

Black Consciousness and Intertextuality

Intertextuality: Using one text as a lens with which to view another text

You're immersed right now in the world of black American writers of the early and mid-twentieth century. You've had access to biographical material for Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, and have read Hurston's novel, Hughes' poetry, a novel or autobiography of Wright, Baldwin or Ellison, and Baldwin's most famous short story. You've seen critical material on all five writers, and have shared "quotes of note" from each of their major works.

Now what?

One way in which students of literature explore the meaning or importance of the literature they read is to view literary texts through the lens of other texts. This is called intertextuality and you've been practicing it in class (whether you knew it or not). The midterm essay questions that had you consider *The Great Gatsby* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through the lens of a Hughes or Dunbar poem were questions that called for intertextual understanding. The connections we've made in class between the Hughes poems and the Wright, Baldwin and Ellison books are also intertextual. The quote connections you've been doing for your reader's circles are also examples of intertextual work.

For the next essay, we are asking you to use your own selection from the support texts on the WHSRoets.weebly.com page (bios, interviews, essays, the short story – attached you'll find a smattering of examples from these texts) as a lens through which to view your Wright, Baldwin or Ellison book. Use your choice of text to provide insight into the book you have read. Consider how the text of choice helps you understand the book's style, structure, narrative voice, author's point of view, themes, characters, setting, meanings, and/or purpose. You don't have to do all of these things, but instead follow what intrigues you about the book and the text you have chosen.

For example, you might be intrigued by the violence and degradation of *Native Son* and be able to view this from the lens of "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," in which Langston Hughes claims that the negro artist needs to depict the whole culture of African-Americans - the good and the ugly. Quote Hughes and then show how and why Wright's novel uses the "ugly."

Step 1 – figure out what intrigues you about your book choice and attempt to define it

Step 2 – read all of the supporting material (or at least the collection of quotes I pulled out for you) and look for any connections between that material and what you find intriguing about the book

Step 3 – brainstorm a thesis statement - a provable or arguable statement that ties together your lens text with your interest

Step 4 – examine your book for support for your thesis – maybe even start with the quotes you've been pulling out of your book for your reading journal

Step 5 – outline your paper – start with the thesis and then break it down into provable elements with support

Step 6 – write a draft – get feedback

Step 7 – write another draft – get feedback

Step 8 – write a final draft – turn it in on turnitin!