**PAPER TWO PROMPT: Literary Analysis of a Text: *The Samurai’s Garden***

**ASSIGNMENT**

Write a 3-4 page (min. of 750 words) focused analysis of *The Samurai’s Garden*. Note: going over four pages is fine, but not meeting the minimum is not fine. Your response should address how your close examination of the text illuminates your understanding of the themes and/or characters of the piece and, in some cases, its cultural relevance.

**FOCUS**

You should have a clear and original idea driving your essay. It should in some way illuminate a universality or human truth beyond the confines of the story.Use the questions below as a jumping off point for your close exploration of the text. Make sure your idea is focused: look at one element of a text or look at the text through a single lens and unravel what is most meaningful to you about the text. You are not limited to these questions. They are here to help you find a focus.

**SUPPORT**

Your ideas should be original and should be supported by the text. This means you must quote from the text and refer to specifics within the text, not just the story in general, throughout your response. The quotes should support **your ideas**.

Your analysis should unravel the text, not merely state the obvious. Drawing on the specifics of the text rather than discussing the text in generalities will help you come up with a more insightful analysis.

This is not a research paper. Please use only the text and your own understanding of text. Should you pull from the lecture, be clear about crediting the lecturer. Unlike the first paper for this class, **this should not be about your personal experiences.**

Learning how to "talk the talk" does count: if you use literary terminology, it is important that you use it correctly. Be sure to title your essay. A title may help clarify your focus for yourself and for your reader.

**QUESTIONS (choose one)**

Examine *The Samurai’s Garden* through the lens of the literary allusion to gardening. How does the garden apply to situations beyond the scenes with literal gardens?

Examine the structural element of *The Samurai’s Garden*. In what ways does the structures of the novel effect the reader’s understanding of characters and/or themes of the text?

Examine power relationships in *The Samurai’s Garden.*

Examine the role of “the other” in *The Samurai’s Garden.*

Examine the role of adulthood, motherhood, or family in *The Samurai’s Garden*. In what ways do historical, political, and/or social climates of the times affect these relationships?

Examine the role of disease in *The Samurai’s Garden*. Does it help Stephen in some way? Did it help Sachi? Kenzo?

Examine the nature of war in this novel. How does the xenophobia play into the underlying truths of the novel.

**HELPUL DEFINITIONS**

***Summary and Analysis***

**A summary** answers the question, "What is it?" When you summarize a text, you restate what the text already says in a briefer format. Summaries are useful when recapping what happened in a story or novel. Since your professor has read the text, it is not necessary in this essay to summarize the text. Your knowledge of the text will be clear when you support your analysis with details from the text, not because you've summarized all the events.

**An analysis** answers the question, "How does it work?" An analysis is a close examination of the text. It is a little like looking at the parts of the car and determining how each of those parts make the car run. In the case of literature, you are examining the parts­­--for example, characters, imagery, setting, structure, context, use of language, etc...--to draw larger conclusions about the work as a whole. Literature tries to answer the big questions through the lens of human experience and emotion. Good stories ask us to consider the "so what's" of human nature. Stories are more than a series of events. They are a series of events with a "so what" implied. An analysis explores the way the story leads to something bigger, something that helps us understand not just the characters better, but understand ourselves better. Every reader sees a story in a different way and walks away with a different "so what."

***Analytical Argument***

An analytical argument is not an argument that people will come to fisticuffs over. In general, if you've accurately portrayed a text, readers are not likely to strongly disagree with your argument or thesis, your "so what." Instead, an analytical argument is merely a way of seeing a text differently. Often your most insightful ideas about a text come only after you've done the close analysis. Sometimes, we have a hunch about a "so what" in text, and then we go into the text and search for the passages that will help us explain that idea to others and help us clarify it for ourselves. A thesis statement is a good way to assure that your reader knows what your point is, which is why most teachers ask you to write one. Whether or not you have an explicit thesis statement in your essay, your reader should walk away with a clear sense of your point, your "so what." In what ways is this story more than a series of events? How can we apply it to our understanding of human nature? What is "the human element"?

***Analytical Lens***

The analytical lenses we have applied to literature thus far this quarter include psychological, socio/political, spiritual, queer and feminist lenses. Looking at a piece through an analytical lens means considering the events and characters in light of that focus. For example, if you look at a text through a psychological lens, you might pay close attention to the psychology of siblings, of parenting, or of abuse. If you look at it through a feminist lens, you would likely start by considering the role of women in the texts and their relationship to empowerment. If you look through a spiritual lens, you're likely to consider the role of the mystery and wonder, birth and death and the ways in which these things illuminate humanity's relationship to the unknown.

***Context***

Context refers to everything surrounding the thing you're looking at, in this case, a piece of literature. If you are looking, for example, at the cultural context of *The Samurai’s Garden*, knowing something about the Sino-Japanese war would be necessary. Context can also refer to the things going on in the background of a story, that is, not necessarily something you need to know outside of the text. The lectures on all of these units provide us with context as do the texts themselves. The context contributes to the “so what” of the text, that every illusive “universality.” Everything has context. We see the thing and we also see the thing with all its surrounding contexts. We draw meaningful conclusions by examining how the thing relates to one or more of its contexts. While you don't have to be an expert in a particular region or time period, understanding the context in which a story takes place as that context is presented in the text is important.