

Dr. Cothran
English 200
Reading Response 1

Pick a topic below. Then, look through *The Moonstone*. Using quotes and examples from the text, write a **3 page, thesis-driven essay** (typed, double-spaced, in 12 point font) that expresses your views.

1. A number of characters in this novel are simply overwhelmed by romantic passion. Even though most (if not all) remain physically chaste, their bodies betray them with blushes and fits and fainting spells. Discuss the different ways in which Collins describes the beauty, power, and danger of romantic desire in this text.
2. In some sense, this novel documents the fall and consequent reconstruction of the British home. What does Collins say about the dangers that threaten the traditional family and traditional English ways of living? How does he envision the new, ideal home and the new, ideal state? What changes must be made? What must be learned?
3. In the opening pages of her well-known biography of Wilkie Collins, Catherine Peters describes how Collins always imagined himself to be “haunted by a second self” (1). She goes on to claim that, in many of his novels, “physical deformity threatens a character’s identity in the eyes of others” and that “[m]adness, drugs, and dreams permanently or temporarily interfere with the full possession of the self, and bring hidden personalities to the surface” (2). What does *The Moonstone* tell us about private identity, public perception, and self-knowledge?
4. Choose your own topic! (You might discuss Collins’ presentations of nationality, race, class, or gender in the novel, etc.) Just get it approved by me beforehand.

Suggestions:

The more nuanced and detailed your discussion, the more likely you are to make a good grade. If you can, discuss a variety of comments (hopefully made by more than one character) on the topic. Some characters’ views might contradict the views of other characters ... why might this be? Who do you think Collins wants us to trust? What does it mean if there are a variety of conflicting views? These are just few things you might think about!

Some advice: The evidence you provide when supporting your thesis should present not only quotations from the text (or descriptions of plot/character elements) that support your ideas but **analyses** of those quotations. Analysis means exploring the significance of a quotation. Define, discuss, and describe the quote. Explain why you have used this particular passage. How does it relate to your thesis? Don’t assume that your reader will automatically see the significance of the examples you use.

Note: You are not expected or required to use outside sources when writing this essay, but if you do use them, please be sure to cite all source material using correct MLA format.