

Loyola Core Proposal Application

ENGL N294 Tolkien's Middle Ages

Instructor: Elizabeth Watkins

Loyola Core: Writing about Literature

Description:

This course utilizes popular literature, namely J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* fantasy trilogy, as a path to engage students' critical reading and writing skills, and to introduce them to the study of medieval literature. In this class, students will explore the texts J.R.R. Tolkien studied and taught as a professor of medieval language and literature at the University of Oxford and examine how they influenced his own writings, which we will read in the latter part of the semester. This approach provides a forum for studying popular literature with a critical eye; the relationship between medieval and modern fantasy literature; the whiteness of medieval literature and Tolkien's fictional worlds; and the influence of Tolkien's Catholic faith on his writings.

Format:

This class is taught in mixed lecture and discussion format. The assessments, both informal and formal, are writing-intensive. The formal assignments include:

- A presentation on an assigned reading for which they must prepare slides and submit a summary write-up (250-500 words)
- A close reading paper in which students apply a key tool of literary analysis to a short passage from a medieval text (750 words; scaffolding assignments: passage mark-up assignment and a rough draft)
- An analysis paper in which students examine Tolkien's adaptation of medieval literature in *The Lord of the Rings* (750 words; scaffolding assignment: paper proposal and thesis statement)
- A creative close reading paper in which students use their close reading skills in a creative context to adapt and reimagine some aspects of Tolkien's narrative (500 words for the creative component and 200 words for the analysis)
- A discussion board post in which students discuss the influence of Tolkien's writings on contemporary culture, whether on literature, music, gaming, television, films, etc. (500 words and two 100-word responses)
- A think piece in which students examine some aspect of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, drawing on their close reading and research skills (1500 words; scaffolding assignments: 150-word proposal and a rough draft)

Goals:

- Critical Thinking
 - Students will analyze medieval literary texts and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and make critical arguments about them in class discussions, informal assignments, and written papers. They will develop their close reading skills, an essential tool for literary analysis, throughout the semester. Each assignment hones their analysis skills in a new way, shifting from focusing on a short passage in their first formal assignment

to looking at a literary work in its intertextual context (analysis paper), to exploring how close reading can be applied to creative writing (creative close reading), to looking at a literary work in its wider cultural context, and, finally, to engaging in extended analysis that combines focused close reading and research.

- Effective Communication
 - Students will develop and hone their writing in a series of assignments that add new skill sets and get progressively longer as they become more comfortable and gain more acumen with these skills. The more heavily-weighted papers have scaffolding assignments that allow students to build their papers block by block, including writing rough drafts that they workshop with their classmates.

Grades and Assessments:

Course Goal or SLO	Graded Assignment	Course Assessment
Critical Thinking	Presentation Close reading paper Tolkien's medievalism paper Creative close reading paper Influence of <i>LotR</i> assignment Think piece	75% of students will be able to examine subtle textual details and discuss their significance for their understanding and interpretation of the course readings; place their analysis in conversation with the analyses of others; and organize their observations into a cohesive and well-structured argument (think piece)
Effective Communication	Presentation Close reading paper Tolkien's medievalism paper Creative close reading paper Influence of <i>LotR</i> assignment Think piece	75% of students will be able to write a grammatically correct and polished assignment that conveys information effectively to a wide audience that is not exclusively academic in its make-up (Influence of <i>LotR</i> assignment)

Competencies:

- Critical Thinking
- Effective Communication

Features

- Not applicable