

ENGL 3922
SAMPLE Explication Assignment

Overview:

Explications are exercises in *close reading*, one of the primary skills necessary for literary analysis.

The word "explication" comes from the Latin term *explicare*, which means "to unfold"; accordingly, an explication unfolds or unpacks the meaning and workings of a literary text. Explications typically examine a text intensively, *line by line*, so they are usually used to interpret either short poems or short passages from longer works of fiction or drama.

An explication should account for all or most of the lines of the poem or passage, paying attention to whatever devices (connotations, allusions, metaphors and similes, symbols, rhythm, sounds, etc.) seem important. Explain how they relate to each other and to the overall meaning and/or effect of the work of literature. Your explication should have a strong thesis, and the rest of the paper should clearly support that thesis (think of your thesis statement as answering the question, "What is this poem or passage about?").

Instructions:

Use **one** of the questions below to prompt you to select a specific quote to support your response to the particular question. Answer only ONE of the questions below. If you are interested in writing about an aspect of the poem not included in the questions below, please email me with your selected quote and argument. Make sure you explain the significance of the quote you choose as well as relate the quote to the significance of the poem as a whole. Write approximately 500 words, double-spaced, 12pt. times new roman font. DO NOT EXCEED THE WORD LIMIT.

Questions:

1. What argument does this poem make about the consequence of choices?
2. How does this poem address the materiality of movement?

Quote Selected by the Sample Student: (from "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost)

"Yet knowing how way leads on to way, / I doubted if I should ever come back. " (14-15)

COMPLETE TEXT OF THE POEM INCLUDED BELOW, FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE:

The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.