

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

For this course, you'll write two essays: one on *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and one on Aristophanes's *Clouds*.

Before uploading, make sure your essays meet the [Requirements for All Papers](#). All written assignments must be submitted via [BlackBoard](#).

Open the individual pages linked below for the details, requirements, and guidance.

	Upload by
Essay #1 on <i>The Epic of Gilgamesh</i>	Jan. 9
Essay #2 on <i>Clouds</i>	Jan. 16

IMPORTANT

For each assignment:

- **Watch the video.** The overview video explains what I want you to cover in the essay and what I'm expecting in terms of arguments, evidence, and structure.
- **Before you upload,** make sure your essay meets the [Requirements for All Papers](#), including formatting, structure, and citations. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited. For how to do citations and bibliographies, see the [Citations handout](#).

Essay #1 on *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

The assignment: Write a 3- to 4-page essay using three moments from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to **take a position** on the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of ancient Sumer, responding to **one** of the following three prompts.

OPTION 1

The mortal and the divine

Choose any of the mortal characters from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and discuss his or her relationship with the gods.

- Describe and discuss three moments from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* showing your character interacting with or contemplating the gods.
- Make an argument about what these examples show us regarding Sumer's take on religion and the gods, and what it means to be human. Think about Sumerian culture's traditions and expectations and how they impact on the individual you're writing about.
- (Note: your best bets are either Gilgamesh or Enkidu; Utanapishtim is also a possibility.)

OPTION 2

Gender in Sumerian society

Choose any of the female characters from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and discuss her relationship with the other characters and Sumerian society.

- Describe and discuss three moments from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* showing your character's actions or behavior and how it relates to her role as a woman in Sumerian society.
- Make an argument about what these examples show us regarding gender expectations and the roles of women in Sumerian culture. Think about Sumerian culture's traditions and expectations and how they impact on the individual you're writing about.
- (Note: your best bet is Shamhat; Ninsun and Ishtar are also possibilities.)

OPTION 3

Life and death

Mortality is one of the major themes of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, but what is the epic saying about it?

- Describe and discuss three moments from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* that involve death or mortality—either an actual death, or discussion of death and mortality.
- Make an argument about what these examples show us regarding Sumerian ideas of death and legacy, and how Sumerian culture thought about death. Think about Sumerian culture's traditions and expectations and how they impact on the individual you're writing about.

Essay #2 on *Clouds*

The assignment: Write a 3- to 4-page essay comparing three moments from *Clouds* to another work in order to **take a position** on the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of classical Athens, responding to **one** of the following three prompts.

OPTION 1

Right and wrong in Clouds

Clouds emphasizes traditional values throughout the play and then ends with violence. Does *Clouds* offer an inconsistent message on morality?

- First, choose a tragedy from the Greek classical period in which morality is a key issue. (Popular options include *Medea* by Euripides; *Elektra* by Euripides or Sophocles; and *Antigone* by Sophocles; but there are other possibilities as well.)
- Describe and discuss three incidents from *Clouds* that involve a moral decision or an argument between characters about what the morality of an action. Compare each of these incidents with a similar (or contrasting) moment in the tragedy you've selected.
- Make an argument for the consistency of the moral argument of *Clouds* by comparing it with the moral argument in the tragedy. Where do both plays stand with regard to the Athenian debate on relative morality (*nomos* vs. *physis*)?

OPTION 2

Aristophanes's agenda

The surviving plays of Aristophanes range over a long and turbulent period of Athenian history. Do Aristophanes's opinions and technique change over time?

- First, choose another play by Aristophanes. (Popular options include *Frogs*, mounted in 405 BCE, 11 years after the revised version of *Clouds*; *Birds*, mounted in 414; and *Wealth*, mounted in 388; but any of the 11 surviving plays is fair game. Full texts in English are available [here](#).)
- Describe and discuss three moments from *Clouds* that reflect either Aristophanes's opinions or how he makes the play reflect them. Compare each of these moments with a similar (or contrasting) moment in the other comedy.
- Make an argument for the consistency of Aristophanes's approach to writing, and the evolution of his overall philosophy across this most troubled period. What themes and ideas are present in both plays? Is his approach, methodology, or agenda consistent? If not, how does it change?

OPTION 3

Socrates vs. Socrates

The “Socrates” found in Aristophanes’s *Clouds* is a deliberate distortion driven by a desire to discredit the real Socrates. What does this version of Socrates have in common with the one depicted in works by Socrates’s student, Plato?

- First, choose a work by Plato in which Socrates is a major character. (Possibilities include: *Phaedo*, which has Socrates discussing life and afterlife on the brink of his execution; *Apology*, a version of Socrates’s self-defense against charges of irreligion; or any of the other dialogues that focus on how Plato wanted to show Socrates’s methods and beliefs. Full texts in English are available [here](#).)
- Describe and discuss three moments from *Clouds* that reflect an opinion or behavior expressed by Aristophanes’s version of Socrates. Compare each of these moments with a similar (or contrasting) moment in the work by Plato. What characteristics of Socrates and his philosophy were most exaggerated by the two authors (either in ridicule or praise), and why?
- Make an argument about how Socrates was seen by Athenians in their time of strife. What stood out about his behavior and beliefs that caused him to be venerated by some, and yet so feared by others that he was executed?
- (What’s important to remember is that *both* versions of Socrates are distortions, twisted in the service of what their authors were trying to say about them. Aristophanes and Plato each had an agenda with respect to how they wanted to show Socrates. That means that both authors offered a distorted picture of Socrates that separates us from the real-life man.)