

Sample Journal Assignments

A.K.A. "What the heck do check minus, check, and check plus mean, and how can I improve the quality of my responses?"

PURPOSE

The following pages provide examples of journal responses from students in your course, including commentary intended to help you to take your answer to the next level. It is my hope that this document will be useful to you for future journal assignments. As a new TA, I've learned much in creating it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the students who have graciously given their consent to have their answers featured anonymously here.

A CHECK MINUS ANSWER...

- 1-2 sentences long
- Incomplete sentences or bullet points (like what I've done here!)
- Does not make reference to course materials (lectures, readings, etc.)
- Argument is unclear or missing
- Terms or concepts are consistently misspelled (especially if the term is included in the question!)
- Only one of the two journal questions is answered
- Little effort is shown to answer the question to the student's best ability

Why is the Royal Proclamation considered to be the legal basis for the Crown's recognition of Indigenous nations?

The Royal Proclamation protects indigenous rights. It is the legal proof that the Crown cannot steal Indigenous land and that they have the right to live on their land under their own laws.

Commented [1]: This response shows a basic understanding of why the Royal Proclamation is significant, but it doesn't elaborate from there. It is a response that can be gleaned by a quick look at course material, but does not make any references to it.

To bring this response up to a check, the response would have to include at least one clear example to support the argument.

In the Nisga'a story, Origin of the Wolf Crest, what human problems are being explored? How are those problems resolved (or not resolved)? What are the reasons behind that resolution? How did you feel about the story?

Oppression and violence against women, women's vulnerability in society. The reasons are that overbearing fathers oppress their daughters and make them vulnerable to oppression and violence by the men in their lives. It shows that when women try to escape from violence that violence follows them wherever they go, as seen by the wolf baby that the woman brings home.

Commented [2]: While this answer is longer than in the previous example, it still doesn't answer every component in the question, and begins answering the question in list form.

This answer shows some engagement with the material and even provides an example, but no connection is made between violence against women and the baby.

Bringing this answer up to a check will require showing deeper engagement with the material and an effort to explain the reasoning behind the arguments made.

A CHECK ANSWER...

- Responds to each component of the question
- Response shows a surface level or “big picture” understanding of the concept or material
- Provides a relevant example, *but*
 - Example is left standing alone, with no supporting explanation that relates it to the argument or question, or
 - Example is vague, or too broad in scope

Why is the Royal Proclamation considered to be the legal basis for the Crown’s recognition of Indigenous nations?

The reason that the Royal Proclamation is considered to be the legal basis for the Crown’s recognition of Indigenous people is because it was the first time the British monarch has acknowledged that indigenous peoples are sovereign and have the authority to determine their own laws. The Royal Proclamation demonstrates that the British and French treated indigenous peoples as though they were foreign nations. Indigenous nations remained independent in their internal affairs even though the British and French were fighting a war on their lands. They never relinquished their sovereignty, nor did they relinquish their laws. This is demonstrated by their ability to form treaties with other countries, such as the British and the French. It is also seen in small cases between individual people such as marriage disputes.

Commented [3]: In this answer, the student answers the question and shows a general understanding of the significance of the Royal Proclamation.

An example is hinted at, but is missing specificity and an explanation linking it back to the question.

In the Nisga'a story, Origin of the Wolf Crest, what human problems are being explored? How are those problems resolved (or not resolved)? What are the reasons behind that resolution? How did you feel about the story?

The Nisga'a story, Origin of the Wolf Crest explores many human problems, particularly in relation to the treatment of women. The story highlights the problem of women being vulnerable and enslaved and facing violence and oppression. We first see how the daughter in the story is oppressed by her father as he has control over who she can marry. This problem of oppression and violence towards women is seen again when the woman visits the prince's village and finds many women who were abused and enslaved by the prince. As these women were all former wives of the prince, it highlights how the prince treated women as temporary objects before abusing them and creating a miserable life for them. We see the resolution to the problem, or a progressive step in resolving the problem of oppression and violence towards women when the daughter of the chief realises her fate. Through acknowledging the situation she was in, the wife escaped from the prince and the wolves to ensure her safety, and avoid becoming part of the group of enslaved former wives. With the help of one slave woman and the Loon Woman, we see that the wife's escape resolves the problem of oppression towards her. However, it is notable that the only people who helped the wife escape were other women. This shows that the problem is not fully resolved as no male figures acknowledged the problem or attempted to resolve it, despite being the oppressive part of the oppressive party. I also think that the lack of complete resolution is seen in the death of the slave woman. Despite wanting to escape, her lack of power led to her death, showing that regardless of wanting to overcome the problem, vulnerability in a society of oppression is much more difficult to overcome.

Commented [4]: This is an example of an answer that borders on a check and a check plus.

The student answers each component of the question.

They provide an example that directly relates to their argument and supports that example with a brief explanation.

What would take this example from a check to a check plus would be to provide a specific example directly from the text (i.e., description of the physical state of the women--sores, etc.) that is clear and concrete and demonstrates the prince's abuse of his (former) wives.

A CHECK PLUS ANSWER...

Fulfils the requirements for a check answer, *plus*

- Defines concepts
- Makes connections across units of study (the current week's course material and material from previous weeks)
- Clear and concise argument(s)
- Argument(s) are supported by specific, relevant examples and explanations
- Shows engagement beyond what the question requires (i.e. asks insightful questions about the material, relates the material to contemporary issues/events, personal responses related to the material)

Why is the Royal Proclamation considered to be the legal basis for the Crown's recognition of Indigenous nations?

The Royal Proclamation is considered to be the legal basis for the Crown's recognition of Indigenous rights because it was one of the first examples of the Crown recognizing Indigenous legal frameworks and rights to land (although it is exceptionally important to note how colonialism has continued to shape power dynamics, and I question if this should be 'celebrated' in the way it is). The Royal Proclamation is the founding document to recognize some Indigenous people's rights to their sovereign lands and nations. Additionally, the Royal Proclamation paved the way for future treaty-making processes. The Royal Proclamations' legal power has been represented throughout history, like in *Connoly v. Woolrich* where the judge uses the Royal Proclamation to defend that the marriage that took place under Cree law was legitimate. This choice locates that Indigenous peoples have their own sovereign internal systems which the Royal Proclamation states we should respect and recognize. However, as mentioned in the

Commented [5]: From the first sentence, this student has answered the question/taken a stance. They attempt to define the Royal Proclamation, and a couple of sentences later provide a specific, relevant example to support their argument.

readings and lectures, the contents of the Royal Proclamation have been regularly ignored. The understanding of this legal relationship being rooted in the Royal Proclamation is a more modern legal framing. Additionally, it is worth noting that colonial scripts have created notions surrounding Indigenous barbarianism, primitivism, and lawlessness. These notions work to delegitimize Indigenous legal systems, political formations, among other structures of Indigenous life and nation. Although there are more examples of the Royal Proclamation being honored now, cases like *Connolly v. Woolrich* were historical outliers where Indigenous law was actually recognized. Additionally, colonialism has negotiated terms of power, so although Indigenous law (like Cree marriage and divorce laws) are recognized in the Canadian Court, it is still worth dissecting the fact that these legal decisions are happening on the terms of a Colonial government and legal order.

Commented [6]: Here the student shows engagement beyond what is required for a check answer by expanding on their earlier example and providing commentary on the contemporary application of the Royal Proclamation.

In the Nisga'a story, Origin of the Wolf Crest, what human problems are being explored? How are those problems resolved (or not resolved)? What are the reasons behind that resolution? How did you feel about the story?

"Origin of the Wolf Crest" articulates problems around marriage, agency, gender roles, consent, solidarity and community. The chief's daughter, Yalek, is restricted by her father's high expectations for her future spouse, which causes her to flee with a man she doesn't know. In doing so, she is taking back the agency that her father didn't allow her to exercise. She marries the prince blindly, after which she is told by an enslaved woman about the circumstances of her marriage; her new husband is a wolf and will soon discard of her once he's heard of another woman. Yalek's ability to consent to such a marriage wasn't granted to her, as the prince never

Commented [7]: In this response the student clearly answers the question in the first sentence.

They use an example from the text that directly illustrates their argument.

Notice how in each sentence, the student relates their explanation back to their initial argument. Their argument is clear--there is consistency in the terms used to minimize confusion over which example relates to which supporting point.

told her the truth. In an act of solidarity and community, the enslaved woman escapes to the mountains with Yalek, as an attempt to flee the inevitable enslavement that our protagonist would suffer. By running away, they are taking back the agency removed from them through marriage and enslavement. With the wolves on their heels, the enslaved woman throws Yalek up into a tree, saving her first, and is consequently devoured and killed. Being in solidarity with Yalek cost the enslaved woman her life, leaving a strange resolution to the question of community; will lending a helping hand always lead you to death? Another way to think about it is through considering the circumstances of the enslaved woman's life, thrown away by her husband, her "legs covered in sores from the extreme cold and burns from the fire". Perhaps taking back her agency, being in solidarity and attempting to flee represented a preferable path in contrast to enslavement. Once the enslaved woman is eaten by the wolves, they attempt to dislodge Yalek, but to no avail. She manages to escape in the morning, by using her blood to steer away the wolves, and travels for months. She is found by an old woman called the Loon Woman, who feeds and heals her. This represents another act of community, in which women take care of and revitalize one another. The Loon woman gives Yalek her name, paints her face red with an image of the sun and gifts her with a sun crest and the blessing of its songs, which now belong to Yalek and to her future generations. Once back in her community, Yalek realizes that she is pregnant with the wolf's son, which seems like a realization of the Loon Woman's gift, a gift that bore the promise of a lineage. The story ends on a note that could indicate that Yalek has retrieved her agency; she escaped the possibility of enslavement and has returned to her village, as hoped. Her bearing of a child resurfaces the questions around consent, gender and marriage, as no acts of sexual intercourse had been mentioned in the story. Perhaps the end is also indicative of a

Commented [8]: From here, the student shows further engagement with the text, again keeping their answer in line with their original argument.

certain kind of transformative potential, as Yalek, now bearer of the sun crest, can raise her child to not replicate the patriarchal violences that she suffered at the hands of her father and husband.