

Essays

For this course, you'll write three essays based on evidence
from the ancient world.

The written assignments for this course are as follows. Mark your calendar, and leave time to prepare, write, and review each assignment.

Essay #1 on *Epic of Gilgamesh*

Due Monday, Sep. 29.

Use three moments from *Gilgamesh* to take a position on the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of ancient Sumer.

See the Essay #1 on *Epic of Gilgamesh* assignment page for details and specific requirements.

Essay #2 on *Clouds*

Due Monday, Nov. 17.

Use three moments from *Clouds* to take a position on the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of classical Athens.

See the Essay #2 on *Clouds* assignment page for details and specific requirements.

Essay #3 on Representations and Images

Due Monday, Dec. 8.

Use depictions of the ancient world to take a position on the representations of ancient cultural ideas and beliefs.

See the Essay #3 on Representations and Images assignment page for details and specific requirements.

Resources and Information

See the Research and Citation Center for more information.

- Footnotes
- Bibliographies
- Citing Ancient Sources
- Kinds of Sources
- Research Options

Other resources on the course website include:

- Writing a Position Paper (a.k.a. the “Elephant Pamphlet”)
- Policies: Plagiarism
- Pre-formatted MS Word template
- Pre-formatted Google Docs template
- More resources

Essay #1

The first essay uses *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to write about Sumer.

The assignment: Write a 3- to 4-page essay that uses three moments from *Gilgamesh* to take a position on the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of ancient Sumer. Quick overview video: *The Gilgamesh Essay* (10:50)

What you need to do

● Get ready.

Review the requirements. Review the Requirements for All Papers. This page has important guidance and videos on formatting your document, structuring your essay, and using evidence.

Watch the video. The overview video linked above explains what I want you to cover in the essay and what I'm expecting in terms of arguments, evidence, and structure.

Another resource you may find helpful is the Elephant Pamphlet, which gives step-by-step guidance on preparing for and writing a position paper.

● Choose your topic from one of the three prompts below

Option A

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. (Note: your best bets are either Gilgamesh or Enkidu; Utanapishtim is also a possibility.)

What does the *Epic* show us regarding Sumer's take on religion and the gods, and what it means to be human?

Option B

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. (Note: your best bet is Shamhat; Ninsun and Ishtar are also possibilities.)

What does the *Epic* show us regarding gender expectations and the roles of women in Sumerian culture?

Option C

Life and death. Mortality is one of the major themes of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, but what is the *Epic* saying about it?

What does the *Epic* show us regarding Sumerian ideas of death and legacy, and how Sumerian culture thought about death?

● Find three moments from the *Epic* that are strong examples of your topic.

Option A

For the "mortal and divine" option, find three moments from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* showing your character interacting with or contemplating the gods.

Option B

For the "gender" option, find 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.

Option C

For the "life and death" option, find three moments from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* that involve death or mortality—either an actual death, or discussion of death and mortality.

● **Write a 3- to 4-page essay in which you take a position on Sumerian culture.**

You'll need an Introduction State what you believe the *Epic* shows us about the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of ancient Sumer in a way that answers the question in the prompt you chose. (This is your thesis statement.)

... a Body Describe and discuss, one by one, each of the three moments you found from the *Epic*. For each section, discuss what the evidence tells us about ancient Sumer.

... and a Conclusion. Tie your examples and assertions together and show how they support your overall thesis.

● **Finalize your essay.**

Citations are important. Make sure your evidence is cited and that you include a bibliography. For how to do citations and bibliographies, see the Research and Citation Center. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited.

Optional draft. You may email me an optional draft two weeks before the final due date. It should include most of your paper (at least two-thirds of the final content, with sections to be written described in square brackets). I'll give feedback, but not a grade, to help you refine your final paper.

Double-check the requirements. Make sure your essay meets the Requirements for All Papers for formatting, structure, and evidence, as well as the specifications given above for what's expected for this assignment.

Once you're sure your essay meets the requirements, upload it as DOCX or PDF to Brightspace.

Essay #2

The second essay uses *Clouds* to write about Athens.

The assignment: Write a 3- to 4-page essay that uses three moments from *Clouds* to take a position on the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of classical Athens. Quick overview video: [The *Clouds* Essay \(19:52\)](#)

What you need to do

● Get ready.

Review the requirements. Review the Requirements for All Papers. This page has important guidance and videos on formatting your document, structuring your essay, and using evidence.

Watch the video. The overview video linked above explains what I want you to cover in the essay and what I'm expecting in terms of arguments, evidence, and structure.

Another resource you may find helpful is the Elephant Pamphlet, which gives step-by-step guidance on preparing for and writing a position paper.

● Choose your topic from one of the three prompts below.

Option A

Right and wrong in *Clouds*.

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

Discuss 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 B

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?

Discuss 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 C

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?

Discuss how Socrates was seen by Athenians in their time of strife. What about his behavior and beliefs that caused him to be venerated by some, and yet so feared by others that he was executed? What characteristics of Socrates and his philosophy were most exaggerated by the two authors (either in ridicule or praise), and why?

(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—positive or negative.)

● **Choose a second work to compare with *Clouds*.**

Option A

For the “right and wrong” option, choose a tragedy from the Greek classical period in which morality is a key issue to compare with *Clouds*.

Popular options include:

- *Medea* by Euripides;
- *Elektra* by Euripides or Sophocles; and
- *Antigone* by Sophocles.

There are other possibilities as well.

Option B

For the “Aristophanes’s agenda” option, choose another play by Aristophanes to compare with *Clouds*.

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.
- Any of the 11 surviving plays is fair game. Full texts in English are also available.

Option C

For the “Socrates vs. Socrates” option, choose a work by Plato in which Socrates is a major character to compare with *Clouds*.

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 irreverence; 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](#).

● **Find three moments from *Clouds* that are strong examples of your topic.**

Option A

For the “right and wrong” option, find 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.

Option B

For the “Aristophanes’s agenda” option, find three incidents 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.

Option C

For the “Socrates vs. Socrates” option, find three incidents 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.

● **Write a 3- to 4-page essay in which you take a position on Athenian culture.**

You’ll need an Introduction State what you believe *Clouds* shows us about the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of fifth-century Athens in a way that answers the question in the prompt you chose. (This is your thesis statement.)

... a Body Describe and discuss, one by one, each of the three moments you found from *Clouds* and compare with a similar moment from your second work. For each section, discuss what the evidence tells us about classical Athens.

... and a Conclusion. Tie your examples and assertions together and show how they support your overall thesis.

● Finalize your essay.

Citations are important. Make sure your evidence is cited and that you include a bibliography. For how to do citations and bibliographies, see the Research and Citation Center. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited.

Optional draft. You may email me an optional draft two weeks before the final due date. It should include most of your paper (at least two-thirds of the final content, with sections to be written described in square brackets). I'll give feedback, but not a grade, to help you refine your final paper.

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Once you're sure your essay meets the requirements, upload it as DOCX or PDF to Brightspace.

Essay #3

The third essay uses images from antiquity to talk about ideas important to cultures of the ancient world.

The assignment: Write a 3- to 4-page essay that uses depictions of the ancient world to take a position on the representations of ancient cultural ideas and beliefs. Quick overview video: The Images Essay (11:00)

What you need to do

● Get ready.

Review the requirements. Review the Requirements for All Papers. This page has important guidance and videos on formatting your document, structuring your essay, and using evidence.

Watch the video. The overview video linked above explains what I want you to cover in the essay and what I'm expecting in terms of arguments, evidence, and structure.

Another resource you may find helpful is the Elephant Pamphlet, which gives step-by-step guidance on preparing for and writing a position paper.

● Choose your topic from one of the two prompts below.

Option A

Two pieces in a museum. How a culture sees abstract ideas (masculinity, virtue, old age, divinity, and so on) is often reflected in its artwork. What can two different works of art depicting the same idea, but from different times or places, tell us about how the cultures that produced them?

Compare the two works show to explore what their creators/artists believed about the idea they were representing. What insight do these beliefs this give us into the cultures the two artists came from?

Option B

The ancient world on film. Every depiction of an historical event, whether in prose, poetry, painting, theater, or film, involves an artist using history to convey his or her own beliefs. What do the creators of these works want you to believe?

Compare the agenda of the filmmakers with the agenda of the authors of the primary source. How did these creators reshape this event for their own purposes? How do these similarities and differences show what this event means to the people who create art about it?

● Choose two works depicting the ancient world to compare.

Option A

For the museum option, you need to choose two works of art from the ancient world that (a) represent the same idea or concept but (b) come either from different periods or from different places in the ancient world.

Choosing your subjects:

- Your two works of art must represent the same idea or concept. For example, you can choose two little girls, two warriors, two fertility goddesses, etc.
- Your works of art must be from the ancient era (before 500 CE) and from either two different places or two different periods. The two pieces can be in any visual medium: sculpture, painting, relief, etc.
- You should experience the artwork face-to-face by attending a museum in person. Possible venues include: Metropolitan Museum's Egypt Collection; Metropolitan Museum's Greek and Roman Art Collection; Brooklyn Museum of Art's Ancient Egyptian Art Collection; and Fordham Museum of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Art. You are not limited to these venues or to New York.

Option B

For the film option, you need to choose a film that is set in the ancient world and that is based on ancient primary sources.

Choosing your subjects:

- First, choose and watch any feature-length film or two episodes of a TV series set in the ancient world (3500 BCE to 500 CE).
- Then find the ancient primary source material it was based on and read it. For example, if you chose the movie 300, which is about the Battle of Thermopylae, the primary source would be the main ancient account, Book 7 of The Histories by Herodotos.
- Your primary source(s) must come from the ancient world (before 500 CE).
- Some suggestions for possible films or series and their corresponding sources are on the course website.

● Find three aspects of your works that are strong examples of your topic.

Option A

For the museum option, choose three aspects of the works you can discuss for both pieces that seem to reflect how the artist felt about the subject and what the subject stood for.

- Some possibilities include facial expression, dress, use of technique or medium, stiffness/fluidity, apparent strength/weakness, idealism/realism, or any other elements offering some kind of insight into what the artist was trying to convey.
- For each aspect, relate your subjective impressions of how it manifests in the first piece; then how the second piece is similar or different and in what way.
- For example: say you've chosen two sculptures depicting different love goddesses, and one has a crafty expression while the other has an innocent expression. The contrast can be used to talk about how each artist might have thought about the goddesses' relationships with mortals; the nature of love; etc.

Option B

For the film option, choose three moments or depictions from the film and find the corresponding events or depictions in the primary source.

- For each moment or depiction, describe and discuss how it appears in the film and how it is presented similarly / differently in the primary source material.
- For example:
 - In the movie 300, Xerxes and the Persians are depicted in a heavy-handed manner; you could use this to discuss what tropes and visual and dialog cues the filmmakers were using to suggest how we should think of the Persians, and why the filmmakers might have turned the story this way.
 - Meanwhile, Herodotos's presentation of the Persians is very different, which you can use to discuss what Herodotos wanted us to think about the Persians and the role he saw them as playing in this war.

Please take note: This essay is about the agenda of the primary source author as much as the filmmakers'. Do not use the source to "fact check" the film and list what it got "wrong". You must consider the primary source to be at least as skewed, manipulative, and agenda-driven as the film.

● **Write a 3- to 4-page essay in which you take a position on the works you're studying.**

You'll need an Introduction State what you believe these works show us about the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of the cultures involved and how they were perceived and used by others in a way that answers the question in the prompt you chose. (This is your thesis statement.)

... a Body Describe and discuss, one by one, each of the three aspects of the works you are studying. For each section, discuss what the evidence tells us about the ideas being represented.

... and a Conclusion. Tie your examples and assertions together and show how they support your overall thesis.

● **Finalize your essay.**

Citations are important. Make sure your evidence is cited and that you include a bibliography. For how to do citations and bibliographies, see the Research and Citation Center. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited.

Option A

For the museum option, instead of a bibliography, on a separate "Works Discussed" page after your essay, list the title of each work, artist, date created, place of origin, and the museum. Paste in photographs of the items from your visit or from the museum's website. Footnotes/parenthetical cites are not needed for this assignment.

Option B

For the film option, instead of a bibliography, on a separate "Works Discussed" page after your essay, list the title of film, year, director, stars and studio. Then list the book or books you drew your written evidence from, using standard citation style. You will need to provide footnotes/parenthetical cites for the primary source(s) you used, but not for the film.

Optional draft. You may email me an optional draft two weeks before the final due date. It should include most of your paper (at least two-thirds of the final content, with sections to be written described in square brackets). I'll give feedback, but not a grade, to help you refine your final paper.

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Commonly used films and their primary sources

Some possibilities for the film and sources option are posted on the course website. Links to most of these primary sources can be found on the ancient texts page on my website.