

Distinguished Honors Program Critical Book Review

As part of the requirements for the Distinguished Honors Program, a candidate must read 8 of the 17 books on the official reading list and present a critical book review of each work in the format of his or her choice from the following options: iMovie, iBook, Keynote presentation. *ONE oral presentation before the Distinguished Honors Committee will be required before graduation.

The review should have two goals: first, to inform the reader about the content of the book, and second, to provide an evaluation that gives your judgment of the book's quality.

Your introduction should include an overview of the book that both, incorporates an encapsulated summary and a sense of your general judgment. This is equivalent to a thesis statement.

Do NOT spend more than one-third or so of the presentation summarizing the book. The summary should consist of a discussion and highlights of the major arguments, features, trends, concepts, themes, ideas, and characteristics of the book. While you may use direct quotes from the book (make sure you always give the page number), such quotes should never be the bulk of the summary. You must describe and explain the material **IN YOUR OWN WORDS**.

Throughout your summary you are to provide a critique of the book. A critique consists of thoughts, responses, and reactions. It is not necessarily negative. Nor do you need to know as much about the subject as the author. Regardless of how negative or positive your critique is, you need to be able to justify and support your position.

Here are questions that you must address as part of your critique:

1. What is your overall opinion of the book? On what basis has this opinion been formulated? That is, tell the reader what you think and how you arrived at this judgment. What did you expect to learn when you picked up the book? To what extent – and how effectively – were your expectations met? Did you wish you could talk back to the author? Expand upon and explain your reactions.
2. What conclusions does the author reach and how clearly are they stated? In other words, how effectively does the book come together?
3. Are you able to detect any underlying philosophy held by the author? Explain with textual evidence.

(See attached rubrics.)

The questions are derived from Robert Blackey, "Words to the Whys: Crafting Critical Book Reviews," *The History Teacher*, 27.2 (Feb. 1994): 159-66. S. Zabin, 2-6-03

<https://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/history/resources/study/criticalbookreview/>