

Short Paper 1.3: Why *Harry Potter*?

engl 131 / sec. D / winter quarter 2010 / chang



By the time you sit down to this assignment, you will have been introduced to the basics of cultural studies and to the analysis of different kinds of texts, including literature. You will have read several critical essays about *Harry Potter*. You will have done close reading, thought about rhetoric, argument, and claim, and you will have generated your own claims and ideas. It's time for more practice.

Like your previous assignments, whether you were consciously aware of the fact or not, this assignment asks you to generate a claim about a text. This short assignment is a response paper, an exploratory paper, a

claim précis. In other words, your goal is to identify something significant, something with stakes about the text that strikes you, gets you thinking, demands analysis, and that opens up the text in a new, interesting, provocative way. Remember that for such a short response paper, you will need to dive right in and demonstrate focus, detail, coherence, and the ability to concisely formulate arguments: open with a specific claim, support with evidence and analysis, identify the stakes or the importance of your analysis.

Central to Giselle Liza Anatol's introduction to *Reading Harry Potter* is the question of the usefulness and critical value of *Harry Potter*. She argues that literature has power and also reveals the ways in which culture works; it is a "site also subject to the ideological structures that motivate all actions and underpin the workings of our daily world" (xv). She wants to resist and complicate "the phrase that many instructors have heard from students in their introductory-level literature classes: 'You're reading too much into it'" (xv). Now, it's your turn to read too much into it or rather to read enough or more into it. Now, it's your turn to answer the troubling questions of why *Harry Potter* should be read, taught, analyzed, and critiqued.

For this 2 to 3 page paper, consider the questions: "**What *Harry Potter*? Why teach *Harry Potter*? Why is *Harry Potter* important?**" You may agree with critics that argue that there is critical value in reading and teaching *Harry Potter*. Why? What is your specific argument? You may take a different approach and argue that there are critical concerns and problems with *Harry Potter*, perhaps thinking about how Harry himself might be heroified. Why? What is your specific claim? Or, you might have a bridging or compromising perspective that tries to incorporate both sides. Why? What is your specific approach? Support your claim with detailed examples, close reading, and quotes from the class readings, particularly drawing on Anatol, Loewen, and Smith.

Targeted outcomes: 1, 2, 3

Turn in: 23 to 34 inches, typed, no title page, proper heading, double-spaced, stapled

Due: Tuesday, January 26, at the start of class