

WRITING PROMPTS

III. Instead of requiring 2 longer, discrete essays, I will assign one conventional 5-page paper and a set of scaffolded microthemes and activities to help students think through the possibilities for the project in increasingly complex ways as the semester progresses. According to pedagogical theory scholar John C. Bean, exploratory writing not only “records the actual process of critical thinking” but works at “simultaneously driving it forward” (6).¹

(A) Individual Journal – Exercise 1

Keep a record of the specific Second Life locations that you visit (names and URLs), and answer the following questions for each site:

What were the most interesting things that you saw on this island, or at particular sites on the island?

How and why did they capture your attention?

Did you *interact* with the environment, or just look/observe/wander around?

What did you see and do that you might apply to your creation of a Morrison space?

[Another invaluable suggestion that came out of BPI discussions: distribute a form to each team that serves as a contract between individual students as well as between the group and the instructor. The students must fill out who is doing which tasks, and by what date, and all must sign the form. At the end of the semester, students fill out peer evaluations, making comments on how each member performed and participated, which the instructor can use to provide feedback (e.g. “I see signs of excellent leadership skills, but you need to be careful of overriding the ideas of others in order to ensure that all members of your group feel like they are significant contributors to the project”).]

(B) In-Class Reflection – Exercise 2

By now, you should have finished *The Bluest Eye*. To integrate your explorations of the Second Life world and your thinking about how a specific work of fiction can be adapted, I’d like you to write a short essay considering the following issue: Imagine that the protagonist, Pecola Breedlove, is transported 70 years into the future and exposed to Second Life technology. When it came time for her to create an avatar, what would it look like? Explain if you think this would be a beneficial experience for her or a negative experience, and why.”

(C) Microthemes – Exercise 3

After reading each of the assigned Morrison novels, students were asked to write a short essay on the most compelling aspects of the work: “After listening to lectures, participating in class discussion, and thinking through the possibilities for your own SL space, what ideas from this novel do you believe are most important to convey in the virtual world? Why? How did you pick up on these concepts in Morrison's writing? (i.e. Quote from the text to reveal the details you gathered to support your visual interpretation.). How might you illustrate one or two of these themes in Second Life? Which (one) setting from the novel would you choose for situating your ideas? (Select only one space, even if you imagine developing several ideas within that space.)”

¹ Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education (1996).

(D) Group Presentation – Exercise 4

During the last week of class in the Fall 2011 semester, I anticipated meeting in the computer lab and each group giving the class a virtual tour of its SL space (but only if the builders could get the environments constructed in time—if not, teams were to present their work via sketches, storyboards, Power Point, etc.). Before presenting their project, students were instructed to gather their writing from throughout the semester to compile portfolios, which were to be submitted at the time of the presentation. Throughout the term, students were directed to turn to the various writing assignments with a critical eye, and interrogate and apply their initial thoughts, my comments and suggestions, later reflection, and research results to the final product.