

*The assignment that you're going to put together for next Monday, March 19th, should be an opportunity for you to use the skills on which we're focusing in class to discuss and present a book that you chose to read on your own. Your final product should be polished in such a way that shows you're proud of it, include multiple pieces of precise evidence, and include the required pieces.*

1) REQUIRED discussion about Theme: Everything you've read in class has a point to it, something that's driven the author to make the choices that they've made. I want to be able to understand how you're taking multiple pieces of evidence and using them to inform an inference about the author's theme. This will obviously be a little easier for the few of you reading non-fiction, but it's still going to be important to discuss the book's strongest points and how they come together to make a point.

2) REQUIRED explanation about ONE of the THREE types of thematic Connections: The book your reading does not exist in isolation. It has things to say about at least one topic that shows up elsewhere. Your task here is to define a theme in your book and to say how and where it connects to: 1) The world - think about historical or current events, 2) Other texts - movies, novels, short stories, documentaries, or 3) Personal - Are you living part of this book?

These connections should be specific and about the thesis you wrote for #1. Please do not tell me that there are characters dating in the book and that you've been on a date recently or that your book is about baseball and lots of people today like baseball.

3) REQUIRED explanation of how ONE literary element (e.g. conflict, setting, point of view, title) or piece of figurative language (e.g. symbolism, allusion, imagery, metaphor, simile) helps to build the case for the author's purpose.

For example: This is just an unfinished draft, but an explanation of the theme and a text-to-text connection that we've been making in class could look like:

Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* takes place in the small, turn-of-the-century New Hampshire town of Grover's Corners. The first two acts of the play essentially set up a pretty sleepy town in which the people rarely stray from tradition and their everyday routines. Doing so in the slightest bit tends to upset people such as Joe Crowell Jr., who delivers milk and is unhappy about his teacher leaving to get married instead staying in her position for the rest of her life. Even his horse, Bessie, gets frustrated when their delivery route gets altered as different people add to and end their orders.

This sense of normalcy continues through the end of Act II, when main characters George Gibbs and Emily Webb, who grow up next door to one another, are getting married not too long after graduating from high school, as is expected of people their age in their town. The calm

acceptance of Grover's Corners' traditions is broken a few times, though, in moments that Wilder clearly designed to push audiences towards questioning the value of the town's provincial legacy. In Act I, someone only named "A Belligerent Man in the Audience" questions the Stage Manager about whether or not: "Anyone in Grover's Corners is aware of social injustice and industrial inequality" in order to point out that the town's residents shouldn't only be concerned with the regular events in their own lives. At the end of that act, Wilder then has a character describe the address on a letter a friend of hers received from her minister. It not only lists the town, state, and country to which the letter was sent, but also the hemisphere, planet, and "the mind of God" as part of the address. While this is seen as odd by the characters, Wilder is clearly reminding his audience that they are part of a bigger picture; their lives are related to many other aspects of life, whether or not they choose to ignore everything outside of their day-to-day routine.

With people's lives continuing forward, as is expected and predicted, in Act II, we are brought through Emily and George's graduating high school and right up to the day of their wedding, which Mrs. Soames, an attendee and long-time town resident, believes is a "perfectly lovely wedding," something which she cherishes. In addition to a host of frantic worry and doubt cast on the event by many of the characters, though, the Stage Manager really spoils the celebration for Wilder's audience by expressing his belief that: "Once in a thousand times it's interesting." While people in "our town," which is defined by Grover's Corners as a microcosm of all towns in which people live, can choose to do what's expected of them and retreat into the comforts of tradition and conformity, doing so is portrayed as an uninspired version of life. There is more out there for people to see, experience and develop empathy for.

Walt Whitman, in his poem "Beat! Beat! Drums!" takes this idea even further by saying that it's an irresponsible choice to not jump out of our own lives and take part in the bigger events of our times.

- people do all sorts of things of their choosing with their days and lives
- an event like The Civil War affects everyone, though
- People must pay more attention even though they'll potentially choose not to, because that would take them out of their comfort zone.
- The drums and bugles of the universe must blare and bang loudly enough to shake people - like those in Grover's Corners - from their complacency and self-absorbed lives
- People's political and social consciousness must become more powerful than the understandable interest in what's safe and familiar.