Dr. Casey A. Cothran

English 310: Short Essay Assignment

For this assignment, you will need to write a **3-4 page essay**. You should use Times New Roman, 12 point font, and attach a Works Cited page.

Directions:

1. Choose one of the passages below. (If none of these textual moments speak to you, come see me about getting permission to analyze a passage that you find evocative and significant.)

a. *The Woman in White*, Walter Hartright tries to save Sir Percival Glyde from the fire: pages 513

(“The instant I turned the corner…”) to 519 (“…he and I should meet.”)

b. *A Study in Scarlet*, “On the Great Alkali Plain”: 48-56 (Part 2, Chapter 1)

c. *The Sign of the Four*, “The Story of the Bald-Headed Man”: 107-114 (Chapter 4)

d. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, “An Evening at Mah Jong”: 178-188 (Chapter 16)

2. Read your chosen passage carefully, taking notes on fictional elements such as character development, setting, writing style, word choice, imagery (similes and metaphors), symbolism, and dialogue. Reflect on *how* sentences within the passage may reflect one of the novel’s larger themes, messages, or morals. What does the passage mean on its own? What does it mean within the context of the novel as a whole?

3. Write a “close reading” of the passage you have chosen. A close reading is a “careful, sustained interpretation of a brief passage. Such a reading places great emphasis on the particular over the general, paying close attention to individual words, syntax, and the order in which sentences and ideas unfold as they are read” (Wikipedia). You will want to make sure you quote extensively from the passage as you write your essay. A close reading looks closely at a piece of text, but it also presents a thesis. As noted on the Harvard.edu webpage:

making these observations constitutes the first step in the process of close reading. The second step is interpreting your observations. What we're basically talking about here is inductive reasoning: moving from the observation of particular facts and details to a conclusion, or interpretation, based on those observations. And, as with inductive reasoning, close reading requires careful gathering of data (your observations) and careful thinking about what these data add up to. (http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/CloseReading.html)

Ultimately, you will write a 3-4 page, thesis-driven essay. The essay will use only a small section of text to present your thesis. In a way, this type of assignment forces you to write the paper from the inside out, considering the passage first and foremost and reading it super-carefully so there's no danger of forcing its details to fit a preordained thesis you have already written.

4. Attach a Works Cited page to your essay. (You may need to review “The Correct Use of Borrowed Information” and MLA formats in your WU handbook.)