

## English 138: Essay #1 – The Use of Nature in British Romanticism

*The Norton Anthology* suggests that nature was of great significance to writers in the Romantic period, whether they were focused on human nature, the natural world around us, or both.

What's more, *The Norton Anthology* suggests that nature, for the Romantics, wasn't just rainbows and flowers and such but was used to convey something more, that nature had a larger message connected with it, as evidenced by the quotations below:

- “The connecting of feelings and nature became recognized as a central theme and strategy in Romantic literature, especially in the lyric poetry we associate with Coleridge and Wordsworth” (NA 54).
- “Though Romantic Poetry is interchangeable for many modern readers with ‘nature poetry’ . . . this characteristic of Romantic poetics risks downplaying the poets’ emphatic attention to the operations of consciousness” (NA 13).
- “This was a shift Wordsworth registered when in his Preface he located the source of a poem not in outer nature but in the psychology of the individual poet” (NA 13).
- “And the appeal that nature poetry had for many writers of the period can be attributed to a determination to idealize the natural scene as a site where the individual could find freedom from social laws, an idealization that was easier to sustain when nature was, as often in the era, represented not as cultivated fields but as uninhabitable wild wastes, unploughed uplands, caves, and chasms” (NA 20).



**Assignment:** Write an analytic essay that makes an argument about how nature is used by one or more British Romantic writers.

Strive for a well-organized, well-supported essay that gives thoughtful attention to the implications of textual details. In addition, be sure to give some attention to the text’s context (that is, the historical period in which it was written) to give added depth to your interpretation.



➤ **Note:** If you are interested in developing ideas on another topic, please check with me.

**Main Objectives:** This assignment is designed to encourage you to think more critically about our readings and to communicate your insights in an effective and credible manner. For this assignment, your key goals are these:

- Make a clear and direct argument. Provide a thesis statement (an arguable claim) in your introduction.
- Support your argument with developed body paragraphs that draw out the implications of textual details.
- Organize your argument by creating assertive topic sentences, unified paragraphs, and smooth transitions.
- Establish credibility by presenting a convincing and academic-looking paper. Quote and cite according to MLA format and carefully proofread your essay.

**Percentage of Course Grade:** 15%

**Format:** 4-5 complete pages, MLA style, typed, double spaced.

**Due Date:** See class schedule. Submit both a paper copy in class and an electronic copy to Turnitin.com.

**Grading Criteria:** Papers will be evaluated upon the effectiveness and clarity with which they address the essay topic and meet the stated objectives of the assignment. More specifically, they will be evaluated according to a grading rubric on our class website.

**Tips & Notes of Clarification: The assignment allows you to . . .**

- Focus on one author's use of nature in one work:
  - Example = Wordsworth's use of nature in his poem about Tintern Abbey
  - Example = Coleridge's use of natural imagery in "Kubla Khan"
- Trace one author's use of nature in various works:
  - Example = Blake's use of nature throughout his poems
- To compare and contrast different authors' use of nature:
  - Example = Similarities and differences in Wordsworth's and Shelley's images of nature
- To examine issues of human nature in writings that are or are not poems:
  - Example = Wollstonecraft's use of nature and account of human nature in her *Vindication*

**The brainstorming diagram below is simply there to help trigger possible ideas; it's not a required part of the assignment**

