

ZOMBIES!



ZOMBIES! ISSUES ESSAY

One of the crucial aspects of this course is developing the ability to critically engage and write about texts and to cultivate readings of those texts that address contemporary issues. Students are asked, in other words, to write about something of importance through what might otherwise be missed or dismissed as *mere* entertainment. This process both adds value to the text (recall I.A. Richards) and sharpens our minds by allowing us to think about things that matter to us. This essay, then, is a sustained engagement with one key issue (e.g., language, love, science, violence, race, justice, diversity) and how zombie texts treat it. To do this, students must draw *very specific* elements from the novels (quotes) and the films (visual elements, bits of dialogue, music—following the handout “How to Watch a Film”). Students must also conduct outside research to locate critical texts dealing with the issue they have chosen to address (an essay on language or violence, for instance. See the instructor for advice and tips on locating critical sources).

General Tips and Guidelines

As students plan and draft their essays, they should follow these bits of “advice”:

- Include a discussion of your issue—how it presently shows-up (nod to critical texts or another touchstone such as a news story) and why it is important.
- Highlight the specific elements of the text or texts that will be used and discussed.
- Pull quotes from books and dialogue and still images from the films (screen captures).
- Draw on, when appropriate and necessary, extra features such as director’s commentaries, interviews with authors, alternate endings, and reviews of the texts (as either support or as foils).
- Avoid the simplistic “what the film is saying” approach. Always be leery of presuming the filmmaker’s or writer’s intentions. Not only are intentions hard to discover, they might not even be clear to the artist. Additionally, the intentions of the artist should not necessarily *limit* what an audience might say about a text. Indeed, many artists construct texts that can be interpreted multiple ways: this adds value to the film or book and allows audience members to make it their own.

Sample Essay Introduction

Humans are social animals. A simple statement widely accepted. But what does or can it possible mean? Are we not, in many respects, distinct individuals? We have our own bodies and nervous systems, and, thus, our own pain. Certainly, we gather together and enjoy and often rely on the company of others, but what is *essential* about the social? In this essay, I explore what it means to be a social animal through the movie *I Am Legend*. *I Am Legend*, when read as a treatment of the social, works to remind us that without one another we are not ourselves. To develop this line of thought, I focus specifically on the way Robert Neville (Will Smith) fills his world with cultural artifacts (tape-recorded television programs and movies) that keep him connected with others. In particular, I explore the scene where Neville synchronously re-enacts a scene from the movie *Shrek* in order to connect with a mother and son who suddenly appear in his life. I argue that it is through his connections with others through media that Neville maintains his humanity, and that it is likewise through these social artifacts that Neville is able to re-enter into meaningful relationships with others. With its portrayal of Robert Neville and his use of and relationship to social artifacts such as television and film, *I Am Legend* (intentionally or not) understands the human animal as social and what this means to individuals.

Rubric

The following rubric is used to assess these essays:

- A. *Outstanding* essays provide specifics from the texts in forwarding a coherent and well-developed treatment of an equally specific issue. The issue selected itself invites a complicated answer (that is, a good question makes the answer better). Additionally, outstanding essays incorporate outside sources (i.e., critical essays on the selected issue, other reviews of the texts, and additional information on the texts themselves like director’s commentaries and author interviews) to add depth and relevance to their answer. The prose is clear and organized and reflects the sophistication of the argument. They also meet all other specifications for this assignment as described below.

- B. Essays performing *significantly* above the basic requirements do all the required tasks but with a level of sophistication and specificity above the basic requirements. This means well-chosen and specific examples from the texts linked together in a thoughtful manner. In many regards, they look like an *outstanding* essay but with less sophistication of prose and analysis.
- C. These essays *meet the basic requirements* as described above. They draw specific passages from the texts in an attempt to treat the selected issue; they do not merely summarize the readings. The prose is clear and the essay logically organized.
- D. Such essays merely summarize texts and define only a vague key issue with no attempts to integrate the two through thoughtful analysis. Essays earning this grade also lack focus in organization and clarity of prose.
- F. Simply put, these essays fail to meet even the most basic requirement. They fail to understand the prompt, discuss any text, or attempt to forward some thesis about a contemporary issue.

Document Specifications

All essays must meet these basic specifications:

- 1,500 words, 1 inch margins, double spaced
- 10-12 point font, legible typeface
- Name, course and section number, date, and assignment name in top left corner, single-spaced
- Title centered above body text

