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World Literature

What I Learned Essay

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## What I Learned.

Honestly I had no idea what to expect when choosing this world literature class. I had resigned before taking this class that it would most likely be quite boring. I was pleasantly surprised, however, at the literature you chose for us to be going through. And through this paper, I will attempt to show what I have learned while going through this course by talking about the things I learned while going through each book separately.

I have loved the character (or person) Gilgamesh for quite some time, and I had read his story before, but I never knew the deeper and hidden meanings behind many of the parts in the book. That’s really the first thing I learned, was that good literature has hidden meanings that we may not see as plainly as say “Gilgamesh understood then that achieving immortality is impossible”, but you gain that understanding, and learn by reading the book anyways. As an aspiring author myself I’ve taken that idea into account, and wonder what meanings I am portraying in my book, and what meaning I *want* to portray in my book.

Also, I learned better the viewpoint of a writer from the ancient world. This falls under both “The Epic of Gilgamesh” and “The Bible”, as they both stem from similar roots and ancient times. For one, their meanings of words is often a lot different from what we understand when looking at them from a modern viewpoint. For example when they say “the world”, while they could potentially be actually talking about all the area in which humans inhabit, the globe floating through space, they are more likely talking about the world in which they know, the land that they know through their own experiences. Taking ideas like that into account will greatly influence, and help you understand, exactly what the ancient writers understood, and what they were trying to portray.

Another thing about the ancient texts like Gilgamesh and the Bible is the roots in which they both come from. Seeing from those, and other similarities, you can see that events like the flood most likely happened due to the amount of people who retell that event in their own ways. However the greater meaning behind those events is drastically different from culture to culture, as in Gilgamesh, the event was caused by selfish gods who seemed to snap into anger as easily as a human, versus a God of justice who knew what he was doing, and intended to cleanse the world of injustice and wickedness, without feeling any remorse unlike the gods of Gilgamesh.

Moving on to a newer text in Ethan Frome, I learned what it actually is to be an american. There are ideas and values that are unique to each culture. I found that as an american, the core values I have are quite similar to most americans, and very different from the rest of the world. I actually found this to be very interesting, and went on to test this myself. In everyone I asked, people tended to have very similar answers, and goals. For example most people feel that having around two kids is a normal thing to do. And even if they think that their choice in the amount of kids they have is unique to them (It is partly), they will most likely decide to have around the same amount as most other americans.

This goes as well for their goals in life as many americans like the idea of owning their own land someday when they get settled. When talking to my brother even he and his (newly-ish wed) wife dream about owning a house someday that they can call their own. I personally have been to the country the Czech Republic, and know many people from there. They don’t care at all about owning their own land. Some do, but most couldn’t care less about something like that.

Also I learned from Ethan Frome how that the “failure” to achieve the american dream does not simply come about from poor choices. The common idea in america is that you *should* be able to achieve the american dream through hard work and perseverance, and if you don’t then you obviously did something wrong. Really now I can see the fault behind that idea, and I can say that I probably agreed with it even when not understanding why. Life often isn’t so simple as to go the way we intend. A year ago I had the idea that if I wanted to be a successful man, I should go to college, get a degree, and find the highest paying job I can in the process. Now I found that life isn't so black and white all the time. Yes, going to college and getting a degree certainly is very helpful to you economically-wise, it is not necessarily the best, or only choice. It is simply the one that I was raised to believe in.

Now, another thing is about the possible deceptiveness of literature. When reading non-fiction, you have to understand that you are reading the tale from the writer’s perspective. It is very difficult for one to write a completely objective paper, and most don’t even try.

A good example is Mary Rowlandson. She wrote this tale from her perspective as a white colonist. Both before, and throughout her story she already bears the idea that native american people are savage, demonically influenced people, despite that they treated her well and never horribly abused her (despite what the colonists did to them). She makes no effort to write objectively, instead using this book as a way to further the ideas she already had. Because of this, even though we know the true background of the native americans, we still can get easily deceived by her point of view.

Moving on however, I have to say that the main thing I learned is just how important literature is in the world. It is the best way to convey ideas and values to people, and share those among entire cultures. That reason is why cultures have books in which they base their values on. Or else, how would a single culture be able to face the rest of the world, if they don’t even share the same values themselves? Even in america today, we all share the same basic values even when debating on what to do in different situations. And as such, those values stem mostly from the Bible, as that is the major literature the settlers had when moving over to america. Another obvious one would be the Koran, as it helps shape the values for those over in the middle east.

In closing, I have come to see this semester the value of literature, and its ability to convey ideas and values even when not stating them plainly. People from different cultures write literature to share their values with each other, allowing them all to stay on the same page. I learned that I should look at ancient texts not only from my point of view, but also from the perspective as the people from those times since that can often mean drastic changes in meanings. I learned that I am in fact an american, and as such I too have ideas and values that are shaped by my culture, but that does not necessarily mean that those are the only ways of doing things, and that by trying hard to strive for the american dream, I will not be guaranteed to succeed, even if I don’t make any “wrong choices”.