

# Exploring Literature through Letter Writing Groups

## Letter Exchange Guidelines

[Note: This document is just a model. You will want to modify it for your own particular context.]

### General Guidelines

The purpose of this letter exchange is for you and your peers to engage in a dialogue of exploration and inquiry. Your letters can arise from your reading, your journal entries, or class discussion. In no way do your thoughts have to be complete, absolute, or fixed. The idea here is to explore your reactions and your ideas, share those ideas with members of our class, and see what they have to say in return. Therefore, open-ended exploration is preferred over trying to prove a particular point of view. However, do refer directly to the text when possible. While the letters are informal, you will want to make sure what you have to say is clear, so revise and proofread your letters before exchanging them with the two members of your group.

We will post letters into the threaded forums in WebCT. You should write and save your letters in a word processor rather than directly into WebCT, and keep electronic files of your letters. If you compose online inside WebCT, you run the risk of losing your connection and, therefore, what you have written. Letters should be roughly one to two pages in length.

### Initial Letter

Write a letter to your two partners which explores the issue raised in the prompt. Some prompts will ask you specific questions such as "Do you like the character of Beowulf? Why or why not?" or "Based upon our ongoing discussion of the hero, is Huck Finn heroic?" Other times prompts may be more open, asking you to explore a theme that you are interested in, or to explore an issue that you wish we had discussed or discussed more fully in class. Your letter should have a point (the point could even be that you don't understand the text, but such a letter should try to explain what you don't understand and ask questions designed to help your letter exchange partners understand what you are struggling with). The letter should provide some context to help your group members understand your point of view. It should also support your thoughts with specific references to the text, and it should be written in such a way that your group members have room to respond to what you say. Think of your letter not as a final opinion of the topic but an opening statement designed to spark discussion.

Once you have drafted your letter, [provide guidelines as to how you want your students to exchange their letters. The Letter Exchange Charts will let students know with whom they should exchange letters].

## First Response

Read the letters written by your two designated group partners and write a response to each of them. As with the letters in stage 1, these letters should be one to two pages in length, refer directly to our text, and strive to engage members of your group in discussion. While each letter should respond to the content of each classmate's letter, you need not limit yourself to that. Associations, comparisons to other texts (either those we're reading in class or texts you've read on your own), other media (movies, graphic novels, T.V. shows, Web sites, video games, etc.), and to class discussion are all welcome. Also, try to incorporate ideas raised by both your letter exchange partners in both letters (i.e. while responding to letter A, try to refer to the content of letter B, and vice versa). As you are responding to two different letters, the content of both will need to differ

## Second and Additional Responses

Read the two responses to your last letter(s) and write two letters responding back. As with the first response, these letters should be one to two pages in length, refer directly to our text, and strive to engage members of your group in discussion. While each letter should respond to the content of your classmate's letter, you need not limit yourself to that. Associations, comparisons to other texts (either those we're reading in class or texts you've read on your own), other media (movies, graphic novels, T.V. shows, Web sites, video games, etc.), and class discussion are all welcome. Also, try to incorporate ideas raised by both your letter exchange partners in both letters (i.e. while responding to letter A, try to refer to the content of letter B, and vice versa). As you are responding to two different letters, the content will of both will once again need to differ.

## Initial Letter Checklist

- Does your letter address the prompt?
- Does your letter have a point?
- Does your letter provide necessary context?
- Does your letter support your thoughts with references to the text?
- Does your letter provide a space for your group members to respond?

## Response Letter Checklist

- Does your letter in some way address the content of the letter to which you are responding?
- Does your letter have a point?
- Does your letter provide necessary context?
- Does your letter support your thoughts with references to the text?
- Does your letter incorporate any ideas or thoughts from the other partner's letter?
- Does your letter leave space for a response?
- Do the two response letters differ in some way, or have you written the same letter to both exchange partners?