Introduction to Literature: The Research-Based Argument (RBA) Essay

THE WHAT: For the course's major research assignment, you will be asked to select **two course texts** that will serve as the focus for an original, insightful argument regarding whatever aspect of these two texts you find most appealing/interesting. (For this assignment, "text" means a whole novel, a complete short story, or an entire book of poetry.) I'm leaving the requirements regarding your argument as vague as possible on purpose; I don't want you to feel "pressured" to write the argument you think *I want to read*, but rather the argument you think *you want to write*. The keys for this assignment will be **advancing a compelling, personal reading of these texts** and then **supporting this reading with multiple scholarly sources**. If you can do both of these things at a high level, you'll be able to produce a successful essay.

THE HOW: After reading our first six books, you should begin thinking about the stories, themes, and characters you find most interesting. Working on your own or with help from a classmate or myself, you'll narrow down your interests to a specific pairing of texts and then begin developing an argument around your selection. With the help of academic journals, works of literary criticism and/or biographical studies, and (reliable) Internet sources, you'll flesh out your ideas and start the process of narrowing your argument to something that can be successfully discussed in a paper of this length. At that point, your task will be **to develop your argument in as comprehensive and nuanced a manner as possible.** I'll be available to meet with you throughout the process, so the sooner you get started, the more help I can provide along the way.

THE SPECS: Focus = Two course texts (*Novel*, *short story*, or *collection of poems*)
Length = 1800-2400 words (6-8 pages)
Format = MLA Guidelines / 12-pt. font / Double-spaced paragraphs / Works Cited
Research Requirement = Minimum of <u>six</u> scholarly sources
Six secondary sources + Two primary sources = <u>Eight total sources</u>

THE BEST ESSAYS WILL…
- ✓ Establish a clear rationale for bringing together the two texts selected for the paper
- ✓ Develop an <u>original</u>, <u>clear</u>, and <u>well-documented</u> argument regarding the paper topic
- ✓ Examine the cultural, biographical, and literary contexts in which the works under analysis were produced
- ✓ Integrate and analyze/evaluate numerous quotes from primary and secondary source materials
- ✓ Draw original and relevant connections between the essay's central argument and the textual evidence offered to support all major claims
- ✓ Display an understanding of the literary terminology and critical approaches we have been discussing in class this semester
- ✓ Include polished, professional prose that, though not necessarily "perfect," demonstrates clearly organized ideas and a commitment to the drafting and revising process

THE WHEN: Final Deadline for the Paper is **TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26**
Unlike the CRA Paper, this essay cannot be revised.