These essays ask you to provide an original, detailed, and persuasive argument about a single text that that we read during the assigned periods. A successful essay will construct a clear, relevant, and sustained thesis. The broader argument will contain a topic (what you are writing about), an argument (what you are claiming about that topic), close-reading or analysis (examining the text in ways that develop your argument), and some synthesis (why your argument matters; in other words, an answer to the “so what” question). Please advance a specific claim about a theme or issue within the text and make an argument about how that theme or issue is presented. In other words, *what* does this text have to say about *x*, *how* does it do so, and *why* is that significant? After reading your essay, your reader should have a deeper understanding not just about your topic but about the text on the whole. Your essay will demonstrate to what extent you have engaged with the readings, the discussions, and the material of this course.

The essay should be between 1,000 and 1,200 words, and no less than three pages. Please format your essay so that the margins are 1”, the font is 12 point Times New Roman, and spacing is double (without extra spacing between paragraphs or in the heading). Please include the course information in the upper left hand corner of the first page and page numbers in the header of each page (in the right-hand side). Give your essay an appropriate title, one that brings up your topic and the name of the text you will address (e.g. Environment and Exceptionalism in Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American*). Do not underline your title, put it in quotation marks, or otherwise embellish it. Please be sure to include parenthetical citations for each quotation or passage that you paraphrase and a works cited sheet at the end of the essay. (In other words, the formatting of the paper should follow MLA style.)

A successful essay will do the following:

-- Begin with an introduction that sets up the context for the argument, states the various sub-arguments, and ends with a clear thesis, one that shows *what* you will argue and *how* you will go about doing so;

-- Argues and develops the thesis in every paragraph;

-- Be organized in a way that helps the reader understand the overall point and specific claims of your thesis (this requires topic sentences, a single and unique argument for each paragraph, clear signposting, and transitions);

-- Base its argument around evidence from the text, paraphrasing important content and quoting important language (the argument should be, in other words, about *what* the text says about your topic and *how* it does so);

-- Analyze closely the examples provided, paying attention to issues of language, style, tone, structure, genre, etc. (examples should not simply support your thesis but instead opportunities to deepen and complicate your thesis);

-- Guide the reader’s understanding from what you notice in the text to your conclusions. (In other words, show your work. Don’t just tell us that *x* reveals *y*, show us how it does so.)

Grading: An A paper will argue an original thesis throughout. Each sub-argument will support the overall thesis and will provide sufficient analysis so as to both deepen and guide the reader’s understanding. Each sub-argument will rely on at least one example from the text and each example will be deeply and thoroughly analyzed. In each paragraph of an A paper, the author will guide the reader through the analysis and will connect these specific points to the paragraph’s conclusions. Each paragraph, in addition, will be clearly connected to the overall thesis. In addition to providing detailed close-reading and analysis, an A paper will impressively utilize terms and issues discussed in class.

A B paper will argue an original thesis, though not as consistently as in an A paper. Nearly all sub-arguments will support the overall thesis. Each sub-argument will rely on at least one example from the text and each example will be sufficiently analyzed. The author will, for the most part, guide the reader through the analysis and will connect the analysis to the sub-argument's conclusions. In nearly all the paragraphs of a B paper, the author will guide the reader through the analysis and will connect these specific points to the paragraph’s conclusions. Nearly all paragraphs, in addition, will be clearly connected to the overall thesis. In addition to providing detailed close-reading and analysis, a B paper will utilize terms and issues discussed in class, but not in a way that demonstrates full command.

A C paper will struggle at times to argue its thesis. Some sub-arguments will not support the overall thesis or will lack examples from the text. Close-reading and analysis will be either intermittent or undeveloped. In a C paper, only some examples will be closely-analyzed and the use of terms and issues discussed in class will be intermittent. A paper that does not meet the length-requirements will earn a C at best.

A D paper will lack a clearly argued thesis. Many sub-arguments will not support the overall thesis or will lack examples from the text. Close-reading and analysis will be either intermittent or undeveloped. The author will rarely guide the reader from point to point. In a D paper, few examples will be closely-analyzed and the use of terms and issues discussed in class will be largely lacking.

An F paper will have no thesis; few, if any, examples; and will avoid analysis, synthesis, and demonstration of familiarity with the terms and issues discussed in class. A paper that is extremely short will receive a failing grade.

Plagiarism: Please review the information on plagiarism included on the syllabus. A paper that is intentionally plagiarized (regardless of how much material comes from another source) will either receive an F or a referral to the Dean. Please contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Topics: I encourage you to define your own topic and will be happy to help you brainstorm or develop potential topics, ideas, approaches, etc., as well as help with any other aspect of the assignment. The best place to start thinking about a topic is your Discussion Board postings.