Engl 117B 2017 **Reading Questions: Assignment Description and Sample**

**Overview:** A “response” to a work of literature involves **analysis**, a **reasoned and well developed interpretation** of the work, along with **supporting details from the work itself**. You will be writing film responses directly when we are in Ireland, but before that you’ll be writing them as responses to the readings.

**Your Task:** You will write **6 reading question assignments** in this class, responding to discussion questions I’ve posted as your prompt. Collectively they will be worth 150 points. I’ll drop the weakest grade (but make an attempt on all of them!) They ***must be typed*** and printed out, submitted in class at the beginning. For this class these responses will be quite brief, just 250-350 words (a bit longer is OK), so they will need to be truly concise, not just short. The question shouldn’t be included in the word count.

**Sample:** Below is a sample of what you should be striving for, taken from an extremely thorough and articulate response to a discussion question from the first time I taught this class. It was actually longer, but I whittled it down a bit to fit this assignment. Yours doesn’t have to be this long, but aim for this depth of thinking.

**Discussion Question #1** Critics have praised McCann’s ability to portray women characters. [. . . .] We discussed this in relation to the earlier chapter with Lily as a minor character in Ireland, but what does her own story in America add to McCann’s statement?

Not only have women “been denied access to the grand narrative of historical events,” according McCann, but they have also been denied representation in stories of their own fight for equality. In *TransAtlantic* McCann tells the story of Frederick Douglass’s fight to abolish slavery while also working to support the American women’s suffrage movement. In McCann’s story, Douglass performs a similar function while in Ireland on an anti-slavery speaking tour when, by his inspiring example, he empowers Lily to free herself from poverty and servitude. Douglass’s presence in Dublin gives Lily a peek at the possibilities beyond her narrow Irish world. Travelling to America is the only way she has of accessing these possibilities. After the death of Lily’s husband, McCann opens the way for her to succeed independently of him. Furthermore, McCann writes Lily’s sons out of the story rather quickly, leaving only Lily herself and her daughter Emily to continue the story. The predictable path would have been to follow the sons, but McCann instead chooses to keep the attention on both women. Most of the male characters appear already formed and accomplished in their field, but with the female characters, McCann delves into their formation, making the narrative a very distinctly female one, adding to their power not only as characters in a work of fiction, but also in the real historical narrative of the times depicted. (230 words)