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Critical Research Paper: Using Literature to Explore Deindustrialization in the American Rust Belt [Composition]

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CUNY La Guardia Community College

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ENG 102: Composition II –Writing Through Literature

Critical Research Paper: Using Literature to Explore Deindustrialization in the American Rust Belt

This ENG 102 assignment was developed in the context of CTL sponsored Learning Matters Mini-grant awarded to the English Department. The primary purpose was to assist full-time and part-time faculty in the Department with revising ENG 102 course materials to align with the Inquiry and Problem Solving (IPS) Core Competency and Written Communication Ability. This goal was achieved through several workshops, a programmatic benchmark reading, and a two-phase departmental review process that prepared assignments to be submitted to the Learning Matters Assignment Library. The mini-grant has been invaluable in helping to bring both full-time and adjunct faculty into departmental conversations about composition course requirements and how they align with LaGuardia's core competencies, the role of the competencies in the curriculum review process, and more generally the importance of the competencies and abilities in the college's general education requirements.

ENG 102: Composition II is a required course for most LaGuardia students that builds and intensifies the training received in Composition I. Most students enrolled in ENG 102 are non-majors, and are upper-freshman or lower-sophomores, although occasionally students may take the course later in their career. In addition to continuing to develop critical reading, writing, and research skills, in ENG 102 students are introduced to the literary genres of fiction, poetry, and drama. Students also learn close reading techniques and are introduced to forms of literary analysis such as historical context. ENG 102 is a baseline course for the Inquiry and Problem Solving (IPS) Core Competency and Written Communication Ability.

One concept I repeatedly discuss ENG 102 is the notion that academic writing is a form of joining an existing conversation on a subject or issue. The following Critical Research Paper Assignment encourages students to continue and expand our class discussion on the effects of deindustrialization in the America's Rust Belt in the 21st century. The primary literary text students analyze in this assignment is Lynn Nottage's 2017 Pulitzer-Prize winner Broadway play *Sweat*. In order to provide students with a stronger historical and ethnographic context for their reading of Nottage's play, students were also assigned to read several chapters of Chad Broughton's book *Boom, Bust, Exodus: The Rust Belt, the Maquilas, and a Tale of Two Cities* (2015).

The Critical Research Paper is a scaffolded assignment that students worked on for 3-4 weeks of the semester. This included one week (about two weeks into the process) where students engaged in peer review workshops in which they meet in groups of 4-5 students with the instructor for 30 minutes to review and discuss the first drafts of their essays. The Critical Research Paper constituted 30% of students' final grade in the course. This includes credit received for all scaffolded sections of the essay, as well as participation in peer review workshops.

The Critical Research Paper meets several of the course's instructional and performance objectives, including practicing writing as a process by completing multiple drafts and revisions. Engaging in close reading strategies and using historical context as a literary analysis methodology. As well as demonstrating research skills through the ability to gather, evaluate, synthesize, and cite primary and secondary sources. Furthermore, these performance objectives overlap with the dimensions of the Inquiry and Problem Solving (IPS) core competency rubric, as the assignment asks students to frame an issue through the thesis statement and argument they develop, to gather evidence to support their assertions, to analyze through their close reading of passages of literature, and finally to draw conclusions based on their analysis.

ENG 102

Prof. J. Jones

Due Date: [date] (draft); [date] (final)

Critical Research Paper Prompt:
Using Literature to Explore Deindustrialization in the American Rust Belt

Purpose: This essay is asking you to continue and expand the discussion we have been having in class about the effects of deindustrialization in the American Rust Belt. It is an assignment in which you will demonstrate your ability to integrate multiple skills we have worked on this semester. Your critical essay requires you to choose one of three themes in Lynn Nottage's play *Sweat* (2015), then develop a thesis statement related to the theme that can be supported by both textual evidence from the play, as well as secondary sources. As such, in your essay you will include close reading of selected passages of *Sweat*, as well as use interdisciplinary sources (from disciplines such as history, economics, political science) to further support your assertions about your selected theme in the play. Lastly, as part of the writing process for this assignment, you will participate in a peer review workshop to give and receive feedback on the first draft of the Critical Research Paper.

Assignment: Write an essay of 1500 words (5 pages) or more in which you discuss how Lynn Nottage's *Sweat* (2015) captures the effects of factory closings on people living in America's Rust Belt. **Your essay should focus on one of the following themes in *Sweat*:**

- **Class and Race:** Tensions between white working-class workers, people of color, and or immigrants
- **The American Economy and Immigration:** NAFTA's role in the erosion of manufacturing jobs in the Rust Belt
- **The American Dream:** How obtainable is the American Dream today? How do we define the dream today? How has it changed?

Your Essay Must Provide the Following:

- A well-developed argument concerning your chosen theme
- A discussion with specific examples (including quotes) from *Sweat* that illuminates how the theme operates within the play
- Integration of academic sources (research) on the subject (chosen theme) to further support and strengthen your claims
- Discussion of how *Sweat*'s characters or the play itself, deals with or resolves the issues or themes it presents

Additional Guidelines

1. Your essay must conform to MLA format including headers, margins, double spacing, etc. See syllabus for further detail.

2. Your essay must quote from Nottage's *Sweat*, at least one chapter of Chad Broughton's *Boom, Bust, Exodus* (2015), and at least two additional academic research sources which you found using a library catalog or database. As a result, you are required to provide in-text citations and a Works Cited list for all quoted, summarized, and paraphrased material.
3. Remember book titles should be italicized (not quotation marks). Shorter pieces like a chapter of a book or a newspaper article should be in quotation marks (not italicized).
4. **Essay should be uploaded to Blackboard by midnight the date it is due (see calendar)**

Peer Review Workshops: Critical Research Paper

On [date] during class time we will hold in-depth peer review workshops to discuss the drafts of your Critical Research Paper. You will be assigned to a peer review group on Blackboard. The goal of the workshop is to give your classmates thoughtful in-depth feedback that will help them revise their essay before submitting the final draft. As your professor, I will serve as a facilitator, and will only provide guidance and feedback when needed.

Instructions:

1. Each group will upload a full draft of their research paper by **[date] at 11:59pm** to their Blackboard group. **Make sure you add your name in the title of the file you upload.**
2. Individually you will fill out a peer review sheet (see class activities folder) for each classmates' paper in your group. On the day you are scheduled to do peer review bring the following for each classmate in your group:
 - a. Print out a copy of your classmate's paper and provide comments on the draft.
 - b. Print and fill out a peer review sheet for each classmate's paper
3. Each group will have a **30 minute slot** in which you will meet with me in our normal classroom to discuss your papers. **You are only required to come during your group's allotted time.** If you are late or not present during your group's peer review session you will be absent for the day. The same goes if you show up for your session but have not read your classmate's work or prepared comments.

[Date]	[Date]
[Time]—	[Time]—

PEER REVIEW WORKSHEET

Author's Name _____

Reviewer's Name _____

In this peer critique activity you will carefully review your classmate's essay and provide constructive feedback that will help strengthen their work.

1. Introduction:

- a. Underline and label what you believe your classmate's **thesis** to be
- b. Does the **introduction** give a brief but clear idea of what is to follow?
Yes ___ No ___ Somewhat ___

Describe: _____

- c. Does the **thesis statement** present a strong **analytical argument**?
Yes ___ No ___ Somewhat ___

Describe: _____

2. Body Paragraphs:

- a. For each body paragraph underline and label what you believe to be a **claim / argument, evidence / supporting details, and analysis**
- b. Are the **claims / arguments** in **each body paragraph** strong?
Yes ___ No ___ Somewhat ___

Describe: _____

- c. Is ample **evidence / supporting details** used to support claims?
Yes ___ No ___ Somewhat ___

Describe: _____

- d. Is there enough **analysis** in each body paragraph? Does the discussion sufficiently **analyze evidence** provided and make **connections** between **evidence** and **claims**?
Yes ___ No ___ Somewhat ___

Describe: _____

3. **Conclusion:** The conclusion is the author's last opportunity to persuade their audience of their claim(s). Does the conclusion give you a sense of the author's **thesis** and any other **significant related ideas**?

Yes____ No____ Somewhat____

What suggestions can you provide your classmate to strengthen their conclusion?

4. **What's the Next Step?** Prove your classmate with some ideas of what they need to do next for this essay to be stronger. This information should include improvements to the content, structure, and style of the essay, identification of MLA format mistakes, as well as reminders concerning required research materials or assignments requirements that are missing from the essay:
