q1: How does Steinbeck foreshadow Lennie’s death?
   A1: One example is when Candy’s dog is shot which foreshadows that George may also have to put Lennie to “sleep.”
   
   Q2: What figurative device is used in the following sentence and what idea does it convey: “On the sand banks the rabbits sat as quietly as little gray, sculptured stones” (2).
   A2: This is an example of simile; the comparison shows how statue-like the rabbits were standing.

C. “Level 3” Question: (universal question, “why” or “so what” of reading)
   Q: Why does George feel he has to kill Lennie?
   A: George feels it is his responsibility to kill Lennie rather than allowing him to be killed by an angry mob. In doing this, George demonstrates his level of compassion for Lennie.

D. “Bugs Me” Question: (ask the author something that doesn’t make sense or bothers you)
   Q: Why is Curley so mean to everyone, especially Lenny? (no answer needed)
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3. PRÉCIS: A PRECISE SUMMARY

Objective & Explanation: Précis is a Latin term meaning a concise (short) summary, and it is often written in a very specific format. For our purposes, a précis is college-level summary of a text in which you provide key information about the text itself, its argument, and its purpose. This will teach you to synthesize what you have read and pull out the most important elements.

Directions:
Before you read, list the following information about the text:
A. What is the title of the piece? Turn the title into a question (you will answer this question later after reading the piece).
B. What is the genre (literary type) of the piece?
C. Who is the author of the piece?
D. What is the date of publication for the piece?
E. Who does the author intend to be reading or listening to the piece?
F. Make a prediction about the content and purpose of the piece based on title and author.

After you read, do the following with the text:
G. Claim: In a single coherent sentence give the following:
   - the name of the author, and the title of the work with the date in parenthesis;
   - a specific verb (such as "assert," "argue," "deny," "refute," "prove," disprove," "explain," etc.);
   - a that clause containing the major claim (thesis statement) of the work.

H. Support: In a single coherent sentence give an explanation of how the author develops and supports the major claim. Format: First the author_______, then________, and finally ________.

I. Audience: In a single coherent sentence give a description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience.

J. Answer your “title question” from Question A.

Example of a Précis:
A. Title: “I Have Dream” / Title Question: What is Martin Luther King’s Dream in this speech?
B. Genre: Persuasive Speech
C. Author: Martin Luther King, Jr.
D. Date of Publication: 1963
E. Intended audience: Specifically, Congress of United States during the March on Washington, but also intended for all Americans listening in the crowd and on the news.
F. Prediction: I predict that Martin Luther King is probably going to share his dream of a better America.
G. Claim: In his speech “I Have a Dream” (1963), Martin Luther King, Jr. argues that, based on our own Constitution, all Americans should be treated equally, regardless of race.
H. Support: In his speech, King supports his claim that we should all be treated equally by first providing examples of injustices against African Americans, and then painting a picture of a better America.
I. Audience: King’s audience is both Black and White, but he uses “we” in order to emphasize his belief that we’re all Americans, regardless of the color of our skin, and that we should all demand equality.
J. Answer to Title Question: King’s dream is to see a just America in which people are judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin, and that all can live freely in harmony.
4. **CHARACTER INVESTIGATION**

**Objective & Explanation:** The purpose of this activity is to analyze the development of a key character from your reading by placing yourself in that character’s shoes.

**Directions:** Choose a significant character from then choose **one** of the following options:

A. **Character-to-Character Letter:** From the point of view of a character of your choice, write a one-page letter to another character based on an event or problem that occurs in the reading. Be sure to use first person and write as the actual character would write (language, style, etc.)

B. **Diary or Journal Entry:** From the point of view of a character of your choice, write a one-page diary or journal entry that discusses a key event from the reading.

C. **Other:** Do another character-related task as explained by your teacher.

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**Example Character-to-Character Letter (yours would be a full page):**

Option A: Letter from George to Lennie

Dear Lenny,

I feel real bad about what I did. Even though you’re not here, I want to put down in words, why I did what I done. If I hadn’t killed you, that bastard Curley woulda done it. And that ain’t right. I was thinking about Candy’s dog and how Candy knew he should have been the one to shoot it. So I knew that you had to die because you killed Curley’s wife (even though I know you didn’t mean to), and I know that you would have wanted me to do what I did.

I couldn’t stand the thought of you getting bullied, or tortured. I also wanted you to die without knowin’ you’d never get to reach that dream we always talked about. Compared to all the other fellas around here, you’re still one of the best people I know. I feel real bad about what I had to do, but I don’t see no other way. I’ll never forget you, don’t worry about that.

Your friend always,

George
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5. CREATIVE WRITING RESPONSE

Objective & Explanation: The purpose of this activity is to move beyond the text in a way that is creative and that reflects a deeper understanding of the reading. This activity will allow you to show off your creative side.

Directions: Choose one of the following options:

A. Interview of a Character: “Conduct” a written interview with a character that explores a significant issue from the reading. Use question and answer format; one to two pages.

B. Alternative Ending: Write a new ending for the story or chapter that takes the plot in a different direction than the author did. Be sure to mimic the author’s style; one to two pages.

C. Poem or Song: Write a poem or song of at least 20 lines that offers an interpretation of events or theme from the reading.

D. Obituary: Write an obituary (an article written after a person dies that that summarizes his or her life) about a significant character; one page.

E. Informal Letter Home: Write a letter home from a significant character; one to two pages.

F. Business Letter: Based on the events of the reading, to whom and for what purpose would a major character write a business letter? Write that letter using formal business letter formatting and language. One to two pages.

G. News Article: Write an article for a newspaper that provides the 5 W’s (who, what, where, when, why, and how) of an event from the reading. Don’t forget a headline! One to two pages.

H. Editorial: Write a newspaper-style editorial (opinion piece) about a significant issue form the reading. Be sure to take a clear side on an issue; one to two pages.

I. Storyboard or Comic Strip: Create a graphical illustration using picture and text that incorporates key plot elements of the reading. Product should consist of six or more panels. Must be school-appropriate and make use of color.

J. Other (your choice, ask teacher for permission)

Example Creative Writing Response (Option C, Poem):

**Lenny’s Blues**

I had me a dream,
’Bout a place of my own;
But someone mean,
Got it blown.

My best friend George
shot me in the head;
and before anymore,
I wound up dead.

It wasn’t fair,
But then, what is?
A real nightmare,
But that’s the biz.

Dyin’s the end,
But when you gotta go;
It’s best if you’re sent,
By someone you know.
6. **ARGUMENT PARAGRAPH**

**Objective & Explanation:** The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate understanding of your reading by writing a well-organized argument paragraph that clearly answers a prompt and asserts an opinion.

**Directions:** Read the prompt or task (question given by your teacher) before reading the assigned text. As you read, keep track of passages that address the question. Develop an answer to the question as you read. Then, formulate a claim that answers the prompt and write a formal, organized argument paragraph that supports your claim. Your paragraph should be 8-10 sentences. When writing out the completed draft, be sure to write all sentences so that they flow together as one paragraph. (An argument paragraph, when finished, will resemble a mini-essay without paragraph breaks). Use the format below to organize your thoughts:

A. **Claim:** First, answer the prompt/question by clearly stating your opinion and what you want to prove about the reading; 1-2 sentences.

B. **Support/ Evidence 1:** Next, back up your claim by quoting one passage that obviously proves your point. Be sure to give the context of the quote (lead-in) and the page (citation); 1 sentence.

C. **Analysis/ Commentary:** Then, analyze and discuss this first quote. How does it prove your claim? What is the deeper meaning? Why is it important? What connections can you make? Argue your point in 2-3 sentences.

D. **Support/ Evidence 2:** Now, quote a second passage that obviously supports your claim. Be sure to give the context of the quote (lead-in) and the page number (citation); 1 sentence.

E. **Analysis/ Commentary:** Then, analyze and discuss the second quote you choose. How does it prove your claim? What is the deeper meaning? Why is it important? What connections can you make? Argue your point in 2-3 sentences.

F. **Closing:** Wrap up your argument paragraph by reminding the reader of your overall claim. Summarize your main points.

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**Example Argument Paragraph (your paragraph should not include the labels in parenthesis):**

**Sample Prompt:** Was George’s decision to kill Lennie at the end of *Mice and Men* an act of cowardice or an act of heroism?

**[Claim:]** At the end of the novel, George acts heroically when he make the difficult decision to kill his best friend, Lennie; George is obviously trying to save him from a worse punishment. **[Support1:]** In their last conversation together, after he had killed the girl, Lennie begged “Let’s get that place now,” and George replied, “Sure right now. You gotta. We gotta” (72). **[Analysis:]** George has given himself the responsibility of being Lennie’s protector, and this he does until the end. When he sees that his friend has no way out of the crime he has committed, George chooses to let Lenny believe that all their dreams will still come true. George decides to be a real friend by ending Lennie’s life in the most humane way he can muster: “The hand shook violently, but his face set and his hand steadied. He pulled the trigger” (75). **[Analysis:]** George didn’t want Lennie to die, but his courageous decision shields Lennie and allows him to retain his blissful ignorance until the end. By shooting him, George spares his friend the merciless death that would be delivered by Curley’s lynch mob, but he also puts to rest his own dream of a perfect world. This shows that George is in fact sacrificing his own dreams to take care of Lennie, which is truly the deed of a hero.
7. CORNELL NOTES

**Objective & Explanation:** Cornell Notes are a specific style of note-taking invented by a professor at Cornell University. The purpose of this activity is to think critically about the text by deciding what the most important pieces of information are and arranging them into organized, college-level notes.

**Directions:**

A. Before reading, prepare your paper so that there is a column on the left-hand side for listing questions, and a wider right-hand column for general note-taking. (See example below). Be sure to label your notes with the title and page numbers of the text.

B. As you read, list the most important points from the text in the right column. Remember these good note-taking strategies: do not copy the text word-for-word (instead, put it into your own words); do not use complete sentences; do use bullets and/or numbering, do skip lines to keep notes easy-to-read.

C. After reading, formulate questions about the information you recorded in your notes; write these questions in the left column. (Hint: if your reading has headings or bolded topics, you can often turn these into questions.) Finally, at the bottom page, write a 1-2 sentence summary of your notes.

**Example of Cornell Notes:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the history of Negros in America?</th>
<th>cornell notes: “i have a dream” (1963) speech pgs. 220-225</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What is the history of Negros in America? | John Doe  
Period 3  
9/12/2010 |
| Emmanuel Proclamation signed 5 score (100 yrs) ago, freed slaves | |
| King says Negros still not free though: | |
| o They’re crippled by segregation & discrimination | |
| o They’re poor even though white Americans prosper | |
| o They’re “exiled” in own land | |
| Why did they come (march) today? | |
| Came today to call attention to Negro’s condition | |
| Why is “now” the time? | |
| “Cash a check” from Capitol: USA hasn’t followed through on promise that all citizens are equal | |
| Why is “now” the time? | |
| King believes USA can still make good by granting justice and freedom | |
| Why is “now” the time? | |
| All God’s children deserve justice right away | |
| Why is “now” the time? | |
| Won’t be any peace in country until the Negro is granted citizenship rights like voting | |
8. LITERARY DEVICE BREAKDOWN

Objective & Explanation: The purpose of this activity is to familiarize students with the language and terms used to analyze an author’s craft and style. (These include device such as: metaphor, simile, personification, point-of-view, characterization, foreshadowing, tone, mood, flashback, etc.)

Directions: While reading the assigned chapter or passage, keep an eye out for the author’s use of literary devices. When finished, use your Literary Devices Handout to choose one literary device that you wish to investigate further and then discuss it using the following format:

A. **Definition:** Record the literary device you’ll be using and define it.

B. **Example:** Record the quote or passage that exemplifies your device. Be sure to give the context of the quote and a page number citation.

C. **Function:** In three or four thoughtful sentences, explain how your chosen example illustrates your literary device and give analysis. Why does the author use this device here? What is the significance? What is the impact on the reader? How does this relate to the text as a whole?

Example Literary Device Breakdown:

A. **Definition:** *Foreshadowing* - the author’s presentation of events and scenes in a work of fiction or drama so that the reader is prepared to some degree for what occurs later in the work. This can be part of the general atmosphere of the work, or it can be a specific scene or object that gives a clue or hint as to a later development of the plot.

B. **Example:** An example of foreshadowing is present in the opening paragraph of the final chapter of *Mice and Men*, where George realizes he is going to have to kill Lennie in order to keep Curly from killing him: “A water snake glided smoothly up the pool, twisting its periscope head side-to-side...a silent head and beak lanced down and plucked it out by the head...” (99).

C. **Function:** Steinbeck’s poetic description of an unaware snake being killed by a bird foreshadows that, Lennie will be killed by George, innocent and unaware of the danger surrounding him. Just as the snake is naturally going about his routine, Lennie simply cannot help being what he was naturally born to be. But in nature, the weaker are inevitably destroyed; perhaps Steinbeck is suggesting here that humanity is no different. Lennie is eventually shot in the head by his friend, just like the snake who was “plucked out by the head.” The foreshadowing here serves as a reminder to the reader that humanity is still part of the world’s natural order: Lennie is vulnerable and defenseless, and thus doesn’t stand a chance of surviving in such a cruel world.
9. TEXT CONNECTIONS

Objective & Explanation: The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to make personal connections to the text. Often while reading, we are reminded of experiences in our own lives that are similar to those experienced by characters in the text. Other times, a passage can remind us of a current issue, societal problem, or historical event. All of these connections allow readers to engage more fully with the reading and therefore think more critically about it.

Directions: Choose a passage from your reading that makes you think of a memory, experience, emotion, societal issue, or historical event. Then follow these steps:

A. Passage: Record the quote or passage that you’ve chosen with page citation.

B. Context: Explain what is happening in this passage.

C. Text Connection: Identify what kind of connection you made with this passage. Was it personal, social, historical? In three or four thoughtful sentences, explain this connection, giving details and comparisons that show significance. How does your connection give you an even deeper understanding of or insight into the passage?

Example Text Connection:

A. Passage: “‘Of course Lennie’s a Goddamn nuisance most of the time,’ said George, ‘but you get used to goin’ around with a guy, and you can’t get rid of him’” (41).

B. Context: In this passage, George is trying to explain to Slim why he sticks with Lennie even though he understands Lennie has special needs and is often a burden to him.

C. Text Connection: This quote reminded me of a friend I had in 4th grade named Cassie. Nobody liked her because she was a little bossy, a little strange, and she was also a bookworm. I got to know her on the bus one day, and she latched on to me, I think because she was pretty lonely for friends. Turns out, she was actually really friendly and loyal, just like Lenny was to George. At times, she was also a burden to me because she was unpopular, which everyone who’s ever been in fourth grade knows, made me unpopular for hanging out with her. But I just couldn’t hurt her feelings and make fun of her like everyone else or leave her all alone to face her tormentors. Thinking back on all this and making this connection to the reading has given me more insight into why George didn’t just abandon Lenny. At a certain point, you just start to care more about another person’s well-being than your own popularity or image.
10. “THEME”OLOGY STUDY

**Objective & Explanation:** Theme is the main idea or message of a text. The message can be about life, society, or human nature. The purpose of this activity is to trace the author’s development of theme across the text.

**Directions:** As you read, consider the author’s message to you. What is that message (theme)? Find lines in the text that support your understanding of this theme. Record the quotes, with citation, and then provide explanation and analysis showing how each quote helps to develop the theme. Use the model below to format your assignment:

In ___ (text and chapter) ___, one theme that emerges is ________________________________.

A. One piece of evidence that supports this theme is:
   “_____________________________________________________________________________” (p.)
   Analysis:___________________________________________________________________________

B. A second piece of evidence that supports this theme is:
   “_____________________________________________________________________________” (p.)
   Analysis:___________________________________________________________________________

C. A third piece of evidence that supports this theme is:
   “_____________________________________________________________________________” (p.)
   Analysis:___________________________________________________________________________

**Example “Theme”ology Study:**

In Chapter One of *Of Mice & Men*, a theme that emerges is the individual’s quest for companionship.

A. One piece of evidence that supports this theme is when George tells Lennie, “Guys like us that work on ranches are the loneliest guys in the world...but with us it’s different...we got someone to talk to who gives a damn” (13-14). [Analysis:] In this passage George and Lennie introduce to the reader their well-rehearsed rendition of what makes them different from all the other loners and drifters that work on the ranches. They know they have each other, and this is satisfying because all of us desire companionship.

B. A second piece of evidence that supports this theme occurs when Candy learns of George and Lennie’s plan to get a place of their own and wishes to join them:  “Maybe if I give you guys my money, you’ll let me hoe in the garden and even if I ain’t no good at it.  An’ I’ll wash dishes an’ little chicken stuff like that.  But I’ll be on our own place, an’ I’ll be let to work on our own place” (60).  [Analysis:]  In this passage, Candy learns of George and Lennie’s dream, and offers money to help them achieve it if he can be a part of it.  All three are tired of the life of the hired hand, drifting from place to place with no one and no place that belongs to them.  This dream will end the life of the desperate loneliness they have always known.

C. A third piece of evidence that supports this theme occurs in a conversation between Crooks and Lennie:  “’S’pose you couldn’t go into the bunk house and play rummy ‘cause you was black.  How’d you like that?  ’S’pose you had to sit out here an’ read books... A guy needs somebody—to be near him.’  He whined, ‘A guy goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody (72).’”  [Analysis:]  In this scene, Crooks, an African American, describes the desperate loneliness he feels.  Because of the color of his skin, no one will associate with him, and he spends his free time in solitary activities, removed from the others on the ranch.