

CRUX-BUSTERS ASSIGNMENT

******You must submit FIVE (5) Crux-Busters on texts of your choice on the dates due in the Course Calendar****** Crux-Busters will only be accepted at the beginning of class on the date they are due (no late papers). If you are concerned about improving the quality of your Crux-Busting, you may submit one additional Crux-Buster, and only the top 5 will count toward your grade.

Overview

Length: 2-3 pages of your own prose

Crux-Busters are short analyses generated in response to passages taken from the reading assignment for a given class session. They require you to select two non-consecutive passages from a work or works and spend 2-3 full pages opening them up for discussion and interpretation (see Requirements, below). “Full page” means an entire page of text, i.e., *2-3 full pages of your own prose*. The passages you discuss *do not count towards your page length*. Running a few lines short or long is ok.

Recommended Layout: Type your selected passages. Start a new page for your 2-3 pages of crux-busting discussion.

Purpose

Crux-Busters have several purposes:

- They give me a sense of how well you understand the texts you’re reading.
- They encourage you to interact with our course texts instead of passively receiving them.
- They foster in-class discussion by ensuring that you have something to say on those days when you turn in a Crux-Buster.
- They prepare you to write the formal essay, which is essentially a more developed crux-busting analysis.

Although a crux is frequently defined as a “puzzle” or “conundrum,” its most basic definition is “something requiring interpretation.” By analyzing the relationship between passages, you’re busting open their source text, making some aspect of its meaning available to your readers, hence the “Crux-Buster” name. “Crux” is also the root for “crucial,” which implies that your interpretation will tell us something important about the passages/works in question.

Requirements

You choose your own passages and cruxes to bust. You can choose passages for any number of reasons: they reveal something important about the text, they clarify a point the text is trying to make, they contradict the text’s message, or they resist comprehension and require elucidation.

Your job is to explain your choices and why your passages matter. Don’t generate Ebert-and-Roeper-style evaluations (“A big thumbs up for some of the best passages I’ve ever read”). We also don’t need plot synopses (“In the first passage, Sir Robin wets himself; in the second, he bravely runs away”). Instead, analyze and interpret your passages in an informal but serious fashion: you’ve identified a pair of cruxes, related textual selections in need of further interpretation and comment, and you’re going to bust open their meanings for us.

Basic content requirements are as follows:

- **Crux-Busters cite and interpret two short passages taken from the text under discussion.** “Short” here means usually no more than 5-8 lines of prose or about 10 of poetry per passage. Stick to passages you can fully interpret within the 2-3 page limit.
- **Crux-Busters take at least one of their passages from the reading assignment due on the day they’re submitted.** Your second passage can also be from that portion of the text or another portion. In other words, your Crux-Buster for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* must have one passage from Part III or IV, but the second passage can be from Part I, II, III, or IV. This requirement ensures that you can use your Crux-Busters in class because at least one passage is from a portion of the text discussed that day.
- **Crux-Buster passages are non-consecutive (i.e., separated by multiple pages of prose/drama or about 30+ lines of poetry).** Why must your two passages be non-consecutive? I want you to move beyond a focus on plot to evaluate factors like structure, style, theme, or use of literary devices. Picking non-consecutive passages will help you to avoid the temptation to summarize what happens and concentrate instead on *why* it happens the way that it does (or why the way in which we’re told what happens makes a difference).
- **Crux-Busters locate points of connection between their passages.** It’s not enough to analyze each of your passages in isolation. I want you to focus instead on how your pair of passages speak to one another. Do they demonstrate a change in a character’s outlook (if so, what made that change happen)? Or do they deploy one of the text’s overarching themes? Does the theme develop from one passage to the next? Sometimes the relationship between your passages will be obvious, but, more often than not, you’ll be looking to make explicit what is only implicit in the text. The best Crux-Busters teach the reader something new or exciting about the text that isn’t immediately obvious.
- **Crux-Busters get to the point right away.** They aren’t long assignments, so you shouldn’t waste time and space while writing them. Avoid long-winded introductory strategies: the repetition of the question to be answered, the “Dawn of Time / All Humans Do X” opening, the cute anecdote, etc. Begin instead with the strongest possible statement of your point and why it is important to our understanding of the work in question (with any paper, you need to tell your reader what to expect and what the payoff is). The remainder of the Crux-Buster can be devoted to elaborating and supporting that argument.
- **Crux-Busters make substantial use of textual evidence.** Students often choose to paraphrase the literary texts with which they’re working instead of directly quoting from them. This is strange behavior: your job is to analyze the words on the page, not your own translation of said words. Resist the temptation to paraphrase, and concentrate instead on interpreting the text’s specific linguistic and stylistic choices. Use the *OED* to help, and look up any unfamiliar names, places, or other references.
- **Crux-Busters don’t repeat previous class discussions.** We don’t need transcriptions of my words or those of your peers in Crux-Busters. From time to time you may want to make reference to something said in class as a way of provoking or supporting your own analysis. This is fine as long as you make such borrowings clear and succinct.

Format

It's important for your written work to be legible, professional, and consistent. Therefore, write your Crux-Busters with the following format guidelines in mind:

- 12-point font (Garamond or Times New Roman, NOT Courier)
- Double-spaced *without extra space following paragraphs* (you may have to alter your Word default paragraph formatting in Format/Paragraph so that line spacing before & after is 0)
- 1" margins (you may have to alter your default Word margins from 1.25)
- All quotations include a citation to page numbers (for prose) or line numbers (for poetry) to tell your reader where that passage can be found in the *NAEL*.
- Proofreading is important! The best way to avoid typos and mistakes in your formal writing is to practice avoiding them in your informal writing. Check your Crux-Busters for errors before submitting them: a submission so typo-riddled as to be essentially illegible will receive no points at all.
- *STAPLE* your pages or use another professional binding technique (*not* folded corners).
- You may "go green" and print double-sided if you choose.

Grading

Crux-Busters are not Formal Essays. I do not expect a fully-fledged argument, complete with introduction, conclusion, transitions, perfect organization, etc. Instead, what I want to see are interesting interpretations of your chosen passages that also reasonably attend to principles of standard, proofread English. The following standards are based on my Essay Grading Standards in Appendix A to the syllabus, but they are framed to focus on content and interpretation (rather than the full expectations for a formal essay).

- **F range = Poor quality.** The Crux-Buster doesn't really interpret its passages (e.g., it resorts instead to plot summary or character description), it doesn't meet the requirements for length or passage selection, or it is incomprehensible.
- **D range = Fair quality.** The Crux-Buster interprets its passages in a seriously flawed fashion and/or relies too much on summary but attempts to meet the requirements of the assignment.
- **C range = Average quality.** The Crux-Buster interprets its passages in a solid and plausible way, though it may not go beyond the surface of the text's explicit meaning.
- **B range = Good quality.** The Crux-Buster offers a promising, careful interpretation of its passages, though it may be occasionally flawed or lacking in original insights.
- **A range = Excellent quality.** The Crux-Buster presents an original, thought-provoking take on the passages it analyzes.

If you have any further questions about this assignment, do not hesitate to stop by my office hours or to send me an e-mail message (in the latter case, I will respond within 24 hours). Now, go forth and bust cruxes!