

## Essay Prompts

The following prompts are general in nature, in order to allow for a variety of approaches that respond to the question. You may modify a prompt to better suit your personal interests in exploring and examining the literature from the Revolutionary War time period. You may also come up with a prompt of your own - if you do, please let me know what it is.... 😊

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The conflict created when the will of an individual opposes the will of the majority is the recurring theme of many literary works. Select the work of an essayist who is in opposition to his or her society; analyze the conflict and discuss the moral and ethical implications for both the individual and the society.

A character's (or author's) attempt to recapture the past is important in many plays, novels, poems, and essays. Choose a literary work from the American Revolution in which the tone of the piece views the past with such feelings as reverence, bitterness, or longing. How does the use of literary devices contribute to the tone?

Throughout history, certain parallel or recurring events prove to be significant during a specific period. In an essay, describe the major similarities and differences between two texts that provide perspective on an historically significant event from the Revolutionary War.

The meaning of some literary works is often enhanced by sustained allusion to myths, the Bible, or other works of literature. Select a literary text from the American Revolution that makes use of such a sustained reference. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain the allusion that predominates in the work and analyze how it enhances the work's meaning.

In great literature, no scene of violence exists for its own sake. Choose a literary piece from the Revolutionary War period that confronts the reader or audience with a scene or scenes of violence. In a well-organized essay,

explain how the scene or scenes contribute to the meaning of the complete work.

The struggle to achieve independence from others frequently appears in literature from the American Revolution. Select a piece of literature from the period and examine the ways language is used to motivate the reader to join the struggle.

Select a few lines from a specific piece of Revolutionary War literature -lines that you find particularly memorable or inspiring. Write an essay in which you identify the line or the passage, explain its relationship to the work in which it is found, and analyze the reasons for its effectiveness.

A critic has said that one important measure of a superior work of literature is its ability to produce in the reader a healthy confusion of pleasure and disquietude. Select a text from the Revolutionary War that produces this "healthy confusion." Write an essay in which you explain the sources of the "pleasure and disquietude" experienced by the readers of the work.

Some texts advocate changes in social or political attitudes or in traditions. Choose such a text and note briefly the particular attitudes or traditions that the author apparently wishes to modify. Then analyze the techniques the author uses to influence the reader's or audience's views.

Flannery O'Connor once wrote, "I am interested in making a good case for distortion because I am coming to believe that it is the only way to make people see." Write an essay in which you "make a good case for distortion," as you observe it in a text from the American Revolution. Analyze how important elements of the work you choose are "distorted" and explain how these distortions contribute to the effectiveness of the work.

Many pieces of literature use contrasting places (for example, two countries, two cities or towns, two houses, or the land and the sea) to represent opposed forces or ideas that are central to the meaning of the work. Choose a text from the American Revolution that contrasts two such places. Write an

essay explaining how the places differ, what each place represents, and how their contrast contributes to the meaning of the work.

Writers often highlight the values of a culture or a society by depicting individuals or groups who are alienated from that culture or society. Choose a text in which such a situation plays a significant role and show how the alienation reveals the surrounding society's assumptions or moral values.

Specific scenes from a piece of literature may reveal the values of the individuals and the society in which they live. Select a text that includes such a scene and, in a focused essay, discuss the contribution the scene makes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

Literature often depicts individuals caught between colliding cultures -- national, regional, ethnic, religious, institutional. Such collisions can call a person's sense of identity into question. Select a novel or play in which a character responds to such a cultural collision. Then write a well-organized essay in which you describe the individual's response and explain its relevance to the work as a whole.

One of the strongest human drives seems to be a desire for power. Write an essay in which you discuss how an individual struggles to free himself or herself from the power of others or seeks to gain power over others. Be sure to demonstrate in your essay how the author uses this power struggle to enhance the meaning of the work.

Many writers use a country setting to establish values within a work of literature. For example, the country may be a place of virtue and peace or one of primitivism and ignorance. Choose a text from the American Revolution in which setting plays a significant role. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the setting functions in the work as a whole.

In many works of literature, past events can affect, positively or negatively, the present activities, attitudes, or values of an individual. Choose a text in which the author must contend with some aspect of the past, either personal

or societal. Then write an essay in which you show how the individual's relationship to the past contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

Works of literature often depict acts of betrayal. Friends and even family may betray a protagonist; main characters may likewise be guilty of treachery or may betray their own values. Select a text from the American revolution that depicts such acts of betrayal. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the nature of the betrayal and show how it contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

Is it possible to separate the American Revolution (a new way of thinking about government, where power lay in the hands of the people) from the American Revolutionary War (American's fight for independence)? Why or why not? How do the views of various writers from this historical period help to separate the idea of the war from the overall Revolution?

Selections from texts written during the Revolutionary War period express values that are still widely held in America. Write an essay in which you identify such values in historical texts and relate them to commonly held beliefs in modern society.