

## Russell C. Black

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### Statement of Teaching Philosophy

The existence of a work of literature depends on an active community of readers. Any reading of a text is a unique and individual experience conditioned and shaped by the reader's worldview, personality, and relationship to literary tradition. All of my students, no matter their background, have their own valid and informative relationship to a text. I instruct my students to engage a text accurately, thoughtfully, and critically in terms of their own natural responses. It is important to me that each student's experience of a film or novel remains their own, both during class discussion and after they leave my classroom.

The craft of articulate self expression is an important element in all my classes. All of my students take turns leading the discussion in class and in online discussion forums, both of which are opportunities for them to test the ideas they will use in designing their arguments for their writing assignments. I instruct my students to generate their own critical arguments that are supported by textual evidence and represent their unique point of view. My students must consider the clarity of the core thesis statement, the quality of it's support, the formality of language and the use of proper mechanical structure before they submit their writing. Peer review is an important part of this process.

I foster a friendly and open environment in my classroom in which everyone is encouraged to express their own personal relationship to our text. I design my curriculum to be accessible, challenging, and fun, and I tailor each class to fit the interests of the students as the natural course of discussion unfolds. Consequently, whenever I teach a novel or film I have taught before, the group's response to the text is a unique reflection of the personality of each individual class. the first time I read *Frankenstein* with a class, much of our discussion focused on Shelley's romantic perspective of the natural world and how the novel informs the modern tensions between science and religion. Since many of my students at the time were majors in the sciences, much of our conversation engaged ethical dilemmas in science and technology. In a later section of the same course, many of my students were more interested in Shelley's gender dynamics and the psychological aspects of Shelley's text. For instance, we spent more time exploring the interesting gender dynamics of Shelley's portrayal and characterization of men. One of the great joys of teaching literature and film is seeing what my own students can teach me about how to read a text from an entirely different point of view.

The act of watching a film or reading a text is a fundamentally personal experience. After the book is closed, the text remains intimate with the reader, stored in their memory and interacting and informing other works of literature they read throughout their lives. As a teacher of writing and literature, I guide my students to read critically and accurately while maintaining an independent and natural relationship with the text. I guide my students to orally articulate their relationship to our text in discussion, and express their conclusions in proper, formal writing. To read a text critically and accurately, and to write clearly and convincingly are both important skills every student requires when entering the workforce. To read literature enables every individual to be aware of their relationship with humanity and themselves.