Introduction for Faculty Colleagues

This assignment is for ENG 223: American Literature I, an introductory survey course on American literature from pre-colonial times through 1865. Students are first-year through seniors, multi-disciplinary (usually with only 3-5 majors). 33 student cap.

This assignment will be given in the first two weeks of class, when the students are beginning Puritan literature, but before they read Bradstreet’s poetry. They will have had a general introduction to genres (poetry, non-fiction, fiction, drama) and the Puritans (why they are in America, the basic tenets of their beliefs, and an overview of the genres of literature typically anthologized.). We will have discussed the advantages of keeping a double-entry reading notebook, with the understanding that while they are not required to keep entries for the entire semester, they will be required to complete 5-7 homework assignments in this manner during the semester. I will have placed PowerPoints and handouts on the class Moodle site in case they need to review information necessary to complete this assignment. Their pages will be brought to class for discussion in small groups and then with the entire class.

This assignment is part of a small collection of notebook pages that students will turn in as homework during the semester on different texts during the major time periods covered. Students often “freeze up” in literature classes, remain silent—or even apologize-- because they are afraid their ideas aren’t “correct” or won’t be considered seriously by an audience (usually their professor). I want this assignment to empower them to be honest with their responses—whether they understand the text fully. The desire is that students will find this exercise useful in helping them to better prepare themselves for discussing a text in class and writing about literature on essays and exams required during the semester.

My aims for the paper include 1) teaching students to learn how to read a poem closely before it is discussed in class and pose questions about what they don’t understand, 2) helping readers better understand and analyze an early American poem and its relation to the time period and cultural/social contexts, and 3) giving students more confidence in their ability to read and discuss this particular genre of literature.
The following rubric will be used to quickly assess their success and ways to improve their performance before the next similar assignment.

**Rubric for Double-Entry Journal Assignments (Eng 223: American Literature I)**

Text__________________________________

Name__________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Fair/Average</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment Completeness: See Quantity of Analysis and parameters of assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding of text (See Quality of Analysis)</td>
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<td>Use of Examples from the text</td>
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The Assignment I Distribute to Students

ENG 223 – American Literature I

Revised Short Homework Assignment: Double-Entry Notebook Page
Anne Bradstreet’s poem, “The Author to Her Book” (p. 181 in Belasco)

Do you really dislike poetry? Or are you a fan? I challenge you to give this poem a chance. After you know more about the author and the circumstances that prompted her to write this piece, I bet you’ll appreciate it (if not actually enjoy it!).

Writing analytically about literature (style, purpose, audience, themes, literary devices, etc.) is one of the objectives for this course. This assignment will help you learn how to read a poem critically for meaning, use of poetic devices, and structure. You’ll also have the opportunity to test your skills in group and class discussions, which will give you a chance to listen to other opinions and offer your own. Now—down to the specifics.

When is this due?  (September 10)

How will I prepare this assignment?

1. Create a double-sided page or two-columned word document (refer to the double-entry notebook handout on Moodle) to hand in at the end of the class period.

2. Read the poem--twice. (Refer to handout on Moodle, ”Reading and Analyzing Poetry”)

3. In the left column, write down any questions you have about this particular text with regard to what it means (or what you think it means), its structure, words you don’t understand (look them up!), literary devices used, etc.

4. In the right column, make notes about what you see in the text that relates to material covered in class (e.g. poetic devices, structure, characteristics of Puritanism, gender issues in early America, rhyme scheme, themes, etc.)

5. In preparation for a lively class discussion, bring your notes to class to discuss your thoughts on the text.

6. In class, you will first discuss your questions and notes in a small group; small groups will summarize their discussion and present to full class for further discussion/questions.

Length: At least one-half page typed (3/4 to a page handwritten) of column notations/questions.
**Audience:** The author

**Purpose:** 1) To learn how to closely read a poem and highlight what the reader doesn't understand, 2) to help the reader better understand and analyze an early American poem and its relation to the time period and cultural contexts, and 3) to give students more confidence in their ability to read and discuss this genre of literature

**How will you evaluate this assignment?** I’ll look at your assignment to see if you meet or exceed the following criteria (Rubric for these assignments are on Moodle.):

**Quality of analysis:** Does the analysis reflect a careful reading of the poem? Does it reflect ideas discussed in class about poetry, Puritanism, early American society, and Bradstreet?

**Quantity of analysis:** Thoughtful analysis should include several questions/notations about what the poem means and poetic elements (imagery, poetic devices, language, symbolism, etc.)

**Double-Entry Reading Journal**

An excellent way to think about literature and find ways to “figure it out” is to write down questions you have about a text as well as to note how the text relates to and reflects the terminology and concepts discussed in class.

My suggestion for the most effective way to do this is by keeping a double-entry reading notebook. This is not a required assignment, but a suggested tool for you to understand the literature you’ll be reading and discussing this semester. I will be happy to look at or discuss your notebook at any time. You will be graded only on the specific homework assignments I ask you to do.

Ideally, if you had time, you would record your thoughts for everything you read this term, BUT I understand that this is asking a lot for mostly ungraded work--thus the reason I have merely suggested this as a tool. You will, on occasion, be required to do this kind of exercise on selected literature as homework to discuss in peer groups and class and turn in to be checked.

**Why should you consider this?** Your questions and comments on literature are imperative to many of the objectives for this course, especially for your ability to understand and analyze literature as you read it—and not after class discussion has "revealed" all the mysteries. Regardless of the content you are reading or which class you are reading it for, by keeping notes and questions, you will be better prepared to participate in class discussions, do well on in-class assignments, and prepare for exams. Your notations can be written freely, with no constraints on
Students who write about what they study and learn are always better prepared to discuss complicated issues—whether the material is for a literature class or a class in any other discipline.

Below is an example of what a double-entry journal might look like for an analysis of a poem that most of you are familiar with, Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken.”

```
TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth; 5

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same, 10

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back. 15

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. 20
```

**QUESTIONS**

What does *diverged* mean?  

Does this poem have a specific meter?  

Who is the speaker?  

What is the date of the poem? Could it be autobiographical? Is Frost talking about himself?  

Meaning of the poem could be just a person walking in the woods who comes upon 2 paths and has to decide which one to walk on—he chooses the one that is more overgrown. Could it mean something more?? Perhaps a decision the author had to make in his own life????
What is the difference he talks about in the last line? Easier? Harder?

“way leads on to way” (14)—what does this mean? A path or trail leads to another trail? Or more trails.

**OBSERVATIONS**

*Diverged* = separated, went different ways

Poem has 4 stanzas; each has 5 lines

Rhyme scheme is *abab* (consistent)

Poetic devices:

- Simile (6)
- Imagery: “yellow wood” (1), “grassy and wanted wear” (8)
- Repetition (last stanza)
- Symbols: does the road = life; paths = different paths one might take in life (personal life, hobby, education, jobs, etc.)
- Word order (syntax) seems odd and “old” at times: “And be one traveler, long I stood” (3), “in leaves no step had trodden Black” (12)