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Literary Analysis Assignment [Composition]

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Dr. Tuli Chatterji
Assignment Abstract
ENG 102/Essay 3: Literary Analysis Paper (Composition)

This assignment was used in English 102 Writing through Literature course and was designed to meet LaGuardia's Inquiry and Problem Solving Core Competency and Written Communication Ability. Students were expected to critically reflect on issues-- such as water crisis, migration-- addressed in Linda Sue Park's novel *A Long Walk to Water* (2010) and then explore those issues in a global context, for instance, water crisis in Rajasthan, India, or migration from Central America to USA. Discussions prior to the assignment prepared students to study the literary text, both as an end in itself and as a bridge to other academic disciplines. The learning objectives that the assignment aimed to achieve were:

- 1) What can literature teach us about how people think, act, dream, and rebel?
- 2) What are some of the commonalities and differences that can help us to observe as we travel across time and space?
- 3) In what ways can the text act both as mirror of its own time period and also as a model for literary achievement?

The assignment was part of English 102 course which almost all students at LaGuardia are required to take before they graduate. The assignment foregrounds process based writing that aims for students to demonstrate a sound analysis of the literary text while also considering cross cultural conversations. The focus was to help students develop critical thinking and writing skills through the study of different genres, in this context, fiction. Students were expected to transfer their knowledge of close reading skills while composing essays that involved integrating texts and data acquired through library research.

The assignment was scaffolded by short in-class and out-of-class assignments that spanned for a period of three weeks with three class hours per week. The low-stakes prompts and activities were:

- a) Write a reflection on how Salva endeavored to keep alive hope in spite of being on the road as a refugee for eleven years.
- b) Give evidences that support Salva's intense desire to meet his family.
- c) Work in groups citing textual evidence that reflects how Salva's hardships contextualized the war in Sudan.
- d) How did crossing the Nile from Sudan to Ethiopia help the refugees come together as a family?
- e) How did Salva's uncle's words, "One step at a time...one day at a time" give Salva the courage to assume leadership amongst the refugees—young and old--and guide them safely across the border from Sudan to Ethiopia to Kenya?

These steps created the platform for students to delve critically into the text, understand the context, and then apply their knowledge in evaluating similar situations. This assignment formed the final research essay of the semester. Through a close reading of the text, students were

required to identify and analyze a social issue and then apply their knowledge from the text to understand and explore a similar issue in a global context.

At the end of the assignment students were expected to demonstrate two key elements:

- 1) Close reading and analytical thinking
- 2) Application and transfer of knowledge from the text to real life situations.

This ENG 102 assignment was not part of a CTL seminar or mini-grant and/or assignment development workshop but, as stated above, the core competency and communication ability rubrics attached to this course directly informed the way in which the assignment was designed. The primary purpose of the assignment was to encourage students to synthesize the information from the text in addressing issues that impact humanity, in both local and global spaces. As all the students were non-majors and freshmen, the assignment allowed students to draw connections from their lived experience to use literature to *ground* and *begin* writing. It also gave students confidence in appropriating networks of information and communication to connect the literary readings with what is happening both locally and globally. This aligned with the IPS rubric of advancing a claim from the text to comprehend complex issues that would generate sustained life-long learning. The assignment served the purpose of informed conclusions through seeing or responding to the world through writing.

The assignment formed 30% of the final grade of the semester (15% low-stake assignments leading to the final essay + 15% finished essay). The above scaffolding focusing on textual analysis and reflective narratives helped students to look at writing both as an act of self-construction and a way of connecting to a larger world where they can engage in a process of dialogue with each other, one that includes drafting, sharing, responding, listening, and revising. These processes encouraged students to explore possibilities and push their boundaries, in an attempt to make meaning out of issues they deeply care about.

The few important take-aways from the assignment were that it a) helped students foster the ability to ethically engage with the “Other” b) understand global crises c) and learn to critically inquire before responding to situations. My aim will be to continue with this assignment and encourage students to frame their knowledge acquired from the text to further their understanding of issues that impact their own lives as well as the lives of others. A comparative study of two nations would also be a good step in helping students conclude that there is no single formula in understanding refugee crises around the world.

THE ASSIGNMENT

This is a two part essay which will require you to demonstrate your critical understanding of the text and application of that knowledge from the text in comprehending situations outside the text.
WORD LIMIT: 900-1500 WORDS

Part 1: (500-800 words)

Salva's journey in *A Long Walk to Water* can be defined as an odyssey on foot crossing both physical and emotional borders. The horrifying civil war in Sudan resulted in Salva losing his family, friends, school, and his village of Loun-Ariik. However, the years he spends in the refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya also teach him hope in the midst of war.

Write an essay reflecting on his journey from Loun-Ariik village in Sudan to Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia. How does this journey foreground a saga of courage, determination, and hope? Through a close reading of *three scenes*, offer a critical analysis of how Salva demonstrates the above qualities.

Keep in mind that your analysis should address the following points:

- 1) Briefly summarize the novel and focus on the key issues of migration/ displacement caused due to war.
- 2) As you focus on Salva's crossings, give evidence from the text that substantiates Salva's courage, determination, and hope.
- 3) The evidence should be followed by your analysis of the situation in which Salva strives to keep his hope of being alive so that one day he can meet his family.
- 4) Draw your own inference on how war can become a detrimental factor in shaping the refugee crisis in today's world.

Part 2: (400-700 words)

As you contextualize Salva's journey against the backdrop of the civil war in Sudan, what other nation or country comes to your mind that too, like Sudan, has resulted in forced mass migration and displacement? Briefly discuss the situation in that nation. Thinking through *A Long Walk to Water*, write how has the novel helped your research in understanding the courage of refugees forced to displace by war or otherwise.

Citation:

At the end of the essay you should cite your evidence properly by following the MLA format 8th Edition. If you have any difficulty, refer to:

www.owl.purdue.org.

<https://library.laguardia.edu/help/cite/>