

Answer TWO of the following five questions. Each question asks you to discuss three works (and in one of the two, you **must** discuss a novel, though you **can** use both novels), but it is up to you to choose which works to discuss (only use works in the “Second Half” section for this portion of the exam). Remember that an essay that provides specific examples/evidence will be most convincing. Please watch your time carefully.

**For each question, explain how the work explains the theme. You don’t have to answer all the sub-questions: they are only there to guide you.**

1. The theme of **alienation** has been prevalent as we have wrapped up our course this semester. What do these works add to the plight of the human condition? Choose three works and draw out how they answer this rather pervasive theme. Is there any possibility for **hope** here, or is this world truly a veil of tears? Who is alienated? How does alienation make up an essential part of human existence? How much is alienation society’s fault, and how much can we blame the individual? Can alienation lead to a positive outcome?
2. Many of the works we have read in this half of the semester have treated the theme and idea of **confession**. What is a confession and how does it differ from a normal story? Who has been confessing and for what reason? How much truth does a confession hold? Choose three works and discuss what is confessed and by whom. Think about how the confession itself is important to the meaning of the work.
3. One of the major focuses in the second half of the semester has been the idea of the **individual** (specifically in relation to the community or country). We have encountered many individuals and stories about individuals. What challenges does the individual face? What does it mean to be an individual? How much autonomy does the individual have (does the individual have control over his or her own destiny)? Use the three works you choose to draw out the theme and discuss what comments our authors have made about the place or role of the individual.
4. The related themes of **race and gender** have been central to many of the readings in this half of the semester. How does a person’s outlook change based on these important characteristics? For this theme, choose three works and concentrate on how race and/or gender are important to the meaning that emerges. How does race or gender relate to the idea of America? Are these categories that people can ignore? Does the race of others cause characters to act or think in a certain way? Have we seen characters surpass these categories, or do they seem stuck in them? Are these themes escapable? Does they always relate to negative ideas, or can these themes be part of a more positive outlook?
5. Finally, **family** has played a crucial role in the second half of our semester. Think of all the poems, stories, and novels we have read that include commentary on the family. Is family something a person can escape? Should a person try to escape family? Does our family determine who we are and what we can do? How possible is it to live outside of the family? From parents to siblings to more extended members, choose three works and focus on the role family plays and what ideas or comments are offered about family.

## Comprehensive Question for the Final Exam

Answer **one** of the following questions using at least **five** works we've read this semester. You must use at least **two** works from each half of the semester, but there are no restrictions on the number of short stories, poems, or novels.

- 1) Much of our course has centered around "Americanness." Many of the works we have read this semester discuss America as an idea, as a reality, or as a theme to comment on. What kinds of views on America or being an American are offered? Which writers offer the most optimistic and which the most pessimistic views about **America** and the **possibilities this country has to offer** (as a nation or for individual citizens)? Set up a spectrum from most optimistic to most pessimistic and place **five** works on that spectrum, discussing how they deserve those places.
- 2) Even though we have danced around it, probably the most pervasive theme in literature as a whole (besides death and religion) is **love**. In most of the things we have read, love has played a crucial role (as something sought, as background, as unfulfilled longing, as reckless abandon, as related to country, as a reason to destroy, as the glue holding a family together, as possible, as conquering all). Pick **five** works that deal with love and explore their definitions and depictions of love. What is it? Is it possible? How does it appear? What things does it cause?

## Works from the Second Half of the Semester

Emerson: "Self-Reliance" – Essay  
Pound, "In a Station of the Metro" – Poem  
Eliot "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" – Poem  
Stevens: "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman" – Poem  
Williams: "Pastoral" – Poem  
Williams: "Tract" – Poem  
e.e. cummings: "anyone lived in a pretty how town" – Poem  
Nirvana: "All Apologies" – Song/Poem  
O'Connor: "Good Country People" – Short Story  
Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" – Poem  
Lowell: "Memories of West Street and Lepke" – Poem  
Plath: "Daddy" – Poem  
Sexton: "And One for My Dame" – Poem  
Bishop: "One Art" – Poem  
Doctorow: *The Book of Daniel* – Novel  
Douglas: "What to the Slave IS the Fourth of July?" – Oration  
Baldwin: "Sonny's Blues" – Short Story  
Faulkner: "Barn Burning" – Short Story  
Sanchez: "the final solution/" – Poem  
Ortiz: "The Final Solution: Jobs, Leaving" – Poem  
Gilman: "The Yellow Wall-Paper" – Short Story  
Chopin: "The Storm" – Short Story  
Kingston: "No Name Woman" – Short Story  
Lahiri: *The Namesake* – Novel

### Recommended Works from Second Half:

Melville: "Bartleby the Scrivener" – Short Story  
Thoreau: "Civil Disobedience" – Essay  
Stevens: "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" – Poem  
Williams: "The Red Wheelbarrow" – Poem  
Plath: "Lady Lazarus" – Poem  
Lowell: "For the Union Dead" – Poem

## Works from the First Half of the Semester (for Comprehensive Question)

Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life" - Poetry  
Frost, "The Road Not Taken" - Poetry  
Columbus: "Letter Describing his First Voyage" – Letter/Essay  
Crevecoeur: "What is an American?" - Essay  
Paine: "Common Sense" – Essay/Pamphlet  
Cooper: *The Deerslayer* (Chapter 1) – Short Story  
Whitman: "I Hear America Singing" - Poem  
Whitman: "Song of Myself" – Section 1 ONLY - Poem  
Edwards: "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" - Sermon  
Poe: "The Black Cat" – Short Story  
Bradstreet: "Upon the Burning of Our House, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1666" - Poem  
Bradstreet: "In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet..." - Poem  
Bryant: "Thanatopsis" - Poem  
Dickinson: 325. "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church –" - Poem  
Dickinson: 712, "Because I could not stop for Death –" - Poem  
Dickinson: 1545, "The Bible is an antique Volume –" -Poem  
Dickinson: 1732, "My life closed twice before its close" - Poem  
Whitman: "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" - Poem  
Poe: "Sonnet – To Science" - Poem  
Dickinson: 185, "'Faith' is a fine invention" - Poem  
Hawthorne: "Rappicini's Daughter" – Short Story  
Pynchon: "Entropy" – Short Story  
Melville: "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight" - Poem  
Emerson: "Concord Hymn" - Poem  
Crane: "Do Not Weep, Maiden, for War is Kind" - Poem  
Twain: "The War Prayer" – Short Story  
Hemingway: "In Another Country" – Short Story  
O'Brien: *The Things They Carried*: "On the Rainy River" – Short Story  
Hemingway: *The Sun Also Rises* - Novel

