

Extra Credit Assignment Guidelines

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To earn some extra credit, you can visit <http://palmer.wellesley.edu/~ivolic/pages/reading.html> and look through the readings linked to this page. All the short stories, excerpts from books, and other writings that appear there contain a mathematical component (or at least I think so) whose presence and relevance might range from completely obvious to deep and subtle. Your assignment is to choose one or more of these readings that you find particularly interesting and write an essay on it.

What's this all about: You have most likely spent many years learning math without ever having been told that this subject has regularly found its way into art and literature throughout history, where it has left a unique and lasting mark. The goal of the assignment is for you to discover this for yourselves (and have fun doing it).

Amount of extra credit: You could receive *up to 5 points* on your final after the curve (so this is 5 points out of 100).

How to maximize the extra credit: If you write a generic essay devoid of passion or insight, you will likely not receive very much credit. Unless you go “wow” after you read one of the writings, you probably shouldn't write about it. But if you do, think about why it moved you, and then think about what the math in the story had to do with it. After this has become clear to you, write it down for me. That's it. It's also fine to write an essay comparing two or more stories. You can even write about how much you detested a piece of writing or how angry it made you. Anything goes, as long as I see that you've put some thought into the art and math of the writings. Keep in mind that you shouldn't go through with this assignment just to get a few extra points on your final. The more fun you have with this assignment and the more these readings grab you, the more it'll show in your writing and the more credit you'll receive.

Due date: The assignment is due by 5 pm on the last day of finals. If I am not in my office to receive your paper from you, you should leave it in the box on my door.

Format: Your essay should be about 4-5 pages long. Keep in mind that this is an approximate guideline; I don't care if it's shorter or longer than 5 pages, and I certainly don't care if it's double-spaced. It just needs to be typed, proofread, and spellchecked. As long as you tell me what you want to tell me, I'm fine with any length. As you think about, plan, and eventually write the paper, keep in mind that this is not an English exercise, but an optional assignment you're supposed to have a good time with. I care mostly about content, and not format. I actually don't even care if you turn in an essay; if you find that a cartoon, a poem, or a painting is a better way for you to express what you felt when reading some of the writings, then by all means go with it (but you should have a good reason why you are choosing a different format).

Timeline/Warning: Ideally, you should look through the readings half way through the semester and find one or more that you really like and feel like you could have something to say about. You should then talk to me as soon as possible to let me know what you've come up with. If you'd like, I can help you formulate the central theme of what is to become your essay or clear up any confusion you might have about some of the more mystifying parts of some of the readings. You should then get to writing, and have the essay finished by the time you have to start studying for the finals. The warning is: *Do not start late!* Trying to write this essay at the last minute takes away from valuable study time, and produces mediocre essays that do not earn very much credit. Your time is much better spent studying during the reading period and you are much more likely to earn more points on the final by studying rather than by working on this essay.

Please let me know if you have any questions and have fun!