

Assignment 2: Textual Analysis

How does Asian American writing and/or film convey important histories to audiences that are often unfamiliar with these experiences? How does the form of a text do the work of telling a particular story? This assignment asks you to take on the role of a researcher in the humanities. Humanities scholars primarily engage with primary texts – they make claims about what a text means, using the text itself as evidence. We do this through **close reading**, a method that privileges quality over quantity and depth over breadth. A good close reader chooses a few key instances to analyze in depth, paying attention not only to a story's action but also to the author's choice of words and arrangement of events. A close reader understands the effect of a story, poem, graphic novel, or film as the deliberate craft of the writer and aims to uncover how that effect was created.

In this assignment, you will choose one of the texts that we have encountered in class to make a claim about the work, using details from that text to support your argument. How and to what effect does the text you have chosen engage with Asian American history or experiences? **You may choose to expand any of your forum posts into a full-fledged essay.** For example, you might:

- Choose several of Mitsuye Yamada's poems to discuss how and why the issue of "loyalty" was painful for Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II.
- Analyze Maxine Hong Kingston's retelling of the Fa Mu Lan myth as an example of the "double bind" of sexism and racism faced by many Asian American women in the twentieth century.
- Discuss a theme in Deann Borshay Liem's film about her adoption. How does she introduce her story? How can we make sense of her pain in the context of her families' love?
- Return to Mira Jacob's *Good Talk* to analyze what is accomplished by telling the story as a graphic novel (or do the same for the very different text, *The Best We Could Do*). To do this, you might choose a theme in the text and analyze how that theme is expressed in language, visual art, and narrative.

Your final product should be 4-5 pages, double-spaced, submitted in MS Word format (.doc or .docx). You should use MLA citation style and include a Works Cited page. **You must include at least one historical source for this assignment.** This could be our in-class excerpts of Erika Lee's book (for Yamada's poetry, Kingston's book, or Bui's memoir), Jodi Kim's article (for Liem's film), or even Edward Said (for *Good Talk*).

Tips for a successful assignment:

- Choose something **truly interesting** to write about – something puzzling, fascinating, clever, or meaningful to you. If you are expanding a homework assignment, think about how you might make your argument more complicated.
- Don't assume the reader has read your text. **Literary critics assume the reader either has not read the text or has not read it recently.** On the other hand, don't waste a lot of time summarizing. Summaries should be brief and contain just enough information for us to understand your point.
- **Contextualize!** Since I am asking you to include historical information in your paper, it makes sense to make this the context for your argument. For most of you, this information will go in your introduction.
- Cite! Be very careful to parenthetically cite all your sources, including those you are paraphrasing. Do this **as you are writing**. Don't rely on a later self to go back and put in page numbers – students who do this tend to forget.