

Writing Prompts for Application to the M.A. in English program

If you do not have a critical writing sample from your undergraduate career, you are welcome to use the following short stories to prompt your thinking as your essay. Choose one of the following short stories (a link to an online text is provided) and read it. When you have finished, you may either use one of the questions we have posted to help you construct a 7-12 page essay, or you may come up with your own question to frame an analysis of the tale. What we will be looking for in these essays is your ability to construct a sophisticated literary analysis, well-supported by textual detail. These essays should have a clear thesis (not a statement of fact, but an assertion to be argued), be persuasively organized, clearly written, and free of grammatical and spelling errors.

Please note, you are not required to use any of these prompts or stories; feel free to submit a paper you have already written, or to write a new one on the text of your choice.

Henry James, "Daisy Miller"

<http://www.fullbooks.com/Daisy-Miller-by-Henry-James.html>

1. In what ways does Daisy Miller represent the American character?
2. In what ways might Daisy be considered innocent? How does her innocence make her a potential victim? What does her death, considered symbolically, say about the fate of American innocence in Europe?

Edgar Allen Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado"

<http://poestories.com/read/amontillado>

1. How can we understand the story to be Montresor's account of his own moral annihilation?
2. The story ends with the Latin phrase meaning "rest in peace." Who, presumably, would speak this and what does it tell us about the situation under which Montresor tells his story?

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown"

<http://www.online-literature.com/poe/158/>

1. What do the situation and the names in this story imply about the likelihood that this story should be read allegorically? How might this allegory function?

2. Discuss the forest/village opposition as symbolic of a number of oppositions: dream/reality, truth/illusion, innocence/experience.