

As Steven Lynn works hard to make clear in the Reader Response chapter from *Texts and Contexts*, a valid literary response to a text, any text, always begins with exactly that: your own **subjective response**. Your assignment for this paper is to choose a specific section or series of connected moments from Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio* and write a **5 page (minimum)** essay in which you record for us your actual responses to those passages, your attempts to make meaning of them as you encounter the work. Because you are subjectively responding to the text, which is to say talking about your own feelings, impressions, etc. of the work as you read it, you may write in the 1st person, and you may also mix the present and past tenses – as long as your writing still remains clear and focused.

You should choose sections that resonate for you – personally, emotionally, or intellectually. In your analysis of what these sections of the text mean (for you), you will simply be laying out how you respond to them, how the text **affects** you and what tangible **effects** it creates within you. Use Lynn's text for clarification of these terms. Trace memories the story triggers for you, the associations you make between the text and your own experiences with similar stories or histories you've learned elsewhere, the emotions elicited by the text as you move through it. Describe *what Olsen does* to make you **expect** or **anticipate** something specific in the story.

You may also choose to balance your more personal response against a discussion in which you hypothesize about what kind of **implied reader** you think Olsen is envisioning as she constructs the selections you are responding to, and what clues in the text lead you to assume that particular kind of implied reader.

The basic assumption of this body of literary critique is that meaning is *created, by you*. The goal of this theory then is to teach us how to describe this process of creation, this making of meaning. Write about the writing, and anchor your conclusions and emotional impressions with specific references to the text. And remember, this analysis should not simply be a free and unfettered personal description of a given response: it must still posit a single, central argument – some idea or hypothesis you have about how or why Olsen has done her work.

Your thesis statement should work hard to explain two things: *why* you've chosen to respond to the selection(s) that you have, and *what* your response teaches you about something Olsen is trying to communicate in her storytelling. What is she trying to achieve, capture, emulate, illustrate, and how does your own personal, subjective, emotional, "messy" human response help to complete her narrative "mission," or not? How exactly do we make real meaning from her text, really?

Remember to use the "How to" sections I've pointed out in *Texts and Contexts* to help you with the format and language of this assignment. In particular, look at the sample Reader Response essay in the chapter for a model of the kind of discussion I want.

- Introduce the section(s) of Olsen's novel you will be analyzing *and* summarize the major tenets of Reader Response Criticism before you begin your actual analysis
- Be specific in your argumentation: Develop a sound thesis in your first paragraph that revolves around a single point you wish to make about the work
- Develop your body paragraphs according to the model you have already learned: state a topic point, introduce and insert textual support, analyze this textual material, link your discussion back to the main point of your paragraph and to your thesis
- Do a Works Cited page for this assignment, and be sure to follow all other standard rules of textual citation and attribution in your essay