

ESSAY 2:

ANNOTATE A SHORT PASSAGE FROM SHAKESPEARE

Your second essay will not be a conventional essay but a list, a list of analytical annotations for a short passage from Shakespeare.

Let me tell you why I want you to do this, explain what exactly I want you to do, and point you to some examples.

A traditional essay on a passage from Shakespeare tends to leave out much of what goes on in Shakespeare's language. Such an essay draws attention only to those few things that support its author's thesis, inevitably ignoring lots of fascinating verbal fireworks that simply don't fit into the essay's (unavoidably) narrow conceptual framework.

A list of analytical annotations, on the other hand, can be genuinely and fully inclusive. Such a list enables its author to record everything they observe about a passage without any obligation to make each observation fit into a neat, coherent, limited argument.

For this assignment, you should pick a a short, manageable passage. Annotating ten lines of Shakespeare adequately is quite ambitious; five lines or so might be better. Indeed, some passages from Shakespeare are so dense and so rich that annotating just a line or two thoroughly will prove challenging.

Select a passage from a Shakespeare play *not* on our reading. (See below for a list of suggested passages.)

Choose a passage that strikes you as particularly good, a passage that does particularly well the kinds of things that Shakespeare does well. Read the passage slowly, carefully, and repeatedly in order to make worthwhile observations on it. Your annotations can address many different aspects of Shakespeare's language: rhythm, wordplay, syntax, figures of speech, sound patterns, imagery, connotations of words, irony, word choice, allusions, and so on.

Your annotations should provide detailed, line-by-line, word-by-word analysis of Shakespeare's language. They should present fine-grained analysis, not mushy generalizations.

When writing your annotations, look for patterns: repetitions, echoes, and parallels of structure, sound, or meaning. Think about multiple meanings of words and phrases: puns, wordplays, and ambiguities. Consider too how words and phrases often shift meaning as the syntax of the lines unfolds.

Remember that your assignment is to make observations about the lines themselves, not about their author, or the characters and situations that appear in them, or anything else. Every annotation should relate directly to the actual words of the text. Don't get sidetracked; stick with the words.

Your annotations should be truthful, vivid, insightful, and focused on nuanced details from the text. They should not merely repeat textual notes, and they should not just paraphrase or summarize the lines.

Quote your passage in full, providing the proper reference: play title plus act, scene, and line numbers. You may want to include a brief headnote about the passage as a whole. Then present your line-by-line annotations.

You can see some sample annotations on my website here:

drmarkwomack.com/engl-3306/handouts/sample-annotations/

Make your prose as clear and concise as possible. Don't waste your time (or mine) trying to sound impressive. Write, instead, in a conversational voice: the clear, plainspoken, engaging voice of a person talking about a subject they find interesting. Don't let your annotations run longer than what you have to say. Make every word count. A sentence that has something to say is better than a paragraph that doesn't.

The length of your analytical annotations will depend on how much you have to say and on how well you say it. The better you write, the less of your reader's time you need.

Submit your annotations through the TurnItIn link on the class Blackboard Learn page labeled "Essay 2—Annotated Passage." You needn't submit a hard copy version of your essay.

DUE DATES:

- **COMMENTS DEADLINE: November 16**
If you want comments on your annotations, you must submit them on or before Monday, November 16.
- **FINAL DEADLINE: November 23**
Although I will make few or no comments on annotations submitted after Monday, November 16, I will grade them just the same as those turned in by the earlier date.

SOME SHAKESPEAREAN PASSAGES FOR ANNOTATION

This list is merely a list of suggestions; you can annotate any Shakespearean passage as long as it comes from a play not on the syllabus. Feel free to consult with me about selecting a passage.

The line numbers are from the Pelican Shakespeare edition. (Line numbers vary from edition to edition primarily because typesetting choices — such as page, margin, and font sizes — determine the length of prose lines. Therefore prose always skews the line numbers of the subsequent lines in any scene where it occurs.)

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

(3.1.174–87) “What light is light”

Romeo and Juliet

(Prologue 1–14) “Two households both alike”

(3.2.17–25) “Come, night, come, Romeo”

Richard II

(3.1.40–50) “This royal throne of kings”

The Merchant of Venice

(3.1.54–67) “Hath not a Jew eyes?”

1 Henry IV

(5.1.126–140) “Why thou owest God a death”

Hamlet

(2.2.265–78) “I have of late — but wherefore I know not —”

(2.2.392–404) “The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms”

(4.7.164–81) “There is a willow grows askant the brook”

Othello

(1.3.81–94) “Rude am I in my speech”

(1.3.319–32) “Virtue? A fig!”

(3.3.165–170) “O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!”

Measure for Measure

(2.2.110–23) “Could great men thunder”

The Tempest

(1.2.397–403) “Full fathom five thy father lies”

(3.2.134–42) “Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises”

(4.1.148–58) “Our revels now are ended”