

THEMATIC ANALYSIS: GROUP DISCUSSION & ESSAY

ASSIGNMENT

Participate in creating a group-generated essay on one recurring theme addressed in the course over time and through a variety of texts. The essay will be collaboratively built by group members throughout the semester, first through an online discussion thread and then eventually reshaped into a more polished essay.

OBJECTIVES

- To consider a theme at close range, over time, and through a variety of texts, i.e., to acquire *breadth* of knowledge of the course content to complement the *depth* provided by work on the research paper
- To analyze the development of the theme: what remains the same, what changes, and why
- To synthesize the results of analysis and formulate conclusions
- To productively collaborate with a group of your peers so that the results and conclusions of your analysis are enriched by the perspectives of others

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DISCUSSION

Go to the "Discussion and Private Messages" section of the course Collab site and post a new message under the discussion topic for your theme and section:

For *each* reading, **beginning with Mayakovsky/Marshsak/Ilin**, post a message under the discussion topic for your theme in which you:

- Contribute a minimum of **3 sentences explaining** the way your theme functions within the work. (If there is more than one work, please post separately for each); and
- Contribute a minimum of **2 specific references** to text (this can be as simple as providing a page number and a few words) that illustrate your summary.
- UNLESS you are the first person in your group to post, provide a **brief response to one of the other postings**.

(If your theme does not appear in a given work, provide a minimum of 3 sentences speculating on *why* it does not appear. In this case, of course, no specific references to texts are necessary.)

Texts that are covered over several lecture meetings require *only one* discussion entry, e.g., Ilf and Petrov, or Aksyonov.

IMPORTANT: Do not duplicate the postings of others in group! This should serve as an incentive to **post early** and as an incentive to **read what others have posted**. If one of your colleagues has already posted something very close to what you wanted to say, you can either provide new summary points or references, or talk about the same references, but from a different angle that has not yet been presented. It's okay to bring up ideas that were discussed in class, but only if you're the first person to contribute that information to the discussion.

Suggestion: If you keep your theme in mind as you read a text/watch a film and take brief notes on it, your discussion entry can more or less take shape on its own and you'll just have to transcribe it.

DEADLINES

Post your contributions for the week's readings/film by **midnight on Sundays**. The easiest and most manageable way to handle postings is to do them as you complete the readings, but whether you do them one at a time or once a week is up to you. **See the checklist of readings/films and the latest posting dates on the last page of this handout.**

WHAT DO TO WITH YOUR "RAW MATERIAL"

(THIS PART OF YOUR THEME WORK HAPPENS **AFTER** SPRING BREAK)

By **SUNDAY, 2 MAY (MIDNIGHT)**: Work with your colleagues to create a collaborative essay that provides an overview of your theme for the semester, based on your ongoing discussion and elaborating on it as necessary. You should determine as a group how the final essay will be constructed (e.g., one person can write it, and then send it around to everyone else for comments / revision; or you can divide up the essay into parts and then one or two people will edit to make it work as a whole and then send it out to the group for comments / revision). Before your essay is due, some time in discussion sections will be given over to individual group meetings for determining the final shape of the essay and distribution of writing and editing responsibilities.

Your group's final essay should, in 6-8 double-spaced, typed pages:

- Provide an introduction to your theme – what it is, why it is significant within the context of the course
- Describe and analyze the way(s) in which your theme appears in the texts. This can be done case by case, or you can categorize different *kinds* of appearances, e.g., positive, negative, or other categories that make sense to the group. Just be sure to build some sort of *internal logic* into your essay's structure – chronological order, by category, etc. Please also be sure to craft *meaningful transitions* between your examples, otherwise the essay may end up too much like a list.

- Offer conclusions – what does this tell readers about America? what does this tell readers about Russia? At this point, make every effort to draw all of the texts you've been discussing back together, so that your conclusions reflect larger trends over the course of time.

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU GET STARTED:

IMPORTANT NOTE: Although you may use these questions to help find a way in to your group essay, your essay should not be merely answers to these questions strung together. The best essays develop the group's own reflection on what questions to answer in what order (and they may be different questions than those that you find below); those essays also build logical transitions from one paragraph/sub-topic to the next.

How does your theme emerge in the texts/films covered in the course? Is it overt? Is it covert? Why? Is it more prominent or less prominent than other themes in literature/films about America? Why?

What are the similarities in the ways that the texts/films address the theme? How can these similarities be explained?

Where are there particularly striking contrasts in the ways that the texts/films address the theme? How can these differences potentially be explained?

Is there anything you would have expected to find in the texts'/films' treatment of the theme that you didn't find? Why do you think that is?

Did this theme reveal anything about yourselves that you hadn't realized before? Why or why not?

Why is this theme important to understanding Russian views of America(ns)? What does it tell you about *Russians*?

EVALUATION

Each group member will receive an individual grade for the thematic analysis essay. 70% of this grade will be based on your individual contributions to the on-line discussion (timeliness and quality), and 30% will be based on evaluation of the final group essay (this 30% will be the same grade for everyone in the group).

CHECKLIST OF DISCUSSION CONTRIBUTIONS

Here is the complete list of texts (this includes films) that you are expected to discuss with respect to your theme:

✓	Text/Film	Latest date to post
	up to 5 bonus points for each separate posting: Gorky Shaginian Mayakovsky Marshak Ilin Ilf and Petrov	29 April
	<i>Circus</i>	20 February
	2 separate posts: Shalamov Simonov	20 February
	Nabokov*	27 February
	Nekrasov*	13 March
	Katayev*	20 March
	<i>Incident at Map Grid 36-80</i>	27 March
	2 separate posts: Yevtushenko Brodsky	27 March
	Limonov*	3 April
	Aksyonov*	10 April
	Pelevin*	17 April
	Genis	24 April
	<i>Brother 2</i>	24 April

*although we will discuss this text over more than one day,
only ONE posting is required

NOTE: April 29 is the last day you can add bonus postings
on the readings prior to *Circus*