January 2011

Meditations on a "Taut but Happy" Class

Bret Mulligan
Haverford College

Meditations on a Taut but Happy Class

Teaching and Learning Institute ~ Bret Mulligan

In the spring of 2009, I participated in the Faculty Pedagogy Seminar, which is supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI) at Bryn Mawr College. As part of the Seminar, a student consultant was assigned to observe one of my courses, *Tales of Troy,* which tracks the development of the myth of the Trojan War in various media from archaic Greece to modernity. At first I was primarily interested in learning how to foster better class discussions. But over the course of the semester, prompted by conversations with faculty in Seminar and with my student consultant, I came to understand that this goal was one aspect of a larger set of concerns that I had about the course and about my role as a teacher.

I have long felt that one of my responsibilities as a teacher is to create a comfortable environment in which students feel secure enough to tackle difficult questions and challenging material. And from student feedback, it seemed that I was more or less successful in promoting such an environment. Occasionally, however, a student would comment at the end of the semester that they felt I was 'too nice' and should have been more strict in enforcing this or that policy. At first, I tended to minimize the importance of such comments. After all, other students were not privy to the circumstances that led to the accommodations. And this was a price of cultivating a nurturing classroom, I thought. But when a similar concern was voiced during the mid-semester course evaluation for *Tales of Troy* that was conducted by my student consultant, I reconsidered the criticism. Discussing the matter with my student consultant, I came to appreciate how, by accommodating an individual, I did a disservice to the group, and, ultimately, I think, to the accommodated individual as well. This realization led me to reflect further on the type of classroom atmosphere I hope to foster, the kind of relationships I wish to have with my students, and how these, together with the organization of the course and the format of assignments, can contribute to a successful class.

Searching for a Metaphor

It so happened that during that semester I was reading Patrick O'Brian's *Master and Commander* series, which follows the undulating careers of Jack Aubrey, a Captain in the British Royal Navy, and his 'particular friend', Stephen Maturin—surgeon, naturalist, and spy extraordinaire—during the globe-spanning Napoleonic conflicts of the early ninetieth centuries. While teaching, conducting research, and participating in the *Teaching and Learning Initiative* seminar, Aubrey and Maturin were my (almost) constant companions, as I tore through all twenty of O'Brian's novels. Although the character of Maturin—a linguist, intellectual, and scholar—is more familiar to my own experience as a professor, as I read the novels I became increasing fascinated by the challenges Aubrey faced in leading and, yes, teaching his crew. While shunning the vanity of imaging myself as a dashing sea captain, I came to appreciate that Aubrey's captaincy provides an apt metaphor for the college classroom. As I sailed through O'Brian's novels (the naval men of the novels like nothing better than a pun), I noted how Aubrey dealt with challenges that were surprisingly analogous to those I face in the classroom. And through conversations with colleagues in the Pedagogy Seminar and with my student consultant, I began to draft a new blueprint for how I will organize and conduct my classes.

The Good Captain [*and the Effective Professor*]

As a captain in the age of sail, Aubrey's missions lasted months and sometimes years. The goals of the mission are often only generally proscribed and Aubrey had great latitude for personal judgement and discretion in how to execute them. On the ship, the only power

[1]

1

higher than the captain is God. For the professor, there is: *[the duration of a class; the demands of the curriculum; the autonomy of the professor within the class; the authority of the professor; the power differential between professor and student]*

He commands square-rigged sailing ships, complicated and labor-intensive vessels, that require a high-degree of training and close cooperation by the officers and crew to sail effectively—and even then they are always at the mercy of the elements. *[complex relationship between the elements of a course (readings, assignments, discussion, etc.); the difficulties in attaining course goals; the influence of exogenous factors]*

Sometimes Aubrey had a crack ship and an exciting mission to motivate a picked crew; but often, at least part of the crew was pressed, disgruntled, or even mutinous when Aubrey arrived. More often than not, with each new command, Aubrey inherited or received a new crew, comprising men (and the occasional woman), of wildly different experiences and abilities, from able sailors to untrained lubbers. Yet, regardless of how unpromising the timber of the crew may have been, Aubrey always set out with great energy to mold the disparate individuals of the crew into 'a happy ship'. *[knowing your students, their abilities and their limitations; the influence of morale on course success; the necessity of cultivating relationships with and among students; the difficulties of creating a coherent class from individual students and a professor]*

Finally, each ship had a character of its own and the captain and crew had to know its capabilities and limitations. Some ships were weatherly and great on the bow-line: you could point them in the direction that you wanted to sail (within the limitations imposed by the wind) and there you would go; others had terrible leeway —the wind would push them sideways—and what would be a quick and easy trip in a weatherly ship would require additional time and effort. Every captain had to

remember that the ship's course had to take ship, crew, and wind into account—no journey was ever the same, nor in a straight line. *[the limitations of student preparation; type and size of class; the physical space of the classroom; the necessity of adapting methods to circumstances]*

> "With the utmost care, Jack reiterated his arguments about the necessity for having a happy ship if one was to command an efficient fighting machine; he quoted examples of like and contrary cases; and his audience listened and approved"—Patrick O'Brian, *Master and Commander*, 244.

The Happy Ship and the Happy Class

The reader never hears Aubrey elaborating his theory of what makes a 'happy ship', and he suggests on more than one occasion that captains may forge their 'happy ships' in different ways. Nevertheless, throughout the novels there are certain traits common to 'happy ships':

A happy ship is cohesive: the crew enjoys one another's (close) company and believes that every man is trying his best to make the mission a success; a happy ship cannot withstand a 'Jonah', someone who separates themselves from the group, causes trouble for others, and jeopardizes the mission.

A happy ship is well-ordered but never cruel: a happy ship is not a lax ship—from captain to lubber, the crew should know what they contribute to the functioning of the ship and why they must do their duty competently; ideally this order is created by example and training. The crew seeks perfection for their own sense of accomplishment, and their respect for the Captain and each other, never out of fear for the 'cat' (o' nine tails).

A happy ship is active and challenged: a passive crew loses focus, loses efficiency, and loses respect for the officers; nothing forges a united crew faster than overcoming a challenge.

A happy ship has a happy, trusting commander: high morale flows from the example of the Captain, who should always be optimistic, who should never ask a crewman to take a risk or endure a hardship that he is not willing to undertake himself, who anticipates the needs of the crew before they begin to complain, and who trusts his officers and crew to do their duty.

A happy ship is successful: temporary setbacks do not break the happy ship, but ultimately a ship can only be happy if the crew believes it is succeeding on its mission (and enriching the crew along the way never hurts).

Different Types of Captains

Jack's healthy obsession with creating a 'happy ship' places him at odds with many other captains in O'Brian's novels, who often focus more on enforcing the appearance of order and seamanship than on having a well-ordered and effective crew and ship. These captains obsess about ship's paint (often to the point of painting over operational elements), the tautness of its rigging (to the detriment of the ship's sailing qualities), and the speed with which the crew can execute trivial maneuvers (at the risk of the crew's safety and training for more essential tasks, like gunnery). Such captains are frequently the most tyrannical, enforcing their order through cruel punishment of the most trifling offense, either real or perceived. To most observers, however, such captains appear models of authority and efficiency. Yet under the veneer of control, is a deeply unhappy ship. Their crews are discontented, and their ships are useless in a fight or a storm. And the crew flees at the first opportunity. *[proscription vs. structure]*

There are some captains of the opposite stripe, those who are lax and familiar with their crews, but who by sheer weight of personality and charisma fashion a happy ship. Cult might be the better term, as the crew's

[2]

allegiance is entirely to the man, not to duty or service. And although men endowed with such innate charisma can successfully command small ships with picked crews, such captains can rarely manage a larger ship, with a more disparate crew; and often chafe when they are ordered to work with others.

Forging a Happy Ship

In crafting a 'happy ship', Aubrey steers the middle course between being lax and overly strict. He is known as a 'taut captain', who makes clear from the beginning what his expectations are for his crew, who expects every crewman to do his duty to the utmost of his ability, and who maintains consistent vigilance for minor slips and infractions—not out of a sense of ego or a need to demonstrate his power, but in order to teach the seaman how to succeed in their job (and stay alive) and, crucially, to forestall larger and more widespread transgressions in the future. But unlike his peers, he abhors corporal punishment, and is comfortable letting the honest mistake become a learning experience for the malefactor.

Jack takes pains to know every man in the crew, and regularly invites officers and midshipmen to his table. He is friendly but not overly-familiar; he does not presume to intrude on the crew's prerogatives, nor does he seek to make social friends among them, as might happen on a lax ship.

'Happy', therefore, is not to be confused with permissive. It is the state in which a group of individuals know their roles, know how to succeed, and know that the captain has their interests at heart. Most crucially, Aubrey does not set out to make 'happy' sailors. This is the tactic taken by the lax captain (and professor), who curries favor among the crew by lenience and bonhomie —an unstable state in which the slightest inconvenience or setback is apt to turn the ship unhappy. The lax ship,

lacking as it does discipline and clearly-defined roles and boundaries for the crew, is often as unhappy as as that run by the tyrant, and rarely an efficient ship.

For Aubrey believes that the only guarantee of content sailors is their membership in a 'happy' group. The overall cohesion and efficiency of the group are paramount. But this is accomplished through the captain's attention to the individual. There are no artificial"team-building" exercises (so-called) on the 'happy ship'. Camaraderie and mutual respect are forged through the mutual experiences of attaining challenging goals. The result is a resilient confidence that comes from achievement, in which the crew is motivated without being terrified, respectful without being cowed, and daring without being reckless.

Forging a Taut and Happy Class

Mutatis mutandis, I feel that this is the kind of atmosphere that will be conducive to students achieving their intellectual (and personal) goals in my courses. In the following portfolio, I outline how I plan to cultivate a 'taut and happy' class, focusing in particular on how assignments can be used to complement one another, encourage metacognitive awareness, and promote a cohesive class dynamic.

The observations and insights in this portfolio emerged over the semester in which I taught my *Tales of Troy* class, as I met with fellow faculty and my student consultant to discuss matters pedagogical. Since the faculty in Seminar were drawn from several disciplines, our conversations tended to focus on principles and strategies that are generally applicable for cultivating student success—theory in the best sense of the word. I also met weekly with my student consultant, Ally, after she had observed a class session and emailed me an extensive set of observations and questions. In the

semester-long conversation held in these two complementary venues—faculty / student, group / individual, general / specific, theoretical / topical—a set of themes emerged that I see as crucial to fostering a successful classroom experience:

- *assessment: effective assessment, formative assessment*
- *connectivity (connections to lives of students and world)*
- *explicit goals*
- *goal-oriented planning*
- *knowing your students*
- *metacognitive awareness*
- *proscription vs. structure*
- *responding to feedback*
- *right tool*
- *signaling*
- *spiral teaching*
- *student-generated content*
- *taut and happy class*
- *transparency.*

This portfolio will describe how I plan to incorporate the principles and strategies I learned during my semester in the *TLI* seminar into the structure, activities, and assignments of my *Tales of Troy* class.

To help organize my thoughts, the themes listed above appear as tags at the start of entries in the portfolio. I also use a set of color-coded text boxes to differentiate between:

corrections to make in handouts and assignments

meditations on problems, feedback, methods, etc.

further questions to consider

[3]

GOAL-ORIENTED PLANNING

"What were your main goals for class today? Were there certain ideas you really want to bring out and consider, or did you just want to tease out different ideas as the students raised them from their own understanding of the book?"—Ally, 1/27

"Did you have answers to this question in mind already? It feels like a question you may be looking for specific answers for."—Ally, 3/17

Working with a student consultant compelled me to ask and answer the kind of metacognitive questions that I encourage my students to consider.

On the first day of class, as I describe the goals of the class, I ask students to identify their goals for the semester. In our weekly conversations, Ally routinely prompted me to justify what I was doing in the classroom and how these activities related to the explicit and implicit goals of the course. Through our conversations I noticed that although I designed the course and its assignments with these goals in mind, I rarely made explicit how an assignment later in the semester related to the goals articulated at the beginning of the course.

From class to class I like to think that I considered why I was undertaking a particular discussion or activity. But lost in the details of due dates, citation formats, and page counts, I often neglected to consider the connections between activities. Ally's observations induced me to consider how one goal might affect another, and how activities should complement each other.

[explicit goals/signaling] The first clause of this headline goal is in error; the goal is not to "examine" the goal is to "learn" *by examining;* the second clause strikes the correct stance: "understanding" is a valid goal.

[explicit goals/signaling] How will "appreciation" be promoted and assessed?

[explicit goals/goal-oriented planning] Given the significance of Vergil (and to a lesser extent Attic tragedy, should these topics be added to this/a new goal?

[goal-oriented planning] If only one day's activity supports this goal, is it a goal of the class, or is that activity subordinate to another goal? I could augment this aspect of the course, adding, for example, a supplemental viewing of a documentary.

COURSE GOALS

To ~~examine~~ the myths centering on the Trojan War, and understand how artists in successive cultures have adopted this familiar story.

BY THE COMPLETION OF THE COURSE, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

Identify and discuss the major phases, personalities, and events of the Trojan War Myth, so as to be able to recognize references to the story and appreciate their implications.

Appreciate and be able to discuss the influence of the Homeric versions of the Troy myth (or lack thereof).

Appreciate and be able to discuss how and why different authors and artists in different media and at different cultural moments (including our own) engaged and adapted the myth of Troy, including in the physical and visual arts.

Understand the historical and archaeological evidence for the Trojan War, and how beliefs about the truth behind the myth influenced stories about it.

Have improved your reasoning and writing skills, with the goal of communicating with a clear thesis, a developed argument, a coherent conclusion in an essay free from mechanical errors.

[right tool/effective assessment/connectivity] I already try to employ "backwards design" for my courses by articulating a single (albeit general) goal for the course and then specifying 4-to-6 competency or improvement goals that students should attain by the end of the semester. This semester, however, I realized that after I have worked to design a coherent, goal-oriented syllabus, my structuring of assignments has decidedly not followed from this process. Rather, my assignments have been based on a number of exogenous factors: the "standard" for the number and kind of assignments (based on what happened in courses I took; or the comments of senior colleagues); a desire to space assignments out over the semester, which influenced the *types* and *duration* of assignments. Having established the timing and general length of the assignment, only then did I think about crafting an assignment that relates to the course goals, that build on early activities or assignments, etc. **This points to a fundamental disconnect between evaluation and class activities**.

ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE THESE GOALS

QUIZZES					
FIRST ESSAY: Homeric Character	RECEPTION PROJECT: MODERN FILM	RECEPTION PROJECT: ANCIENT COMPARISON			
VISITING LECTURE (MUSIC)	TRIP TO PLAY	TRIP TO MUSEUM / LIBRARY EXHIBITS	RECEPTION PROJECT: MATERIAL CULTURE	RECEPTION PROJECT: MODERN FILM	WIKI PROJECT: Ancient Author / Work
VISITING LECTURE (TROY)	TRIP TO MUSEUM / LIBRARY EXHIBITS?				
FIRST ESSAY: Homeric Character	WIKI PROJECT: Ancient Author / Work	RECEPTION PROJECT	MID-SEMESTER PROJECT: Reflection & Reassessment of Journal	FINAL PROJECT: Reception of Modern Work	

READINGS

CLASS DISCUSSION & ACTIVITIES

JOURNAL

[4]

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

" I worry about such a formal setup for the discussion."—Ally, 1/27

"A student disagrees with another student, but talks directly to you. How could you deal with this so these students will talk to each other instead of only talking to you, could you give the first student an opportunity to respond or defend his point of view after being challenged and get them to address each other this way?"—Ally, 2/3

"The class energy feel like its slowing down, how can this be responded to? Can you highlight what made Thursday so lively? Was it the type of questions you asked, the subject matter being discussed, was it just a day when everyone was well rested?"—Ally, 3/3

In our conversations, Ally and I often grappled with the vagaries of class discussion, how the same people discussing similar material can alternately produce coruscating or dreary conversations. In particular we brainstormed ways to encourage students to discuss ideas with one another rather than responding to a series of prompts by me—that is, how to foster conversation rather than dialogue. In my meetings with Ally it became clear that while asking the "right" question is important, the format of the discussion--whole-class, small-groups, pairs--was often more influential on the effectiveness of the discussion.

Anxiety about misunderstanding a question or activity often hinders student participation. Ally's questions reaffirmed the need to provide structure or "scaffolding" for a class session and how the class activity contributes to their attainment.

[Blog post, 3/25/2009] "Within a given discussion, I try to avoid asking factual questions—unless they set up a discussion question. Discussion should not be reduced to verifying completion or comprehension. Since students have difficulty responding to "obvious" questions or ones in which they think the questioner has a specific response in mind, I try, in those instances when I do ask such a question, to indicate that this is the case [and that it will lead to another question]. Yet, even in instances were I do not have a particular response in mind, it seems that many students often assume that I must. This may [contribute to] discussions in my classes [that] are Socratic or "hub and spoke" [in format], with me posing a question, and a student or students responding. [to me and my prompt].

"the coin of the realm is the question, not the answer… the expression of intelligent confusion rather than a piece of information"
—an unattributed comment in my TLI notepad

Ideally, discussions [should] take the form of a multi-sided conversation, in which students are engaging each others opinions, while I occasionally introduce a question, [ask for elaboration and clarification], or redirect discussion. To encourage this form of discussion, I have been trying to formulate questions that pose a controversy, one that requires not analysis but debate. Although there have been some successes this semester, I still find this very challenging.

"Questions for discussion should come when class session is being outlined; not during/after detailed notes are being made; it should be among the first activities I should do, not the last!"— a TLI faculty colleague

To encourage broader [and more interactive] participation in class discussion this semester, I have been employing significantly more pre-discussion activities in class, such as breaking into pairs or small groups, short free-writing exercises, etc. I have also asked students to write in a journal for every class. One way of encouraging personal connections would be to ask students to open class with comments drawn directly from their journals, although this raises issues of privacy that may make certain students (and me) uncomfortable.

From course feedback in previous semesters, students generally say they enjoyed the frequency and content of discussions in my courses, although some wished they had more "structure". I have often been at a loss to square this with my own assessment of the nature of our discussions in which, if anything, there seems to be too much structure. Perhaps these students felt the discussions were too prescriptive but not structured? Or did they feel that certain aspects of the texts were not discussed and so we didn't "cover" the material. This is a valid critique, but also an unavoidable one. Given the nature and amount of the texts we are reading, there will also be further paths we could take. I, however, could better convey that no discussion can be (or should be) exhaustive.

[transparency/proscription vs. structure] Student comments this semester did not indicate that they felt a lack of "structure", I believe in large part because of the variety of supporting activities that I employed in class. Coverage remained a concern, although students indicated that they recognized that there was just not enough time to thoroughly discuss the texts in class without sacrificing a large amount of the course's coverage. All students indicated that, when forced to choose, they preferred exposure to more texts to extra time on each text.

[transparency/proscription vs. structure/knowing your students] Part of asking the right question is crafting and timing the question so that students understand what you are asking. Two student responses that are staples of educational humor illustrate the risks of being imprecise in your questioning.

TEACHER: Glenn, how do you spell "crocodile?"
GLENN: K-R-O-K-O-D-I-A-L"
TEACHER: No, that's wrong
GLENN: Huh uh, you asked me how I spell it.
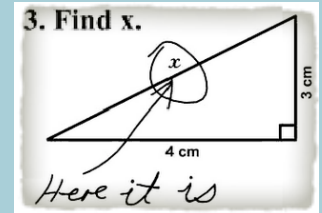
predict, connect, observe, argue; assess, decide, rank, grade, test, measure, recommend, convince, select, judge, explain, discriminate, support, conclude, compare, summarize

[transparency/proscription vs. structure/knowing your students] Reflecting on how I question students, I have noticed that although I pay a great deal of attention to the *type* of question that ask, I have only categorized questions into two types: factual and critical. But questions and conversations operate over a wider range than this taxonomy would suggest. Connected to a more nuanced typology of questions is greater attention to the language with which I pose them. Benjamin Bloom's discussion of the six categories of **cognition** could provide a useful model for formulating appropriate questions (*Taxonomy of Educational Objectives,* 1956).

[Bloom's Taxonomy]

[Revised Bloom's taxonomy, Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001]

[5]
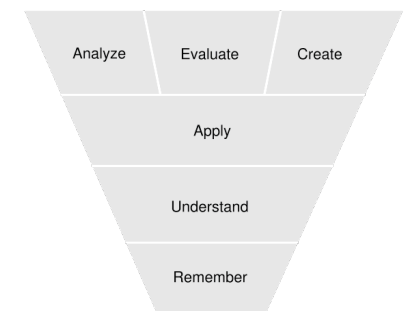
[Bloom's Taxonomy]

Knowledge   Remembering or recalling appropriate, previously learned information to draw out factual (usually right or wrong) answers.

Use words and phrases such as: *how many, when, where, list, define, tell, describe, identify, etc.*, to draw out factual answers, testing students' recall and recognition.

Comprehension   Grasping or understanding the meaning of informational materials.

Use words such as: describe, *explain, estimate, predict, identify, differentiate, etc.*, to encourage students to translate, interpret, and extrapolate.

Application   Applying previously learned information (or knowledge) to new and unfamiliar situations.

Use words such as: *demonstrate, apply, illustrate, show, solve, examine, classify, experiment, etc.*, to encourage students to apply knowledge to situations that are new and unfamiliar.

Analysis   Breaking down information into parts, or examining (and trying to understand the organizational structure of) information.

Use words and phrases such as: *what are the differences, analyze, explain, compare, separate, classify, arrange, etc.*, to encourage students to break information down into parts.

Synthesis   Applying prior knowledge and skills to combine elements into a pattern not clearly there before.

Use words and phrases such as: *combine, rearrange, substitute, create, design, invent, what if, etc.*, to encourage students to combine elements into a pattern that's new.

Evaluation   Judging or deciding according to some set of criteria, without real right or wrong answers.

Use words such as: assess, decide, measure, select, explain, conclude, compare, summarize, etc., to encourage students to make judgements according to a set of criteria.

—from http://www.teachervision.fen.com/
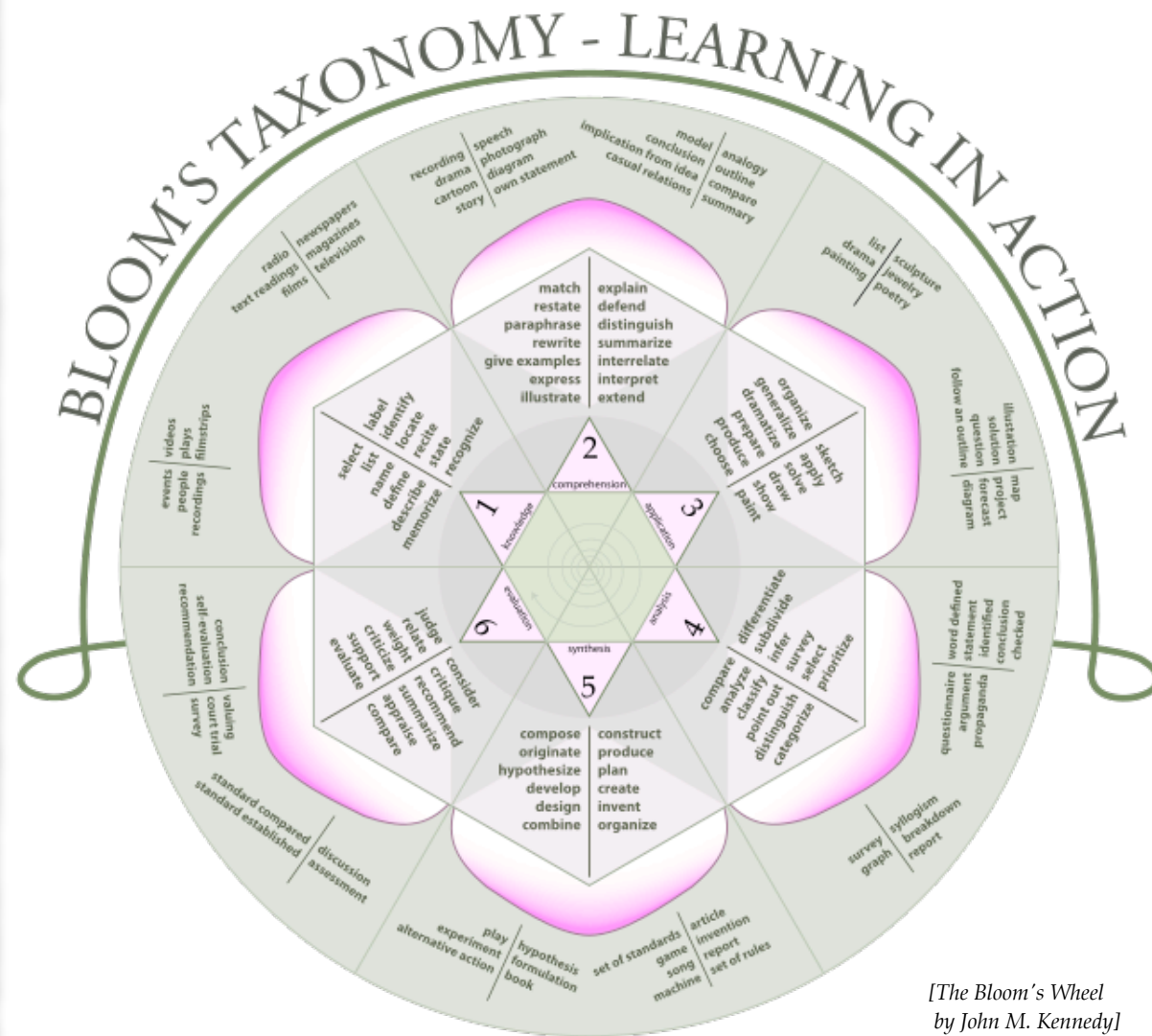
[The Bloom's Wheel by John M. Kennedy]

[6]

C~~REATING~~ R~~EFLECTIVE~~ A~~SSIGNMENTS~~ U<small>SING</small> A<small>SSIGNMENTS TO</small> E<small>NCOURAGE</small> R<small>EFLECTION</small>

When the semester began, I thought that this would be the last time that I would teach *Tales of Troy.* Although I love discussing the texts in this class and believe that knowledge of the myth yields great benefits for students who take the class, I was increasingly frustrated by the absence of a larger theme or themes that the students grappled with over the course of the semester. In short, the survey had a chronological but not intellectual destination, and I was looking forward to developing a new course that was organized around investigating a meaty intellectual question, rather than a corpus of texts/myths. I was also growing frustrated with the formal assignments and their assessment. This semester I have come to believe that these frustrations, which I thought resulted from different concerns, were in fact related. My dissatisfaction with the value of *Tales of Troy* and formal assignments both arose from my perception that elements of the course (readings,

assignments) lacked connection and did not contribute to developing and improving students' knowledge, reasoning, and abilities over the course of the semester.

The solution, I believe, is not (as I considered) moving from a corpus-course to a theme-course (e.g. *War & Trauma in the Tale of Troy; Homecoming and Sexuality in the Tale of Troy. etc.*), but to refashioning of the corpus-course, in which we return to the same characters and themes repeatedly over the course of the semester, into an opportunity for students to reflect, at many points throughout the semester, on a variety of themes, but more importantly on their own experiences, limitations, biases, and abilities and to develop, with an integrated series of assignments, their ability to grapple with difficult texts and difficult questions.

F<small>IRST</small> E<small>SSAY</small> A<small>SSIGNMENT</small>

A<small>SSIGNMENT</small>

Near the end of Book 6 of the *Iliad*, Hector reveals to Andromache a fatalistic vision of Troy's impending doom,

> "For in my heart and soul I also know this well:
> the day will come when sacred Troy must die,
> Priam must die and all his people with him..." (*Iliad* 6.530-32).

Later in Book 6, however, Hector appears to hold out hope that Troy might yet be saved, and as the events of the *Iliad* unfold, he becomes increasingly convinced of this possibility. In 2-to-3 pages, you are to trace Hector's evolving understanding of Troy's fate and how that influences his behavior on the battlefield.

Some of the questions you may want to consider include: what motivates Hector's initial change of opinion, or whether in fact a change of opinion occurs at all? How secure is Hector's newfound optimism? How do events confirm or alter his belief? Do you see any dangers that arise from Hector's optimism (for this, consider especially how others react to him as the *Iliad* progresses)? How does the description and characterization of Hector change as the Trojans come closer to firing the Greek ships (pay special attention to similes and his speeches)?

Be sure to support your analysis with **evidence** from the *Iliad*—i.e. citations and *short* quotations. And, as always in an academic essay, keep plot summary to the absolute minimum necessary for your argument.

Your only source for this assignment will be Homer's *Iliad*, Books 1-20. You are not to incorporate material from Chs. 21-24 or from outside of the *Iliad*. I do not expect you to engage secondary sources on this question; if you do so, however, be sure to include appropriate citation.

[transparency/explicit goals/right tool] This project invariably causes students difficulty. The short nature of the assignment was designed to compel students to be succinct, but on reflection, the scope of the prompt is simply too vast to be treated with any depth or detail in two-to-three pages, and the limited space promotes superficial and confused analysis, rather than concision.

[transparency/explicit goals/signaling] The linking of the analysis of "Hector's evolving understanding of Troy's fate and how that influences his behavior on the battlefield" to his contradictory comments in Book 6 also frequently led to confusion.

[transparency/explicit goals/right tool] Is the assignment appropriate? An analysis of a single character over several books of the *Iliad* is valuable for encouraging students to review the readings and discuss the phenomenon of character and its development in Homer. The later "comparison" essay in the Reception Project will likewise employ this mode of analysis, and so this essay provides valuable practice and feedback on this type of critical writing. Focusing on Hector, the central character during Achilles' withdrawal, is appropriate.

Perhaps the confusion could be remedied if it is made clear that this contradiction introduces the question of Hector's conception of fate but that their essay should treat Hector's *behavior* in regard to *fate* in the subsequent books, rather than explaining this specific contradiction; or should I remove mention of his comments to Paris, allowing students to engage that passage if it suits their argument, without suggesting that they "solve" this paradox.

[7]

"I feel like you rush through the examples of what the journal can discuss. If they are important for the students to focus on maybe you want to spend a little more time articulating the questions and why you think they are good focal points."—Ally, 1/27

"Have you been using the journals in class? Should you be trying to connect the journals to class more?"—Ally, 2/27

"Bringing in the journals – 1)Tell people ahead of time to bring in their journals and partner them up to share a specific entry they wrote with each other, have them talk about what questions or issues they raised, 2) you could pull quotes from the journals or the papers based on the journals and pose them to the class anonymously, that way no one is put on the spot but it shows that you are impressed by their thinking and want the class to take up some of the issues raised, would validate those who tend to be quiet in class."—Ally, 3/3

The journal has traditionally been the most controversial assignment in this class. Despite my pleas and protestations, many students found it drudgery. When I mentioned the project early in the semester, Ally's observations on my introduction of the project prompted me to revisit my explanation in the next class. Subsequently, we worked on small class activities that made the journal a more integrated component of students' intellectual inquiry in the course, rather than a (vaguely-connected) supplement to class discussions. Out of our conversations, I was inspired to revise the mid-term assignment to include a reflective component utilizing the journal (discussed below).

JOURNAL PROJECT

> ***"Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse but to weigh and consider."*** *— Sir Francis Bacon*

DESCRIPTION: With Bacon's advice in mind, our ultimate goal this semester is the critical, reflective engagement with the works that we will read and the artifacts that we will observe this semester. We read not (just) for meaning and enjoyment, but also to fire our imaginations and exercise our judgement; and to make us question, not only what we are reading, but recognize the challenges to ourselves that these works pose.

To facilitate this active, critical engagement throughout the semester, you will **write** a personal **journal entry** for every assignment—a running account of your reactions to the authors, works, and subjects you encounter during this course. Essentially, these entries will capture your first reactions and/or further considerations as you read (or re-read) the day's assignment. The purpose of this project is not to check on whether you have completed assignments (that is a given); it is to encourage you to think critically about readings, to elucidate questions that you have, to formulate questions to raise in class. In the past, students have commented that maintaining a journal helped them to understand and appreciate the works that we will be discussing, as well as, more prosaically, proved a valuable study aid for papers and exams.

WHAT SHOULD I WRITE? At times, focus questions will be provided to guide your meditations, but routinely your journal should reflect your personal thoughts and/or questions about a reading. Among other possibilities, a successful journal entry can be a series of questions that the text provoked and that you would like to raise with the class; relating a character or event to a personal experience or another work read outside of class; or a brief critical analysis of a passage or character.; or a summary of the reading, interspersed with questions and observations. Occasional creative responses—e.g. short stories, poems, and artwork—are encouraged, but most of your entries should take the more traditional form.

[signaling/proscription] Why do most of the entries need to of the "more traditional form"? I wanted to students to prepare for the sorts of literary analysis that we would have in class. But this indicates that I find the more creative responses to be of lesser significance than "traditional" reactions. Is this true? Yes and no. As many students noted in their mid-course and final feedback, the journal provided the most extensive and sustained writing they have undertaken at college (woe betide us!). Perhaps the solution is to emphasize this benefit of "traditional" entries while more strongly encouraging creative responses, or at least not disparaging other types of entries.
Add to DESCRIPTION, "In the past... "In previous courses, students have commented that maintaining the journal helped them to understand and appreciate the works that we will be discussing. Many also noted that their comfort and facility with academic writing was significantly improved by the journal.
Change this to read: "Creative responses—e.g. artwork, collage, short stories or plays, poems, videos—are strongly encouraged."

[knowing your students/responding to feedback] In responding to mid-course feedback, I reminded students that they are welcome to engage in creative responses, and that the journal is a sphere for engagement; students can engage in any number of ways; and that those who are getting a lot from the more traditional approach should not feel any pressure to make a drawing. Everyone should do what works for them.

[knowing your students/encouraging connections to the world and lives of students] This call, to think about readings in the context of a student's own experience, was new to the assignment this time. It helped transform the reading journals from a rather mechanical compendium of literary criticism into a true personal reflection on the art we were considering as a class. To be sure, the degree to which some students revealed aspects of their personal lives was surprising and, occasionally, uncomfortable: how can I (should I) evaluate intense personal revelations with the same dispassionate, critical eye as a character analysis or a mock casting-call? Despite such challenges, the increased personal investment in the journal more than outweighed whatever discomfort I may have experienced. I will be sure to highlight and encourage this aspect of the journals next time.

[signaling] I say that students should "write" an entry, but I mean to encourage students to engage in a more diverse set of activities by drawing, composing poems, etc. Could I find a more media-neutral verb: *compose, craft, produce*? I should also remove "Occasional" for the later prompt.

[signaling/proscription vs. structure] Students inevitably find onerous the production of journal entries in advance of *every* class session. In the evaluation rubric, I mention that *"not every reading or activity will strike you with the same force and the occasional brief entry is to be expected."* Is this a point where more explicit targets would be beneficial? Could I say that students must complete entries for 25 of the 27 assignments? I avoided this in the past because it struck me as making the journal more arbitrary—something that just needed to be done x number of times over the course of the semester, rather than an integral component of the intellectual experience of the course. Perhaps the answer lies not in encouraging entries to be omitted or exempting an undefined (but small) number of superficial entries... [see comment on "when should I write"]

[signaling/connections/metacognitive awareness] This semester the journal was (mostly) a personal artifact. The only exception was the mid-semester essay, which asked students to reflect on an entry and a belief articulated in the journals.
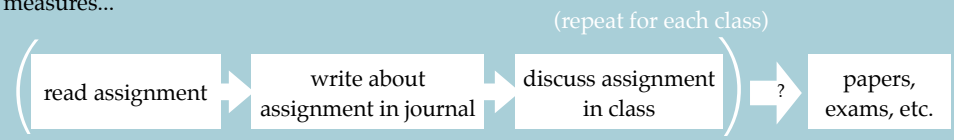*ADD:* At several points during the semester, your journal will provide the basis for in-class activities and reflective assignments. It will also provide the backbone of your PORTFOLIO, from which your final evaluation for the course will be based.

[8]

... To facilitate this active, critical engagement throughout the semester, you will write a personal journal entry for every assignment—a running account of your reactions to the authors, works, and subjects you encounter during this course. ==Essentially, these entries will capture your **first reactions** and/or **further considerations** as you read (or re-read) the day's assignment.==
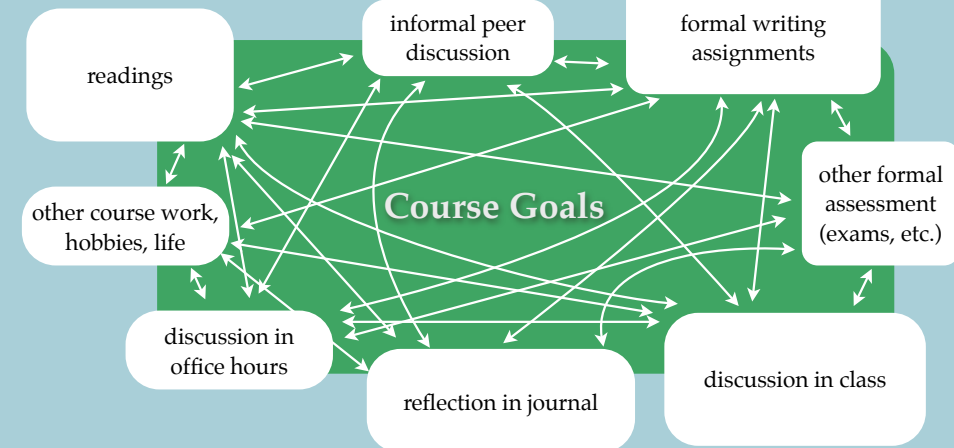
[...]

WHEN SHOULD I WRITE? Journal entires must be written **contemporaneously with the assignment**; "catching up" on several entries after the fact is ==**not only drudgery but vitiates the purpose of maintaing a journal.** As such, "catch up" entries will not receive credit. You always may, and in fact are encouraged to, return to earlier entries to elaborate or comment on your original thoughts and reactions.==

[metacognitive awareness] I added this sentence without much consideration this semester. But I now realize it is vital to encouraging the reflective process that I want students to engage in over the course of the semester. In particular it highlights that their engagement with the artifacts of the course is not a *reiterative linear model* with indirect relevance to assessment measures...

(repeat for each class)

read assignment → write about assignment in journal → discuss assignment in class → ? → papers, exams, etc.

...but is *hermeneutic* and *rhizomatic*:

readings | informal peer discussion | formal writing assignments | other formal assessment (exams, etc.) | other course work, hobbies, life | discussion in office hours | reflection in journal | discussion in class

Course Goals

Inspired by a diagram shared in the *TLI* seminar by a faculty colleague

[metacognitive awareness/proscription vs. structure/goal-oriented planning]
The goal of the journal is have students record their reactions to the artifacts we encounter *over the course of the semester*. I did not, however, want to collect or verify every entry: in part because it would signal that the exercise was more about checking that students did the reading, which was *not* the goal of assignment; and also because of restrictions on my own time. So, how to make sure that students did not simply write out reactions in the day(s) before journal would be evaluated? Require students to write *before* every class. Why *before* and not after class? Because the reflections in the journal should spur more thoughtful discussions in class.

Does the journal succeed in promoting better discussion? For the most part, yes, I think so—to compare to other courses in which I have not used a journal.

But except for those few classes where the journal was an explicit prompt for class discussion, it is not necessary that every member of the class have written an entry before class, only that a considerable number of students need to have done so. After all, the student who is legitimately confused or who did not complete the reading is unlikely to contribute much to our whole-class discussion or to small-group conversations. They should not write something for the sake of writing something: that changes the activity from one promoting consideration and reflection to one of drudgery—exactly the sort of busy-work assignment I do not want students to equate with their journal.

A better model: a better model would be one in which students are *strongly encouraged* to write before class, in order that they can help formulate their own opinions and questions before we come together as a class; students, however, would be encouraged to write in their journals not only before class, but in class (during structured moments of reflection) and after on their own (either immediately after or, even better, days or weeks after the initial reading or entry).

Rather than setting a standard (complete a thoughtful entry in advance of each class session) and then explicitly recognizing that this standard cannot be met (and implicitly acknowledging that it cannot be verified), I should recognize that the absence of comment in fact creates an opening for reflection after a student has engaged with the opinions and analyses of instructor and peers in class, or has encountered another reading or discussion at a later point or in another class that sparks an intellectual engagement with the particular reading. Students must, at some point, return to this entry—be it after class or later in the semester—to *reflect* on the reading *or* class discussion.

questions about revised model (and preliminary answers): should students have to complete a certain percentage of entries ahead of time? (no) Should they have to write *something* before class? (yes, even if it is a single question) Should substantial entries be completed before class? (I think yes, a "majority" of entries should be completed beforehand) Should students indicate which reflections were written before and after class? (absolutely, in part this will be to check that a "majority" were "proflective" (?) but also to indicate if the reflection is immediately after class or later in the semester; there is not stigma to later reflections, indeed they are to be encouraged.

How can these reflections and revisions be integrated into the student PORTFOLIO?

[9]

HOW LONG SHOULD ENTRIES BE? The length of entries is less important than their content, but effective entries are generally at least ~~one~~ two handwritten page (although in my experience they tend to be longer in practice). Of course, not every reading or activity will strike you with the same force and the occasional brief entry is to be expected.

[explicit goals] Since most effective entries are longer than one page in practice, as I note, should I just indicate that in the assignment? Is the phrase "length of entries is less important than their content" misleading? Obviously there is a connection between length and depth of treatment. Can I find a clearer way to indicate this?

FORMAT: You have two options for the format of your journal:

1) *a trusty notebook*: the specific type is guided by your preference. Since your journal will be collected during Week 5 (2/19), I suggest that you do not use the same notebook that you use for other courses. If you keep your journal in your notebook for this course, I request that you place your journal entries in a separate section. I also request that you refrain from colored inks that are difficult to read (pink, light green, sparkling etc.). Typing your journal is also acceptable.

2) *an on-line journal or blog*: If you decide to use a blog for your journal, please send me the link as soon as possible. If you would like to publicize it to your classmates, I am happy to assist. If you are interested in establishing a **group blog** with other members of the class, please contact me for additional details. Free blogs are available through services such as *Blogger* (blogger.com) and *Wordpress* (wordpress.com).

[explicit goals] I want students to keep their journals in the format which they are most comfortable. The format was largely irrelevant when the journal was more or less an isolated aspect of the class that was rarely brought into class and was not included in a portfolio. If I ask students to bring journals to class, does this place bloggers at a disadvantage? Or can they just print out their entries for that day? Or call up their blog on a phone/laptop? The electronic version does cause constraints of the sort of reflective activities we can do *in class* (unless there is prior notice or I print out the entries for them), but many students like to share their experiences with friends, etc. and this should be encouraged for those students who wish to do so. I should have collected and published a list of the class bloggers so that other students could check them out if they so chose. I will also use these as examples for next time, which will likely encourage more students to use the blogging path than the traditional/typed notebook path.

The existence of bloggers suggests that the final portfolio should be able to be assembled in both print and electronic formats. Bloggers could, for example, post papers, etc... but what about revisions and grades? Would students be comfortable if they simply blocked out grades? A better question: if electronic, does it have to be shared? No; it could be electronic because that is the most convenient mode for the student to compile and associate their materials, but this could be me made available via Blackboard, etc. to me.

Some Class Activities Using the Journal

These activities can help forge the connections illustrated in the "rhizomatic" model on p. 9.

I. Have students **review** their journal entry during the first few minutes of class; entry to:
A. Pair[-Share] about the salient aspects of reading
B. "Text Rendering" (this could be done orally or by writing phrases on board)
C. Question formation (for class or groups)
II. Have students **revisit** their journal entry for the last ten minutes of class, reflecting or elaborating on their entry.

III. Have students **share** their journal entries in small groups.
A. *Advantages*: students have direct exposure to the types of inquiry in which their peers are engaging in their journals; illustrates connections/range of approaches
B. *Disadvantages*: as students can engage personal subjects in their journals, they would have to know ahead of time that this entry was going to be used in this way. Would exposure of journals inhibit students from perhaps more productive, deeper, and riskier engagement?
IV. ???

[10]

MID-SEMESTER PROJECT: REFLECTION & REASSESSMENT OF JOURNAL

"Great way to deal with this, I feel like this essay will make the journals meaningful, especially since you just read and respond to them, I think the class will really appreciate this assignment"—Ally, 2/24

Over several conversations with my student consultant, we developed an idea for a different kind of mid-term assignment. The decision to use the journal as the basis for a reflective mid-term assignment was transformational. In their mid-term and end-of-semester feedback, almost all students reported that keeping a journal was worthwhile and contributed to their ability to draw connections between the different topics and texts that we examined. Many reported that it made them more assured and fluid in their writing. Others reported that it gave them the confidence to speak in class.

The last time I taught this class, this the second essay assignment was a simple "compare and contrast" essay.

> For this essay you are to compare the characterization of a single Greek or Trojan as he or she appears in an Athenian tragedy and either the Iliad or Odyssey.

[right tool/connectivity (to lives of students and world)] The comparison essay is useful in building towards the final project, but it need not be on this topic and should be contextualized within the framework of reception. As a result, I will include this as one option in the RECEPTION PROJECT.

In light of conversations with my student consultant and the participants of the seminar, I decided to replace this essay with a reflective essay that engaged the thoughts and work that students had undertaken in their JOURNALS.

[metacognitive awareness/transparency] The phrasing of this is misleading, as "taking stock" and "reassessing" are not goals, but means towards our goals. I should think of ways to link the activity explicitly to the goals of the class, and to make certain that these goals encompass the reflective process of deep education.

Our mid-semester essay will provide the opportunity for you to take stock of what you have learned in the first half of the course, as well as provide a venue in which you can reassess–in light of your evolving understanding of the Legend of Troy and its manifestation in the Homeric epics–a particular observation, question, moment of frustration or enjoyment that you captured in your Journal.

Part 1 (~3 pages): Reflecting on your engagement with the readings and discussions.

Read your journal and answer one of the following questions:

1) Do you see a pattern or common theme emerging in the topics or moments in the works that you chose to comment on? Why is this theme interesting to you and what connection do you see between the texts and you personal and/or academic experience.

2) How do the perspective and knowledge gained in class so far cause to you reassess a fundamental assumption or perspective that you were bringing to your earlier analysis and discussion of the Iliad and Odyssey? [Note, think not about a specific observation or comment —you can reassess that in Part 2—but a broad assumption, method, or approach that informed many comments or questions]

Part 2 (~3 pages): Reassessment [of an entry]in light of new perspectives or information.

Discuss one of the following:

1) Find a thematic question you raised in your journal and answer this question based on your further reading and class work. As part of your response, you may want to explain why this question was significant to you. Note: this should not be a question of fact (e.g. how does Menelaus have two children if Hermione is his only child), but of interpretation.

2) Find a position you took in your journal that you would now challenge or disagree with. Describe why and how you now interpret a character, passage, or theme in a different way.

3) Discuss a moment or line of thought, reflection, or analysis you have noted and/or developed within your journal that you think is different or somehow takes a different angle on the texts than the angle(s) that have informed class discussions.

[metacognitive awareness/transparency] Would it be better to move from the general to the specific or the specific to the general? Perhaps best to leave to up students; make sure to indicate that students respond to the prompts in the order they find most productive.

[right tool/metacognitive awareness/connectivity/transparency] This project provided a venue in which students could contemplate their own development in the course and also *confront* their biases and suppositions. The reflections that students produced were, for the most part excellent, and I was very pleased with the seriousness and insight that students displayed. In the mid-course feedback, a few students mentioned that they did not find the exercise valuable or that the different nature of the essays made them uncomfortable. The question of utility can be addressed in part by explicitly locating the reflective essay within the encompassing framework of the PORTFOLIO. Stressing the *rhizomatic* nature of course activities throughout the semester will help contextualize the activity. Being more transparent about the *purpose* of the activity, should also address the concerns of students.

[metacognitive awareness/transparency] This note points out that the difference between the two prompts is not sufficiency clear. *Part 1* is supposed to consider the journal as a whole; *Part 2* is supposed to encourage the reassessment of a specific entry. I should *Add* language to the introduction of each part to make this difference clear.

[11]

GROUP PRESENTATIONS ON ANCIENT WORKS

BASIC INFORMATION

GOAL: in a group of three, gain insight on the influence of the myth of Troy on an important ancient author whom we will not read as a class, and to provide your classmates with an introduction to the author and summary of the influence of the Troy myth on their work, with an eye towards drawing connections to the broader themes of our class.

DURATION: approximately 10 minutes

INCLUDE: you may want to provide a handout with basic information about the author and/or work; I can provide photocopying assistance. You may also, of course, present this information on the blackboard.

PROCESS AND INSTRUCTIONS

1. Select which reading you would like to present. You may form your group of three yourself, or I can match groups based on interest in a reading. A list of suggested readings is on course blog.
2. Familiarize yourself generally with the author and work you are presenting....

SUGGESTED AUTHORS AND SELECTIONS, WITH DATE OF PRESENTATION

3-Oct   Theocritus, *Idyll 11* — the softer side of Polyphemus the Cyclops, who pines for the love of the nymph Galatea.

PRESENTATION TOPIC: DIO CHRYSOSTOM

1. Describe an interesting observation or concept that you learned from this presentation and why or how you think it will continue to shape your understanding of ancient culture.

2. Please give the presenters one piece of advice for how they could have improved their presentation (constructive comments on content or technique are appropriate).

[right tool/responding to feedback] In mid-course feedback, students noted a gap between what they learned from presenting (a great deal) versus what they learned from listening (very little). They commented that the duration of the presentations (10 minutes) was too short to present everything that they felt they needed for a coherent presentation. Student presenters also commented that, because students have not read some/all of the works, made the presentations that much more challenging; students in the audience commented that they found it very difficult to gain much depth from the presentations for the same reason.

Why have presentations? This is clearly articulated in the "Goal" section of the assignment and are consistent with the goals of the course. My intention was for students to practice presenting and to illuminate the quirky diversity of classical literature and how it relates to the canonical works on which we focus our readings.

Does this exposure and engagement need to be accomplished through Presentations? No. While these goals are important and I want to maintain them in the course, they need not be linked.

In place of formal presentations (in-essence, mini-lectures) groups of students can **assume leadership roles in discussions for a given class**, their questions and comments certainly building from their observations in journals. I might prompt them to research a topic, read an article, etc. and incorporate that information into their moderation of the discussion.

In place of in-class presentations, the group could **compose a wiki-page about the ancillary text**. One of the assignments in the second half of the course could see the students reading all of these short introductions, selecting the one that seems to relate most to the central theme they identified in the reflective mid-term assignment, reading the short work, and writing a short response paper on how this relates to the theme they are developing.

This assignment, which would require students to engage an ancient work, would be one of the "competencies" that lays the foundation for their final project.

[connectivity/right tool] By shifting to "wiki" pages in place of in-class presentations, I can re-evaluate the works that students *should* explore, rather than having that selection controlled by readings on specific days. Will allow me to **include Ovid's *Heroides*** and more minor works like *Priapea* 68 or the Allia Potestas epitaph (CIL VI 37965; see Henriksen 2008)**. I can see several advantages to having students complete the "wiki"s for specific classes: provide context/contrasts as the presentations would have; distribute evaluation work for me; create instructional space so that I can properly advise student groups. They could include short videos, so that they do work on oral presentation skills.

[student-generated content/feedback/metacognition] Having students read the page (before? after?) class would permit student feedback to the creators of the "wikis" on model of successful student feedback for presentations, which students wrote for 5-10 minutes after each in-class presentation.

[12]

RECEPTION PROJECT (DRAFT)

This semester, there were no formal assignments between the mid-semester reflection and the final paper. In previous years, this space was occupied by the Mid-term [discussed below].

I would like to have students have more practice with formal writing before the large-scale final project, as well as to have formal practice on comparing artifacts of different media (text and plastic and filmic), as well as texts of different time periods. I would like students to have experience working outside of class on these sorts of issues.

Rather than a single assignment, I would rather students have multiple opportunities to engage different critical approaches, to explore different media, and to work individually or in groups.

DRAFT ASSIGNMENT

In the second half of the course, as we move into the Athenian, Roman and post-classical periods, we will consider works that engage the Homer along one or more of the axes of reception we identified in class [see blog post]. Your third project asks you to seek out and consider the representation of the Troy myth in theater, literature, material culture, and film.

To that end, you will complete one activity from each of the three modules (I–III) below. Before beginning each activity you will read a short work of scholarship that will provide some intellectual context about how to approach the works.

Group-work: you are *strongly* [?] encouraged to work on these activities with up to two partners (for a total of three students per group). When working in a group, you may either submit individual essays, coordinate essays that treat or debate different aspects of the work being analyzed, or collaborate on a single group essay.

Project Goals: Considering the reception of these works will bring you into contact with a range of material related to the core texts we are discussing in class, will help you review the salient aspects of the Homeric epics was we move into later cultural periods, and will lay an interpretative and theoretical foundation for your final project in which you will be discussing how a modern work engages the Troy Myth.

[connectivity/transparency] I plan on adding a section like this to all future assignments, indicating not only what the purpose of the assignment is, but how it connects to the overall course goals and other activities.

I. COMPARISON

Read: the Wiki-pages on Ancient Authors [see PRESENTATIONS]

✦ Briefly compare the characterization of a single Greek or Trojan as he or she appears in one of the "wiki" works with that in either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*.   **OR**

✦ Briefly compare the characterization of a single Greek or Trojan as he or she appears in one of the "wiki" works and that in an Athenian tragedy.   **OR**

✦ Briefly compare the characterization of a single Greek or Trojan as he or she appears in one of Ovid's *Heroides* and that in either the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, or *Aeneid*.

II. MATERIAL CULTURE

Read: **TBD**

✦ Comment on the visual representation of an episode of the Tale of Troy in a work of ancient art you saw at either 1) the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2) the "Troy" exhibit in Magill Library, or 3) the University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology. **OR**

✦ Comment on the visual representation of an episode of the Tale of Troy in a work of post-Classical art you saw at either 1) the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2) the "Troy" exhibit in Magill Library, 3) Philadelphia Museum of Art (which owns Cy Twombly's "Fifty Days of Iliam" and a large number of other Troy-related paintings and etchings).

III. CINEMATIC RECEPTION

Read: **TBD**

✦ Discuss how a scene in the film *Contempt* gains context, texture, depth, or meaning by alluding, emulating, expanding, or rivaling an analogue in a specific Classical work or the "multitextual" Tale of Troy. **OR**

✦ Discuss how a scene in the film *Naked* gains context, texture, depth, or meaning by alluding, emulating, expanding, or rivaling an analogue in a specific Classical work or the "multitextual" Tale of Troy. **OR**

✦ Discuss how a scene in the film *Oh Brother Where Art Thou* gains context, texture, depth, or meaning by alluding, emulating, expanding, or rivaling an analogue in a specific Classical work or the "multitextual" Tale of Troy.

DUE: One activity from each module is due at regular intervals throughout second half of the semester. [Weeks 9, 11, and 13]. *Nota bene*: these dates are the *due date* but you are welcome to complete the modules or whole project in advance of these due dates.

[right tool/structured vs. proscription] During our conversation with the student consultants in seminar this semester, a variety of "flexible" systems for due dates were mentioned. Since few of the formal writing assignments in the class are linked to specific classroom activities, a flexible model has much to recommend it. I think I will employ the "flex days" bank model [see under ASSESSMENT]

[13]

FINAL PROJECT: APPROACHING MODERN TALES OF TROY

For the final project, I wanted students to engage a modern "Troy" work. This would require them to reflect on earlier works in the tradition of the Troy Myth (Homer, tragedy, the *Aeneid*) and discuss how the modern work is improved by engagement with this myth. This assignment is linked to GOAL THREE ("Appreciate and be able to discuss how and why different authors and artists in different media and at different cultural moments (including our own) engaged and adapted the myth of Troy, including in the physical and visual arts.")

ASSIGNMENT

Your final project will provide the opportunity to explore how a modern (i.e. twentieth or twenty-first century) work engages, manipulates, elaborates, or transforms the Tale of Troy. A list of recommended titles can be found on the reverse. In the final two weeks of the semester, you (with classmates who are reading on the same work) will present some preliminary ideas about your modern work in class. You will then produce an 8-to-10-page essay on some aspect of the work's engagement with the Tale of Troy.

The topic and approach of your essay is entirely your own, but I strongly recommend focusing on a compelling aspect, character, scene, motif, or device in the modern work that resonates with either a specific ancient work we have read or the "multitextual" Legend of Troy. Your essay must present more than summary of the Troy material in a modern work and should explore an aspect in sufficient detail so as to be a compelling presentation and analysis of the issue. I, of course, stand ready to help you select a work, formulate your topic, and development your argument.

COMPONENTS: 1) A synopsis of your project; 2) A class presentation on your project; 3) A 8-to-10 page essay.

2) After you have read (or re-read) your modern work, begin working on your essay and your class presentation. This presentation should briefly introduce the author and work, discuss how it relates to the Tale of Troy, and mention any preliminary thoughts you have on the direction of your paper to illustrate the variety of approaches available to the work. Since you will have no more than 10 minutes to present your project to your classmates (15 if you are in a larger group), carefully consider how best to present your material.

[right tool/responding to feedback/student-generated content] A common theme during the mid-course feedback was that students found presentations on material they had not read to be ineffective [see PRESENTATIONS for further discussion]. Why did I plan to have presentations? I wanted students to be exposed to a wider range of modern versions of the Troy Myth than we would have time to read for class, and to know the sorts of approaches that students were taking to the modern works. I also wanted students to have another change to present material, incorporating the feedback I gave for their presentations on ancient works. The first two of these three goals are better accomplished by groups writing, and students reading, synopses and lists of the theses of individual final projects; the writing of synopses is very similar to the the presentations on ancient works that students did, and so the feedback is relevant and requires them to transfer the comments from one medium to another. With this in mind, I revised the Final Project, substituting a collaborative blog post for the group presentation.

3) After you have read (or re-read) your contemporary work, write an introduction and summary of the book with your classmates who are reading the same work. The introduction and summary prepared by the group will be posted on the course blog.

This post should briefly introduce the author, summarize the work (without spoiling it), discuss how it relates to the Tale of Troy and (if applicable) highlight connections to the major themes we have discussed this semester. To this summary, each member of the group should list (in a few sentences) the topic and preliminary thoughts on the direction of that his or her final essay will take.

4) Read each of the summaries written by your classmates and write a *brief* (3–4 sentence) explanation of which Troy-related work you would like to read next.

[metacognitive awareness/connectivity (learning outside the classroom)] Writing a collaborative summary and listing the topics of their final projects accomplished most of what was accomplished by presentations, but it did not expose the rest of the class to the other modern works, which was, after all, the central goal of the original group presentations. In place of listening to a presentation, however, students read each of the blog posts by the groups and then included a short explanation of which work they would read next. Students therefore had to read each of the posts, think about what they found most intriguing over the course of the semester, and then explain how the next work they would read (notionally) engaged those interests or questions. I was pleased with the level of reflection and thought shown by those students who completed this—several students did not complete the reflection; as several of these were otherwise quite conscientious students, I suspect it was because this aspect of the assignment was added on after the assignment was originally given. By including it from the beginning, I think that such confusion will be avoided.

[14]

Modern Troys: Simmons's Ilium

Posted by bmulligan on May 02, 2009
Activities, Classical Tradition / No Comments

Teaser Plot Summary

Thomas Hockenberry, once a classics professor, now works for the ancient gods as a scholic during the Trojan War. Each day he observes the battle and reports his findings back to the muse he serves. While the events at first strictly adhere to Homer's account in the Iliad, the plot soon diverges.

On the Earth, the race of humans is no more than one million and could care less about things such as reading and writing. However, due to the curiosity of one man named Harman, a small group of new-style humans set out to learn about their own world. Their encounter with the only old-style human left on Earth leads them on an eye-opening adventure.

Mahnmut, a lover of Shakespeare's sonnets, and Orphu, a devotee of Marcel Proust, are moravecs, sentient creatures with both organic and mechanical parts. They are selected for a secret mission: to deliver a Device to Olympos Mons on Mars, a hotbed of quantum instability. Continue reading...

[responding to feedback/connectivity (learning outside the classroom)] An excerpt from one of the modern work summaries posted to the blog. All the synopses were of high quality, far beyond what would have been achieved by a group presentation. The blog synopsis also avoided a potential problem of group presentations: the unequal distribution of students among the modern works. By allowing students to write summaries, it was less relevant if a group had 8 students (as did *Ilium*) or 2 (as did *Seven Sisters*). Since it was very important that students be able to self-select the text on which they wanted to work, the different format provided another unexpected but essential benefit.

[responding to feedback/connectivity (learning outside the classroom)] Several students expressed confusion about the tone that synopsis should take. After several conversations in office hours and class, it was decided that the synopsis should be *truthful* but *persuasive*—that is it should attempt to make the case to the other members of the class that they should read this work next; the synopsis, however, was not advertising and needed to disclose the challenges and limitations of the work that would, after all, be read by an individual without the direct support of professor or class.

Next time: The purpose of this summary is to entice your Troy-trained classmates into reading the work over the summer... so your synopsis should be accurate, be thorough, but should also *be interesting and intriguing*.

3) After you have read (or re-read) your contemporary work, write an introduction and summary of the book with your classmates who are reading the same work. The introduction and summary prepared by the group will be posted on the course blog.

This post should briefly introduce the author, summarize the work (without spoiling it), discuss how it relates to the Tale of Troy and (if applicable) highlight connections to the major themes we have discussed this semester. To this summary, each member of the group should list (in a few sentences) the topic and preliminary thoughts on the direction of that his or her final essay will take. *[Add]*

4) Read each of the summaries written by your classmates and write a *brief* (3–4 sentence) explanation of which Troy-related work you would like to read next.

[connectivity (learning outside the classroom)/metacognitive awareness] This could provide a useful framework for the final component of the PORTFOLIO: rather than a very short explanation, the meditation on which work they would read next could become the venue in which students would summarize what they found interesting in the ancient and modern readings they did this semester, as well as articulate the questions they still have.

[15]

PORTFOLIO

To make connections between activities and document student learning over the course of the semester, the next time I teach *Tales of Troy*, I plan to have students develop a semester-long PORTFOLIO. The backbone of the portfolio will be the STUDENT JOURNAL, whose central role in the portfolio will help make clear its importance to the success of the class and its linkage to the activities and evaluation of student work.

The MID-TERM REFLECTIVE ESSAY will be similar to the one I assigned this year in which students 1) re-evaluated an opinion or bias from early in the course and 2) identified a common theme evident in their journals, will promote *metacognitive awareness*. This assignment will also serve to identify a theme or themes that students will continue to explore for the rest of the semester, in short

RECEPTION ESSAYS which lead progressively to their FINAL PROJECT, as well, hopefully, in their conversations in and outside of class.

When framing the novels students can select from their independent final projects, I can highlight prominent themes in each work, helping to guide students to a modern work that directly engages the interest(s) they have identified. For example, students interested in the trauma of war's aftermath should probably read "Cold Mountain" rather than "Ulysses."

At the end of the semester, students will submit their final analytical project, together with their portfolio, which will include a final reflective assessment of their work and development in the course, keyed to the NEXT WORK they plan to read.

[16]
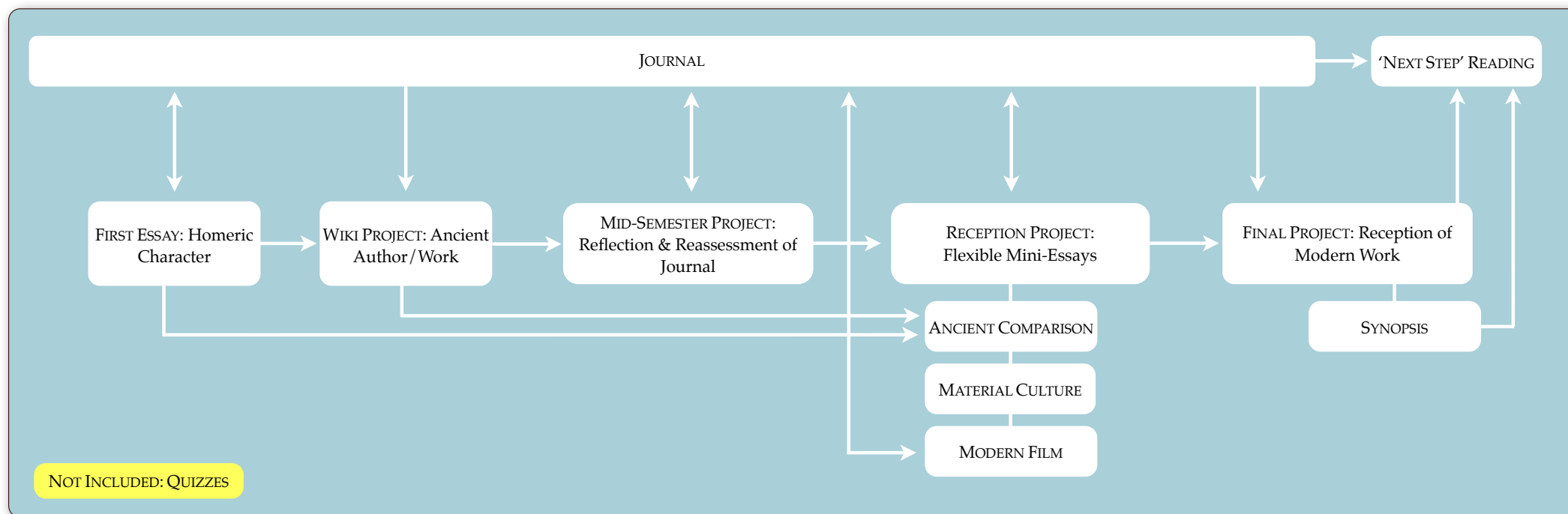
ASSESSMENT

Late Assignments	Assignments turned in after the stipulated deadline will be penalized one letter grade for each day or part of a day the assignment is overdue. An assignment will immediately be considered late if it is submitted at any point after the stipulated deadline. Therefore, if an assignment is due at the start of class and you miss or are late to that class, the assignment will be considered one day late and the specified sanction will be applied. Once an assignment is three days late, only half-credit can be earned for an assignment. All assignments must be completed to receive credit for this course.
Extensions & Waivers	Extensions and waivers may be granted for cause at my sole discretion. *Pace* Admiral Grace Hopper (who said, "It is easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to get permission."), these must be secured before the assignment is due. If factors external to this course give rise to the request, I may require written confirmation from the appropriate school official. This policy will be altered only in cases of severe personal crisis, serious medical incapacitation, or other unforeseen and unavoidable circumstances—and then at my sole discretion following the receipt of a written notice from the appropriate school official.
A Note on Policies	All course policies are designed to promote consistent progress towards our goals and fairness to all students. All policies are subordinate to one overriding interest: your effective progress towards your personal learning aspirations as they relate to the goals of the course. If you have been working on an exercise and need an extra day to solidify your understanding of the material, extensions and support will be forthcoming; if you hit a rough patch and need further exposure to a particular idea, help will be gladly given. Provided you act out of a commitment to the class and your goals for it, all requests will be generously received.

[connectivity/reiterative process/happy class] I permitted students to revise their essays this semester. All in all the revisions were beneficial for students, and helped their development over the course of the semester, as well as rewarded students who engaged with the feedback they received. The only aspect I would change for next time would be to have a set due date for revisions—as it was, some students rushed to complete their revisions, others did not begin revising until several weeks later, and in one case after a subsequent writing assignment had been completed.

[transparency/structured vs. proscription/taut and happy class] These three entries from the Course Description I distributed at the start of the semester contain a contradiction. In discussing "Late Assignments" I lay out a restrictive and clearly-defined set of penalties for late work. But in the next sections, I indicate—first implicitly and then explicitly—that I will give extensions not only for medical cause but if students feel they need additional time to produce their best work. This contradiction arose because of conflicting impulses about due dates for the assignments in this class. One the hand I wanted clearly-defined and enforced deadlines in the interest of equity between students; on the other hand I did not want to evaluate work that students knew did not represent their best effort. The rest of this contradiction, however, was that some students availed themselves of the extension option, while others, who might likewise have benefited from an extension for a given activity, did not. Undoubtedly this was perceived by some students as inequitable.

To reconcile these conflicting impulses, I plan to employ the **"flexible" due date system** mentioned during our conversation with the student consultants in seminar this semester. Since few of the formal writing assignments in the class are linked to specific classroom activities, a flexible model has much to recommend it. I think I will employ the "flex days" bank model, in which students can submit work up to a certain cumulative number (5? 6?) of days after the listed due dates without penalty, but there will be no extensions given. I like that this model allows students to manage their workloads, hopefully produce higher quality work, and avoids the possibility of more daring or grasping students being granted extensions from which other students would also have benefited.

REVISION GUIDELINES FOR FIRST ESSAY

For those interested in revising your essay, here is the process we will follow:

Email me, stating your intention to revise your essay. In this email, include a brief paragraph stating: 1) what aspects of your argumentation and selection of evidence you will strive to improve in your revision; 2) the points of style and presentation that you will pay special attention to improving in our revision.

I will contact you to set up a time when we can meet to discuss your essay and your revisions. We will meet to discuss your essay; focusing on points of logic and argumentation for you to improve in your revision; and also discussing strategies for success in the writing process.

By a date we agree on, send me an outline for your revised essay....

[17]

Quizzes & Exams

This semester there was only one quiz, a multiple choice / matching quiz on the Tale of Troy that students took in the second week of the class.

1. _____ Goddesses who claimed Eris' golden apple, inscribed "to the fairest."

    a) Aphrodite, Athena, Demeter   b) Athena, Artemis, Hera
    c) Aphrodite, Athena, Hera   d) Athena, Aphrodite, Eris, Hera

2. _____ Where Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia to placate Artemis.

    a) Aulis   b) Athens
    c) Argos   d) Scyros

3. _____ Diomedes and Odysseus need to steal this from Troy before Troy can be taken.

[spiral teaching/effective assessment/formative assessment/right tool] I give this quiz in Week 2 to ensure that students have a basic grasp of the whole myth of the Trojan War early in the semester. It is vital that students have a sense of the overall myth, as almost every work that we read or view assumes this knowledge. In prompting careful reading of the "Tale of Troy", the quiz is effective—most students earn a high grade for the quiz (85+%). All students were asked to correct their quizzes (receiving partial credit for the corrected answers) to promote knowledge of the Myth.

In previous years I had also given students a midterm, which reviews the general Myth and adds questions about our readings and discussions; it also includes short answer and essay, to assess students' ability to discuss the phenomena, rather than just identifying information. Because of scheduling and because I felt that student in class conversations and reflection in their journals had demonstrated more sophisticated analysis than they would have been asked to produce on the midterm, I did not conduct a midterm exam this semester.

The absence of the mid-term was felt in the poor knowledge students displayed about the overall myth, and I think that their engagement of the Post-Classical material was somewhat weaker as a result.

So why not give a midterm? *It is not the midterm per se that was effective in the past, but the opportunity it provided for review and reassessment.* I want students to review the "Tale of Troy", but it is not necessary that this happens at the mid-point of the semester. In fact, it would be better if it happened at two points in the semester: after the reading of Homer (Week 6, before Attic Drama module) and when reading the *Aeneid* (Weeks 9 or 10, before the move to Post-Classical texts, especially those of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages). The essays presented in the Mid-term would be more effective as part of the RECEPTION PROJECT that students complete in preparation for their FINAL PROJECTS. The short answer prompts, which mostly include terms of literary criticism (e.g. katabasis, *in medias res*, multitext, etc.) could be reviewed in brief in-class assignments and discussions, and reviewed at the most relevant moment, not as part of an omnibus review at an arbitrary point in the middle of the semester.

[spiral teaching/effective assessment/formative assessment/right tool] Another problem with the given one quiz early in the semester is that it rewards students who have previous exposure (and coursework) with the material. Given that this course is designed to be an introduction to ancient culture (although as a 200-level course, not the most basic introduction we offer), it is important to craft assessment so that students who are new to the myth and / or Classical culture are not unduly penalized: for the quiz, after all, students are expected to know dozens of places, many dozens of events, and many dozens of characters. And although it is important they have a general sense of the Myth in Week 2, it is more important that they have a better sense of the Myth before we move to Attic Drama, and an even better sense of the Myth and its variations before we leave the Classical readings.

In place of one arbitrarily-timed midterm, I could give three quizzes of increasing depth and detail: the first in Week 2; the next linked to watching the movie *Troy* after we finish Homer, the other linked to the Dares reading and the transition to post-Classical readings. The format for the first quiz will be maintained: in-class with the opportunity to revise; the two subsequent quizzes will be "**mastery quizzes**", on which students must demonstrate an accurate grasp of the material to pass the quiz; if they do not achieve that level of knowledge (90%?) they must retake the quiz (the questions will be varied) until they pass. Ideally, these quizzes would be taken on-line—but because they are information-centric they are susceptible to abuse. Since the score is irrelevant, hopefully the temptation will not be present. In advance of these quizzes, I should create practice quizzes that students can take on-line. As I will need a large bank of questions for the multiple mastery quizzes, making the practice quizzes will not require much additional effort.

[18]

A Draft Revision of the Syllabus of Assignments

2009

Week	Major Topic or Text	Activities
1	Introduction to the Myth of Troy; Homer *Iliad* 1–4	
2	*Iliad* 5–12	QUIZ: THE TALE OF TROY
3	*Iliad* 13–21	SHORT PAPER
4	*Iliad* 22–24: Homer *Odyssey* 1–4	
5	*Odyssey* 5–14	JOURNAL/BLOG REVIEW
6	*Odyssey* 17–24	
7	Sophocles *Philoctetes*; Sophocles *Ajax*	SECOND PAPER
B-8	Euripides, *Trojan Women*; Guest Lecture: *Troy in Music* (Michael Nock, *Boston Symphony Orchestra*)	NYC TRIP (3/22?)
9	*Aeneid* 1–5	
10	*Aeneid* 6–10	EXAM
11	*Aeneid* 11-12; Troy in the Late Antiquity	
12	Troy in the Middle Ages (Guest Instructor, Maud McInerny); Shakespeare *Troilus & Cressida*	
13	Guest Lecture, *The Archaeology of Troy* (Brian Rose, HC '78, President of the American Institute of Archaeology); Troy & the Romantics	PRESENTATIONS
14	Troy & the Modern Imagination; *Contempt* (viewing)	PRESENTATIONS

FINAL PROJECT DUE DURING FINALS

2012

> Draft due the week before shared with class

Week	Major Topic or Reading	Wiki-Project	Activities
1	Introduction to the Myth of Troy; Homer *Iliad* 1–2		
2	*Iliad* 3–10; *Achilles in Vietnam* (viewing)		MASTERY QUIZ: THE TALE OF TROY
3	*Iliad* 11–18	Sappho, *Poems*	FIRST ESSAY
4	*Iliad* 19–24; *Troy* (viewing)		JOURNAL/BLOG REVIEW
5	Homer *Odyssey* 1–8	Theocritus, *Idyll* 11	MASTERY QUIZ 2: THE TALE OF TROY
6	*Odyssey* 9–17	Herodotus & Thucydides on Trojan War	
7	*Odyssey* 18–24; *Oh Brother Where Art Thou* (viewing)	Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*	REFLECTION PROJECT
B-8	Cocyannis' *Iphigenia at Aulis* (viewing); Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*; Sophocles' Ajax	Catullus *68*	MARATHON, PHILOCTETES PROJECT OR TRIP
9	Eupirides' *Trojan Women/Helen*; *Aeneid* 1–3	Horace, *Satires* II.5	FIRST RECEPTION ESSAY
10	*Aeneid* 4–6; Guest Lecture: *Troy in Music* (Michael Nock, *Boston Symphony Orchestra*)	Ovid, *Heroides* (select) x2	MASTERY QUIZ 3: THE TALE OF TROY
11	*Aeneid* 7–12	Maffeo Vegio	SECOND RECEPTION ESSAY
12	Troy in the Late Antiquity & Troy in the Middle Ages (Guest Instructor, Maud McInerny); Excerpts from Shakespeare *Troilus & Cressida*		
13	Troy & the Romantics; Guest Lecture, *The Archaeology of Troy* (Brian Rose); *Naked* & *Contempt* (viewings)		THIRD RECEPTION ESSAY
14	Troy & the Modern Imagination		

[19]

FINAL PROJECT & "NEXT STEP" REFLECTION DUE DURING FINALS