Essay #5: Synthesis of Two Texts

In this essay, you will be synthesizing two essays of your choice from those we’ve read this quarter. Choose two essays that have a meaningful connection to each other. Through writing this essay, you will do the following:

- Find a meaningful relationship between two texts;
- Learn how to trace and analyze a specific theme or rhetorical strategy in more than one text;
- Arrive at a deeper or new understanding of the theme or strategy and of the texts through the process of synthesis.

In order to write an effective synthesis paper, you’ll need to ask yourself the following questions:

- How does my understanding of Text A change my view of Text B? How does my understanding of Text B change my view of Text A?
- What new awareness is gained from analyzing both texts together that wouldn’t be apparent if I’d analyzed only one text? (in other words, simply saying that both texts deal with the same theme —here’s how Text A does it and here’s how Text B does it —is not a synthesis. The similarities — or differences — in how the authors reveal the themes have to mean something.)

Thesis: To come up with your thesis, you’ll first need to identify the connection between the two texts (a common theme or rhetorical strategy). Then, you’ll need to think about what that connection means. Instead of simply comparing two points of view on a theme by showing differences and similarities, a synthesis analyzes how the two texts speak to each other and what new understanding results from that analysis. According to The New American Webster Handy College Dictionary, synthesis is “the combination of separate elements into a complex whole” (664). The attached handout gives you more information on synthesis.

I am purposely leaving this assignment fairly open-ended because I want to see what kind of connection you can make from your analysis of the texts. We will do some in-class brainstorming this week that should help you get started. Then please bring a rough thesis to class on Tuesday, November 20 for a thesis workshop.

Outline: On Monday, November 26, please bring a typed outline of your essay to class. The outline should include your thesis and a brief description of the paragraphs of your essay. I will provide a sample outline for you.

Conferences: On Tuesday and Wednesday, November 27 and 28, we will have individual conferences in the classroom. These conferences will last around 5-10 minutes each. We’ll discuss your plan for your paper and any other questions you have for me. During conference days, we will not hold regular class. You can use this time to write, revise, and visit the Loft.

Peer Review: Bring two copies of your typed, double-spaced rough draft on Thursday, November 29 for peer review. I will check to see that your rough drafts are a minimum of three full pages. Remember that if you fail to participate in peer review, 10 points will be deducted from your final grade.

Final Draft: Revise your essay and bring it to class on Monday, December 3 in a folder with the outline, rough draft, peer review comments, revision activity, and attached evaluation sheet. Because this assignment is due near the end of the quarter, I cannot accept any late essays. I will return them to you during your final exam period.
Format: Please use the same format that you have used for your previous essays. This essay should be about 1500 words (roughly 4-6 pages).

**Synthesis 101**

**What is synthesis and what is its purpose?**  
Synthesis is a common academic exercise. When you synthesize two or more texts, you find a meaningful connection between them. You create a dialogue of sorts between the texts, showing how they “speak” to one another. That dialogue results in a new and deeper understanding of the texts and the theme or rhetorical strategy that connects them. When you look at the ideas in one text alone, you focus only on your interpretation of that particular text. When you open your analysis up to multiple texts, you can see the ideas in a new light by looking at how those texts complement and/or contradict each other.

**How is synthesis different from compare and contrast?**  
In some ways, these two activities are similar. But think of synthesis as going beyond compare and contrast; in general, it is a more complex intellectual task. Instead of looking at two separate things and finding similarities or differences, you focus on how these two things (texts, in this case) actually work together to create a deeper understanding. A new idea is created out of two.

**How should I organize a synthesis essay?**  
Because you want to show a strong connection between the texts and maintain that throughout your essay, I would encourage you to follow the general organizational pattern below. Notice that you’re going back and forth, from one text to the other, so the connection between texts is always evident. Make sure that you refer to both texts in each body paragraph; do not write separate body paragraphs for each text.

I. Introduction (introduce theme/rhetorical strategy, texts, thesis statement)  
II. First point about the theme/rhetorical strategy  
   A. Illustrations from both texts and explanations of those examples  
III. Second point about the theme/rhetorical strategy  
   A. Illustrations from both texts and explanations of those examples  
IV. Conclusion

Important additions:
- You may, of course, choose to focus on more than two points. The number of points you develop should be dictated by the content of your thesis, not by a formula. Because of this, the number of points in each essay will vary from student to student.
- Depending on the complexity and number of your supporting points, you may choose to write two paragraphs on the same point, dividing that point into sub-points.
- Don’t feel that you need to devote equal time to both texts. Your thesis and the purpose of your comparison should dictate how much time is spent on each text.
Sample Synthesis Introduction and Thesis:

Both Lars Eighner and Frederick Douglass explore the theme of self-discovery in their essays. In Douglass’s “Learning to Read and Write,” he documents this discovery by describing his own journey as a black American slave who by his own efforts becomes literate and is in turn liberated from mental slavery and into freedom. In “On Dumpster Diving,” Eighner’s path is paved through his habit of incessantly digging through the town Dumpsters to look for food, clothing, and even medicine. But as we look carefully at Eighner’s essay, we can see that he is actually in search of his own liberation. When these essays are examined together, we find that both show that on the way to discovering oneself, there should be a focus on not only ourselves and our actions, but also a focus on understanding the nature of the world around us.

A thesis for a synthesis essay has multiple parts:
1. It identifies the common theme or rhetorical strategy
2. It identifies how the authors are using that theme or rhetorical strategy
3. Beyond stating the similarities and/or differences, it asserts what larger idea can be arrived at by looking at both texts. It’s not enough to say “Both author A and Author B discuss ________.” Why is that important?

Outline assignment: Bring a typed outline to class on Monday, November 26. Late outlines will not be given credit. You can follow the basic structure below (or vary it as appropriate for your essay). Please fill your outline in with specific ideas (that is, identify the theme, write the thesis, write the points, etc.).

Sample Synthesis Outline
I. Introduction
   A. Brief introduction of essays
   B. Define theme
   C. Thesis—Make an assertion about the theme that connects the essays
II. Body
   A. Point #1: (examples from both texts)
   B. Point #2: (examples from both texts)
   C. Point #3: (examples from both texts)
III. Conclusion—Restates thesis and points
Essay Evaluation Sheet

Name_____________________________________

Date________________________

Part A: To be filled out by the student (and turned in with the final essay on December 3):

1. What is your thesis?

2. What is the best part of your paper (or your favorite part of your paper)? Why?

3. What specific parts of the paper would you like me to look at? Why?

4. What did you learn from writing this essay?

Part B: To be filled out by the instructor:
The thesis should contain a thoughtful assertion about how the connection between the two texts is significant. It should make clear what you have learned about the theme/rhetorical strategy through the process of synthesis.  

Points should be clearly identified, illustrated with examples/references from the text, and explained (PIE). The PIE paragraphs should support and develop the assertion. The essay should show critical thinking and a careful analysis of the texts.

The essay should be organized in a logical manner with transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and ideas. The organization should reflect the synthesis of the two texts. Particular attention should be paid to how ideas from both texts are connected.

Quotations and paraphrased passages should be smoothly integrated into the writing and should use proper MLA documentation.

The sentence-level writing should be clear and without grammatical, mechanical, or spelling errors. The essay should follow the assigned format.

The outline for the essay should be thorough and complete (by November 26).

Total = ____/100