**HONORS AMERICAN LITERATURE**

**Short Essay Assignment/Writers’ Workshop (50-point Major Assessment Grade)**

In the following passage from Cormac McCarthy’s novel *The Crossing* (1994), the narrator describes a dramatic personal experience.

**Directions:**

1. Individually read and annotate the passage below—i.e. define words you don’t know, mark strong/impactful passages and descriptions, look for specific use of literary techniques, highlight passages that you don’t understand, ask questions, make comments, etc. (I have underlined words you may want to look up to ensure you understand the passage and its setting.)

*1* *By the time he reached the first talus slides under*

*the tall escarpments of the Pilares the dawn was not*

*far to come. He reined the horse in a grassy swale and*

*stood down and dropped the reins. His trousers were*

1. *stiff with blood. He cradled the wolf in his arms and*

*lowered her to the ground and unfolded the sheet. She*

*was stiff and cold and her fur was bristly with the*

*blood dried upon it. He walked the horse back to the*

*creek and left it standing to water and scouted the*

1. *banks for wood with which to make a fire. Coyotes*

*were yapping along the hills to the south and they*

*were calling from the dark shapes of the rimlands*

*above him where their cries seemed to have no origin*

*other than the night itself.*

*15 He got the fire going and lifted the wolf from the*

*sheet and took the sheet to the creek and crouched in*

*the dark and washed the blood out of it and brought it*

*back and he cut forked sticks from a mountain hack-*

*berry and drove them into the ground with a rock and*

*20 hung the sheet on a trestle pole where it steamed in*

*the firelight like a burning scrim standing in a wilder-*

*ness where celebrants of some sacred passion had*

*been carried off by rival sects or perhaps had simply*

*fled in the night at the fear of their own doing. He*

1. *pulled the blanket about his shoulders and sat shiver-*

*ing in the cold and waiting for the dawn that he could*

*find the place where he would bury the wolf. After a*

*while the horse came up from the creek trailing the*

*wet reins through the leaves and stood at the edge of*

1. *the fire.*

*He fell asleep with his hands palm up before him*

*like some dozing penitent. When he woke it was still*

*dark. The fire had died to a few low flames seething*

*over the coals. He took off his hat and fanned the fire*

*with it and coaxed it back and fed the wood he’d*

*gathered. He looked for the horse but could not see it.*

*The coyotes were still calling all along the stone*

*ramparts of the Pilares and it was graying faintly in*

*the east. He squatted over the wolf and touched her*

1. *fur. He touched the cold and perfect teeth. The eye*

*turned to the fire gave back no light and he closed it*

*with his thumb and sat by her and put his hand upon*

*her bloodied forehead and closed his own eyes that*

*he could see her running in the mountains, running*

1. *in the starlight where the grass was wet and the sun’s*

*coming as yet had not undone the rich matrix of*

*creatures passed in the night before her. Deer and*

*hare and dove and ground vole all richly empaneled*

*on the air for her delight, all nations of the possible*

1. *world ordained by God of which she was one among*

*and not separate from. Where she ran the cries of the*

*coyotes clapped shut as if a door had closed upon them*

*and all was fear and marvel. He took up her stiff head*

*out of the leaves and held it or he reached to hold what*

1. *cannot be held, what already ran among the mount-*

*ains at once terrible and of a great beauty, like flowers*

*that feed on flesh. What blood and bone are made of*

*but can themselves not make on any altar nor by an*

*wound of war. What we may well believe has power*

1. *to cut and shape and hollow out the dark form of the*

*world surely if wind can, if rain can. But which can-*

*not be held never be held and is no flower but is swift*

*and a huntress and the wind itself is in terror of it and*

*the world cannot lose it.*

2. With your small group, using the guided questions below, discuss the passage and your reactions to it (take notes to help you with the subsequent essay):

-On a basic level, what is the passage about?

-On a deeper, more figurative level, what is it about?

-Did you like it? Yes? No? Why? There are no wrong answers here.

-What parts of the passage did you have a hard time understanding? Be honest. What made them difficult? Using each other, work through the unclear or difficult sections. Utilize your collective intelligence!

-Consider what you know about McCarthy from our discussions about him. Does this excerpt seem to fit in with the genre of Southern Gothic? In what ways?

-What do you think is the intended authorial impact of this piece? How is McCarthy trying to make readers feel? What do you think he wants the reader to think or feel? What’s the literary “take-away”? WHAT IS THE POINT (ahem, theme)???

3. Now, we are going to spend the next several days in a pseudo-writers’ workshop. Piece by piece, you will compose a well-organized short essay. **You will show how McCarthy’s use of TWO specific literary devices convey the impact of the experience on the main character.** You may wish to consider such literary techniques as **syntax**, **imagery**, **point of view**, **diction**, **setting**, **theme**, **characterization**, etc. Your intro should include the title and author, and your thesis should mention the two specific literary devices you have chosen to discuss.

**Other Requirements and Information (\*Refer to the unit calendar for due dates for each section of the essay.)**

-Normal essay requirements apply: intro with thesis, body, and conclusion; textual evidence in the form of SHORT direct quotations with parenthetical citations (line number—ex: (19) )

-You are to type up each section of your essay and bring enough printed copies for everyone in your group. If you do not have PRINTED COPIES FOR EVERY GROUP MEMBER, you will forfeit your opportunity for group critique and feedback.