

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

ENGL 261 & 262: British Literature
JEP PA: Lauren
FALL 2011

As a JEP student, your work in the community is similar to that of a social scientist who conducts “participant-observer” research. Throughout the course of the semester, you will observe and participate in the daily activities of those you meet at your JEP site, and you will write about your experiences on a weekly basis. These JEP Reflective Questions (RQs) are designed to help you focus your observations and critically reflect on your experiences in relation to what you are learning about in your USC course.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS HINTS:

1. **Read the questions first.** Reading the question before you go to your JEP site is required in order to answer many RQs, and having the questions on your mind will when at your site will help focus your observations and improve your response to all RQs.
2. **Write as soon as possible.** As soon as possible after leaving your site, sketch out your answer to that week’s RQ. Even just taking a few notes about some difficult moments, things that surprised you or highlights will make writing later much easier and will provide the examples and observations you need to write an outstanding journal.
3. **Proof your work.** Like any college-level writing assignment, proof your work to make sure the writing is clear, error-free, and that you answer the question at hand.
4. **Read and respond to your PA's comments.** The questions are related to and build upon one other. So refer back to previous responses and to take seriously your PA’s feedback each week and respond to the feedback by following the PAs suggestions.
5. **Be respectful.** Show your respect by being mindful of the limits of your experience and knowledge. Avoid generalizations and stereotypical explanations of behavior; in other words, do not make arguments that assume you know how someone else thinks or feels or use these assumptions to explain the way people act or their circumstances.
6. **Use examples.** Focus on writing detailed and concrete accounts of people, social settings and conversations (including direct quotes, when possible). Never make claims without evidence or examples!

YOUR ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS

The core parts of each assignment (which you need to focus on) are highlighted in **bold**. Use the additional questions to guide/supplement your answer. Please refer to the PA agreement you received in training for instructions regarding journal due dates and format requirements. *Note that some weeks require longer responses and are worth more points.*

ESSAY ONE - "Pre-reflection"

(1 page, 10 points, due: 9/26)

Please respond to one of the following prompts. Question #2 is for returning students only.

#1: Over the next eight-weeks you will be taking your college education outside of the walls of the University. Based on what you know about JEP and what you know about your site, what do you imagine your JEP experience will be like? Make sure to explain why you think what you think and use examples from your experiences at USC and in the community to explain yourself. Make your imagined vision of your JEP experience specific by addressing these two questions: **Ideally, what would you like to learn from your experiences in JEP? When you think about JEP, what makes you the most nervous or concerned?**

#2: Think back to your last experience in JEP and think about how you can take what you've learned about JEP, USC and the surrounding neighborhood (or the organization or school you worked with) and improve your experience this time around. **Now that you know something about JEP, what do you hope to learn from doing JEP again? What was the biggest obstacle you faced in your last JEP experience and how will you address that issue this time?** Make sure to use clear and detailed examples from your last JEP experience to explain your reasoning.

ESSAY TWO: Assessing your Plan

(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 10/3)

Consider the eight-week plan that you will soon be developing with your mini-team. What are some of the major themes in your English course that you might want to emphasize throughout the following weeks? How might you put these themes together into an English literature mini-course? That is, explain how each week will build on the last and explain how you think students will be able to learn the larger lessons about literature that you want to develop with the mini-course. **The most important themes are often the most difficult to address, so pick one major theme that you think will be particularly challenging to address over the coming weeks and explain 1) why you think it will be difficult; 2) why you think it is an important theme; and 3) what various strategies you will use over the course of the semester to make this theme meaningful for your students.**

EIGHT-WEEK PLAN DUE

(due: 10/10-10/14)

See your PA agreement for details.

ESSAY THREE: The Team

(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 10/17)

Describe your impressions of your mini-course team. How well are you gelling as a team? What strengths do you think each member brings to the table? What weaknesses are you concerned about, if any? How do you think about your own role in the team? **That is, what**

strengths and weaknesses do you bring and what skills would you like to develop?

ESSAY FOUR: Literary Themes in Everyday Life

(2 pages, 20 points, due: 10/24)

Literature often mirrors social, political and religious changes and provides a unique insight into the social interactions – and conflicts – of a given time and place. Similarly, your participation in JEP provides you with a rare insight into society as it allows you to witness – and participate in – unique social interactions (among students, but also between teachers and students, among teachers, between people of different races, genders, social classes, etc.).

Consider some of the texts that you have read this semester in your English class. Even though these texts are from a different time and place, some themes cross over time and space boundaries and can relate to your JEP experience. Common literary themes that may relate to your JEP experience include, but are not limited to, rites of passage, education, childhood narratives, family relations, religion, class relations etc. **Chose one text that particularly evokes an aspect of your experience at JEP or some situation you may have witnessed in your JEP classroom. Can you draw some parallels between the situations portrayed in this text and the ones you are experiencing or witnessing as part of your JEP experience?** Be specific and make sure to share details about both the text you chose and the JEP situation(s) you are writing about.

BLACKBOARD DISCUSSION: Topic To Be Announced

(2 posts to Blackboard, 10 points, due: 10/31-11/4)

Instructions and topic will be posted on Blackboard.

Discussion purpose: Your weekly journals consistently reveal a wide range of interesting insights and abilities that result from your coursework and service-learning assignments. Since students participate in JEP from more than 100 different courses each semester, and rarely do all students in a particular class choose to enroll in JEP, we lack the opportunity to bring you together on a regular basis to learn from one another. As a result, the educational benefits of participating in JEP are limited mostly to your individual or small group experiences. This forum is designed to counter the relative isolation of JEP's service-learning assignments by providing an opportunity for you to share your insights with your peers.

ESSAY FIVE: English Literature for K-12 students

(2 pages, 20 points, due: 11/7)

Now that you know the students you are working with a little better and have more of an understanding of the challenges of your particular mini-course, **reflect on why the material you have learned so far in your English Literature class is worth teaching to K-12 students. To do this, start off with an explanation of the relevance of English literature to your students. Think broadly, for instance, why should K-12 students know about English literature, beyond learning for a test?** Think about what larger ideas or themes are communicated through literary works. Why is it important for students to be exposed to literature at this age?

Think also about your own experience learning about English literature in K-12 settings: how was the subject matter made relevant to you then? Based on your experiences, what do you think is the most effective way to make lessons meaningful and to communicate the larger lesson about the importance of literature to the students you are working with?

ESSAY SIX: Teaching and Learning

(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 11/14)

Now that you have taught several mini-course lessons to your students, **reflect on the experience of teaching English literature**. Think about the process of having to adapt the literary texts you are studying for your USC course and make them relevant, understandable and interesting for your students. How did you decide which texts to teach your students, or which themes and ideas were most important to emphasize in your lessons? What are challenges you and your team have faced as teachers over the course of your JEP experience, and what do you feel your team has done most successfully? **Identify a specific text or lesson that your students responded particularly well to. Why do you think it was especially successful?** Did you present the material in a certain way, or was the text itself inherently interesting for or relevant to your students? Did the experience of teaching the text change or develop your own understanding of the text?

ESSAY SEVEN: Final Reflections

(2.5-3 pages, 25 points, due: 11/21)

Take a look back at the essays you have written (make sure to use Blackboard, so you can see your PA's comments), and think about what you have learned over the past few weeks. As noted in the assignment for Essay #6 (Option 2), one of the benefits of service-learning for participating students is "higher academic achievement." For this final essay, we want you to focus on this particular outcome vis a vis your JEP assignment. **First, consider the premise itself: how does participating in a service-learning program lead to higher academic achievement?** When does it fail to do so? Do students' outcomes vary by the subject matter of the course? Or do they vary by their experiences in the community? **Describe what you think are the most important factors in a service-learning assignment that ensure "higher academic achievement" for university students.**

Next, think about your JEP experiences in the context of your USC course: What is the most significant "academic" outcome of your JEP assignment? How has JEP affected your understanding of the course content? Why do you think your professor is giving academic credit for JEP? What are his or her goals for you? In answering these questions, make sure to use specific examples from your course. Think broadly about the relationship between JEP and your course. Even if you believe there is no direct connection, consider how you could apply a course concept to help better understand or explain something you encounter in your JEP experience. You might focus on detailing a specific learning outcome (e.g., describing a particular theory and how it came to life through your experiences, or how teaching helped you

to understand a particular course concept). Alternatively, you might reflect on how your experiences in JEP shed light on material you have learned in other courses at USC.

The goal of this assignment is for you to think critically about the academic outcomes of service-learning and describe what you learned from your experience. If you are struggling to make the connection, as an alternative, explain, in detail, how you think the course or JEP could be redesigned to foster a more meaningful connection between your course and a service-learning experience in the community.