

Essay #1 on *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Civilizations of the Ancient World • Fall 2022

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.