**Sample Formal Paper Assignments for English 126**

These sample assignments were suggested by faculty members participating in a series of English composition workshops conducted in the spring of 2013.

**Paper #1: Literary Analysis/Interpretation**

1. Select a specific theme that is common to two stories we have encountered this semester, and then compare and contrast how the theme is explored in each text. For example, what might Nathaniel Hawthorne and Shirley Jackson be telling us about our cultural reliance on ritual and blind faith? What are Charles Johnson and Ralph Ellison saying about the pernicious influence of racial inequality? What can be made if the inextricable relationship between the past and present in William Faulkner and Michael Bishop, or Annie Proulx and Steven Millhauser?
2. In an essay of between three and four pages, explore images and ideas about the relationships between parents and children as you draw connections from two of the following poems: "wishes for sons" Lucille Clifton; "Those Winter Sundays" Robert Hayden;"The Possessive" Sharon Olds; "Metaphors" Sylvia Plath.
3. This semester we have read three works that deal with the profound and lingering effects of racism: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Charles Johnson's "Exchange Value," and Flannery O'Connor's "Everything that Rises Must Converge." Drawing connections between Morrison's novel and one of these short stories, examine the role racism plays in the formation of identity -- that is, in these texts, how does racism influence the ways in which characters perceive themselves, and the world around them? What are the authors ultimately telling us about the impact that racism can have on our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors?

**Paper #2 Connecting Literature to Framing Texts**

1. Using "The Things They Carried," by Tim O'Brien, and the class handout "Illumination Rounds" (from "Dispatches") by Michael Herr, write a 3-4 page piece that investigates how soldiers in Vietnam dealt with their fears and hopes when they were in battles or at war in general. Discuss what soldiers did and how they behaved under the pressures of fear and panic. What kinds of things did they wish for? Find textual evidence of how they revealed their true feelings, and how they hid them. Use both texts to flesh out your paper and provide an informed discussion.
2. In a paper of roughly four pages, I would like you to discuss how the critical reading of **ONE non-literary** work impacts your reading and interpretation of **ONE** of the following literary works that we have been discussing in class. In other words, your essay should discuss how the non-literary work adds to your understanding of the literary work: James Baldwin "Sonny's Blues"; Alice Walker "Everyday Use"; Charlotte Perkins Gilman "The Yellow Wallpaper." The non-literary text that you choose might be either a popular or scholarly piece. Please be sure to discuss with me the appropriateness of sources you are considering. For this paper, I ask that you **do** **not** use literary criticism. In other words, do not research the use of metaphor in "Sonny's Blues," for instance, or the symbolism in "The Yellow Wallpaper." Instead, investigate how other disciplines, psychology or sociology, for instance, address the issue identified in the literary work.

**Paper #3: Research Paper**

1. For this final research project, I am asking that you write a research paper of roughly 6 pages based on your reading of either "A Doll's House" or "Antigone." Your analysis of the work should be based on a frame that you determine based on research. For example your frame might be the roles and rights of women in the era of the play. As you draft and revise your research papers, you will be using 3 sources to illuminate a particular aspect of your chosen play. The goal is to investigate some of the context of the work and to integrate **non-literary sources** along with interpretation to address questions that arise in your reading of the work.