

**Term Paper Assignment: Thematic Discussion of an Artwork**

The purpose of this paper is to describe *in your own words* a nineteenth-century work of art that you choose on your own at a visit to a New York City Museum. You will research the background history of your artwork and you will discuss a major theme that relates to your chosen artwork.

**Expectations:** As explained to you in class, you will write a short term paper for HA-215, handed in to me on November 18, 2011. For this paper assignment, you must visit a museum of your choice in New York City and to choose a work of art there on which you want to write your paper. **I expect you to write a visual description, a historical discussion, and a thematic analysis of the work you chose.** I expect the paper to be at least six (6) typed pages, double-spaced. To do this, please follow the steps outlined below:

**Step 1:** Go to ONE museum in New York City (for your paper, the best are the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Museum of Modern Art, or the Brooklyn Museum of Art) and choose ONE work of art (a painting, a sculpture, a photograph, a drawing, etc.) that fits within the date parameters of the course (**that is, choose any painting, sculpture, photograph or drawing made between 1789 and 1914**). Make sure that you will want to write about the work over the course of this semester. Check the museum hours on the web before planning your visit.

Allow yourself a significant amount of time in the museum to look around; two hours would probably be sufficient.

**Step 2:** First, choose a work of art and note its visual and formal qualities. Look at the work itself (not the wall label). Take detailed descriptive notes on the work you chose as you see it. Is it a painting, a sculpture, a photograph or a drawing? What is the artwork made from? What is going on in the image? What colors are being used (describe all colors)? What is the style? What is the subject matter? Please add a full description of your artwork at the beginning of your essay. Explain carefully how the image is presented. Describe the composition (for example: is it cropped or symmetrical, how are the figures posed, how are they positioned in space); brushwork (e.g. invisible or sketchy); line (are contours emphasized or eliminated); color; light and shade; and space (flat or deep; describe the viewpoint or angle from which the image was observed). If you are writing about sculpture, discuss differences in handling materials, surfaces, and the relationship of the figure to the surrounding space and viewer. Most important, explain how these technical choices help create the overall expressive effect/mood of the painting or sculpture. What do you think the artist was trying to convey to the viewer about his subject?

**Step 3:** You must also thoroughly consider the subject matter, beginning with a description of the images in the painting (or sculpture). Is there any narrative action (is anything happening?). Do any of the elements in the work function as symbols? Is the content based on a literary or religious source or a scene from everyday life? Was the work done in a studio or outside? Was a model used or was it based on earlier sketches? Was it done from imagination? Describe the setting, including the location (what country? city?) and time period. Does the event or person depicted relate to current political or social issues? Does the work have any religious or spiritual meaning? Does it reflect cultural attitudes to the subject shown? How does it typify the artistic movement or style to which it belongs?

**Step 4:** Your discussion must include researched information on the life of the artist, the political, social and cultural context (where applicable), and the circumstances impacting the creation of the artwork. Mention if it was commissioned, where it was seen, and how it was interpreted or received by its audience. Include any comments the artist made about this work or about his/her general objectives. Was the painting or sculpture part of a series or related to other work within the artist's *oeuvre*? Does it reflect any changes in the artist's style? What other (earlier) art influenced this painting or sculpture?

**Step 5: Please choose one of the following themes that relates to your chosen artwork on which to write your essay:**

1. Discuss the theme of **death** in nineteenth-century art. How did artists explore the theme differently over the century? What events in history prompted such explorations? What is the history of your chosen artwork and how does it fit within this theme?
2. How was art used in the nineteenth century for **propagandistic purposes**? What were the different ways in which politicians used artists to promote their specific agendas? In addition, how did artists promote their own political views through their art? What is the history of your chosen artwork and how does it fit within this theme?
3. Discuss the theme of **the body and nudity** in nineteenth-century art. What were the major concerns regarding how the body was portrayed? How did mythology and exoticism further the study of the classical nude? Which artists changed the way the nude was regarded during the century? What is the history of your chosen artwork and how does it fit within this theme?
4. Discuss the theme of **race** in nineteenth-century art. How were people of various races portrayed during the century? How did Orientalism and exoticism further the study, or problematize, the subject of race in art? Which artists dealt with racial “types,” and how did specific artists speak to racial issues in their works? What political events in the century lead to art that dealt with these issues? What is the history of your chosen artwork and how does it fit within this theme?

**Format:**

The paper should include a **title**, an **introductory paragraph** and a **concluding paragraph**.

Papers must be typed on clean white paper, double spaced, with no more than 1" margins all around and using a font size no larger than Times New Roman 12.

Please run the **spell check/grammar check** feature before turning the paper in to me; spell check will not catch all errors, but it will clean up some basic and minor spelling issues.

Attach the receipt and/or button, the sketch, the photograph, and the three typed pages, and **attach a cover sheet** with the **title of your paper, your full name, the course number** and the **section**.

Length should be approximately six (6) typed pages.

**NO E-MAILED PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED! NO LATE PAPERS PLEASE!**