ENG 254
FINAL ESSAY

“The one thing in the world of value is the active soul” (RWE)

Each week throughout the term you active souls have read, studied, appreciated, and written insightfully about American Literature. Thank you for your excellent work. In your efforts, you’ve thought critically and creatively about these writers’ histories and traditions. Now, for your formal essay, draw from your close reading and annotations, your weekly writings, your class notes, our class discussions, and your research. (Hint: Why not re-read the weekly writing questions as well as your responses to them? These questions should lead you to good thinking and writing.) As you develop your response, please give evidence from the text (specific examples, quotes, or a paraphrase/summary of a passage) to support your thesis. It is the support, the evidence, that you cite that indicates the thoughtfulness of your critical reading. Any research outside our text should be critically evaluated and vigilantly documented.

FORMAT: Required scope: 1,500 to 2,000 words single-spaced. Write your essay responses on a word processor, single spacing, and using 12 point font. In your header (top left), please include your name, your class, the date you turn your essay in, and the word count.

DUE: Please enjoy the opportunity to complete and turn in this essay at any time up until the tenth week of the term (Final Due Date: March 11).

Some Hints as you proceed:
2. Sketch out a plan (a working thesis and tentative outline) and talk with me as you proceed with your essay project.
3. Compose a rough draft and pass it to me for a rough draft read. That will give me a chance to respond and will give you a chance to revise before the final due date.
4. Visit the Writing Center early in the project.

CHOOSE ONE from the following options.
(In your header, please identify which (#) option you’re responding to.)

1. Imagine that you’re writing the introductory chapter to a Modern American Literature anthology that begins in the 20th century. It is your responsibility to essay an overview of the 19th Century in American Literature (from Literature of the American Renaissance, 1836 – 1865 through Literature of an Expanding Nation, 1865 – 1912). Of course, because of the brevity (1,500 – 2,000 words), you’ll need to pick three to six representative “voices.” Present your choice of specific authors and provide details from their works as examples. Think of your audience (a college student who has not been exposed to any of the writers from the 19th and early 20th centuries) and your purpose (to provide a context for the study of Modern American Literature).
2. How would you describe the *American Vernacular*? Draw from the literature of the 19th century (at least five specific authors, specific details from their texts) to explain to someone unfamiliar with this literature (a student in *American Studies* say from Iran) what characterizes the American literary voice. What subjects, themes, tropes, literary techniques “animate” this literature?

3. Choose three or four of the authors that we have studied this term (Emerson, Fuller, Thoreau, Jacobs, Douglass, Poe, Hawthorne, Whitman, Dickinson, Twain). Create a setting and a time (Is it the 19th century? The 20th century? The 21st century? The 26th century?). Bring these authors’ voices and visions to life by creating a dialogue among them. That dialogue should have a clarity of purpose, focused on several of the American tropes and any issue you bring to their table. To create this dialogue successfully, you’ll need to draw from their works (specific quotes). You don’t have to resolve any conflict you create by bringing these authors together, but it should be clear from your presentation what thematic point you are making.

**ASSESSMENT GUIDE**

**Content:** Interpretation is focused and developed by course themes, illustrates an excellent understanding of the literature, and represents not only a thoughtful engagement of the material but an originality of approach (write an essay that only you could write)

**Organization and Development:** Writing asserts interpretation in a clear thesis statement, develops this thesis well with details, specific examples, and quotations from the literature. Writing uses secondary sources if needed to support interpretations.

**Clarity/Quality of Writing:** Writing is clear, effective, and demonstrates standard grammar conventions and MLA format.

ENJOY