

|Commonplace Book CRUX-BUSTERS ASSIGNMENT|

Adapted from Rob Barrett, UIUC

You must submit Four(4) Crux-Busters on the assigned texts on the dates due in the Course Calendar

|Overview|

Length: 1-1.5 pages of your own prose. Crux-Busters are short analyses generated in response to passages taken from the reading assignment for a given class session. **The quote or passage you select MUST also appear in your Commonplace Book.** The Crux-Buster requires you to select a passage from a work and spend 1-1.5 pages opening them up for discussion and interpretation (see Requirements, below). “Full page” means an entire page of text. The passages you discuss *do not count towards your page length*. Running a few lines short or long is ok.

Recommended Layout: Type your selected passage. Start a new page for your 1-1.5 pages of crux-busting discussion.

|Purpose|

Crux-Busters have several purposes:

- They give me a sense of how well you understand the texts you’re reading.
- They encourage you to interact with our course texts instead of passively receiving them. They foster in-class discussion by ensuring that you have something to say on those days when you turn in a Crux-Buster.
- They prepare you to write the formal essay, which is essentially a more developed crux-busting analysis.

Although a crux is frequently defined as a “puzzle” or “conundrum,” its most basic definition is “something requiring interpretation.” By analyzing the relationship between passages, you’re busting open their source text, making some aspect of its meaning available to your readers, hence the “Crux-Buster” name. “Crux” is also the root for “crucial,” which implies that your interpretation will tell us something important about the passages/works in question.

|Requirements:|

- You choose your own passage and crux to bust. You can choose passages for any number of reasons: they reveal something important about the text, they clarify a point the text is trying to make, they contradict the text’s message, or they resist comprehension and require elucidation.
- Your job is to explain your choices and why your passage matters. Don’t generate You-Tube style evaluations (“A big thumbs up for some of the drippiest passages I’ve ever read, no cap, now smash that like and subscribe button!”). We also don’t need plot synopses (“In the first passage, Sir Robin wets himself; in the second, he bravely runs away”). Instead, analyze and interpret your passages in an informal but serious fashion: you’ve identified a key passage and a corresponding crux, a textual selection in need of further interpretation and comment, and you’re going to bust open the meaning for us.

Basic content requirements are as follows:

- **Crux-Busters cite and interpret a short passage taken from the text under discussion.** “Short” here means usually no more than 5-8 lines of prose or about 10 of poetry per passage. Stick to passages you can fully interpret within the 1-1.5 page limit.
- **Crux-Busters take their passage from the quotes collected in your Commonplace Book**
- **Crux-Buster seek to bust open the text to reveal a new meaning to your reader.** I want you to move beyond a focus on plot to evaluate factors like structure, style, theme, or use of literary devices. Avoid the temptation to summarize what happens and concentrate instead

on *why* it happens the way that it does (or why the way in which we're told what happens makes a difference).

- **Crux-Busters locate points of connection between your passage and the larger context of the assigned reading.** It's not enough to analyze your passages in isolation. I want you to focus instead on how your passage speaks to the larger themes of the text. Does the passage demonstrate a change in a character's outlook (if so, what made that change happen)? Or does it deploy one of the text's overarching themes? How does the theme develop in this particular passage? Sometimes the relationship between your passage and the larger "world" of the text will be obvious, but, more often than not, you'll be looking to make explicit what is only implicit in the text. *The best Crux-Busters teach the reader something new or exciting about the text that isn't immediately obvious.*
- **Crux-Busters get to the point right away.** They aren't long assignments, so you shouldn't waste time and space while writing them. Avoid long-winded introductory strategies: the repetition of the question to be answered, the "Dawn of Time / All Humans Do X" opening, the cute anecdote, etc. Begin instead with the strongest possible statement of your point and why it is important to our understanding of the work in question (*with any essay, you need to tell your reader what to expect and what the payoff is*). The remainder of the Crux-Buster can be devoted to elaborating and supporting that argument.
- **Crux-Busters make substantial use of textual evidence.** Students often choose to paraphrase the literary texts with which they're working instead of directly quoting from them. This is strange behavior: your job is to analyze the words on the page, not your own translation of said words. Resist the temptation to paraphrase, and concentrate instead on interpreting the text's specific linguistic and stylistic choices. *Use the OED to help, and look up any unfamiliar names, places, or other references.*
- **Crux-Busters don't repeat previous class discussions.** We don't need transcriptions of my words or those of your peers in Crux-Busters. From time to time you may want to make reference to something said in class as a way of provoking or supporting your own analysis. This is fine as long as you make such borrowings clear and succinct.

| Format |

It's important for your written work to be legible, professional, and consistent. Therefore, write your Crux-Busters with the following format guidelines in mind:

- 12-point font (Garamond or Times New Roman, NOT Courier or Arial)
- Double-spaced *without extra space following paragraphs* (you may have to alter your Word default paragraph formatting in Format/Paragraph so that line spacing before & after is 0). If you're struggling to condense your thoughts, in some cases you may instead turn in 1 single-spaced page.
- 1" margins (you may have to alter your default Word margins from 1.25)
- All quotations include a citation to page numbers (for prose) or line numbers (for poetry).
- Proofreading is important! The best way to avoid typos and mistakes in your formal writing is to practice avoiding them in your informal writing. Check your Crux-Busters for errors before submitting them: a submission so typo-riddled as to be essentially illegible will receive no points at all.

| Grading |

Crux-Busters are not Formal Essays. I do not expect a fully-fledged argument, complete with introduction, conclusion, transitions, perfect organization, etc. Instead, what I want to see is an interesting interpretation of your chosen passage that also reasonably attends to principles of

standard, proofread English. The following standards are framed to focus on content and interpretation (rather than the full expectations for a formal essay).

- **F range** = Assignment is not turned in or is missing enough required elements to not resemble the assignment.
- **D range** = **Fair quality**. The Crux-Buster doesn't really interpret its passages (e.g., it resorts instead to plot summary or character description), it doesn't meet the requirements for length or passage selection, or it is incomprehensible. The Crux-Buster essentially demonstrates contempt for the assignment
- **C range** = **Average quality**. The Crux-Buster interprets its passages in a solid and plausible way, though it may not go beyond the surface of the text's explicit meaning.
- **B range** = **Good quality**. The Crux-Buster offers a promising, careful interpretation of its passages, though it may be occasionally flawed or lacking in original insights.
- **A range** = **Excellent quality**. The Crux-Buster presents an original, thought-provoking take on the passages it analyzes.

If you have any further questions about this assignment, do not hesitate to stop by my office hours or to send me an e-mail message (in the latter case, I will respond within 24 hours). Now, go forth and bust cruxes!