

## Midterm Essay Prompts

\*Choose **one** of the following questions as your Midterm Essay topic. After you've chosen your topic from the list below, make sure you see the accompanying document that outlines the assignment requirements including word count, textual evidence, etc. **No outside research is required for this essay.**

1. What is, and what should be, our attitude toward the natural world, especially if nature is indifferent to human beings and often hostile to our purpose? **Write an essay that addresses this question and support your position with at least three direct quotations from at least two of the texts we have read this semester.** Though this question refers to nature and the natural world, you don't have to limit your textual evidence only to the stories we read in the naturalism unit.
2. At the end of "The Blue Hotel" Crane writes, "We are all in it! This poor gambler isn't even a noun. He is kind of an adverb. Every sin is the result of collaboration. We, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede" (619). What does Crane mean by "Every sin is a collaboration"? How does this work with the tenets of naturalism? How does declaration explain the action in the story? How might the collaborative nature of the Swede's death speak to or challenge Whitman's thesis in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"? **Write an essay that interprets what "every sin is a collaboration" means in terms of the theme of "The Blue Hotel." You should support your interpretation with at least three direct quotations from the text. These quotes should be carefully chosen to work as evidence for your thesis statements.** You may also want to consider how this collaboration works to characterize the text as a naturalist text.
3. Both "Editha" and "The Real Thing" provide commentary on human perceptions of truth or reality to those of appearance, artifice, or ideals. **Write an essay that compares OR contrasts the relationship between truth/reality and appearance/artifice/illusions in these two stories. You must use direct quotations as textual evidence from both stories (a minimum of three).** Your thesis should be argumentative and you should do more than merely point out similarities or differences in the two texts. You may want to consider theme or what Howells and James want us to learn from these stories in order to develop your argument.
4. All of the stories we have read this semester (and Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry") have reflected the literary movement of its particular time period as well as the changes the United States was experiencing. For the purposes of the course, they have been defined as realist or naturalist texts. However, all of these texts have other themes or messages that extend beyond those characteristics. **Write an essay that examines a secondary theme in any of the texts we have read this semester. You must use at least three direct quotations as textual evidence.** You may choose to compare or contrast two or more texts. You may also consider things like gender, class, historical concerns, or democratic principles that present themselves in the text(s).