

## ENGL 207 Assignment 3 Grading Grid:

5 = Excellent, 4 = Good, 3 = Average, 2 = Lacking, 1 = Very Poor

CRITERIA:	5	4	3	2	1	COMMENTS:
Intro Strategy: use introductory material and relevant concepts to set the stage for both texts						
Arguable, Focused Thesis capturing relationship between primary and secondary text: map and mirror						
Secondary Source Set-up: first body paragraph(s) establish secondary source as frame for reading primary						
Evidence & Analysis: think of each moment you point to in the text as a paragraph-worthy piece of evidence and analysis						
Structure, Org. & Argument Arc: build the argumentative story linking evidence-paragraphs effectively via strong transitions						
Conclusion: a place for revelation not repetition						
Quote Integration: set up within narrative; quote; signal phrase; follow through.						
Style & Voice: find your writing voice and tone						
Concision & Clarity: less is sometimes more, and clarity wins the day over abstraction						
Grammar & Mechanics: you know, commas and semicolons and page numbers and stuff						

Additional Comments and Grade:

NAME

English 207

4/19/17

Contextual Analysis

### Howl and "Self-Reliance": Stickin' it to The Man

American writers throughout history have captured the struggle between the freedom of American people and the constraints of government and the economy. Beginning with early explorers, Columbus wrote himself into the New World as if there were no other society in his way. Slave narratives and tales of immigrants capture the fight for civil rights. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote "Self-Reliance" during an early era of reform in America. Like so many Americans, he was a nonconformist. He claimed that the only way to create progress is to do it alone. With a wealthy and educated background, he was able to support himself without conforming to society's rules. Ginsberg was part of the "beat" generation of nonconformist writers in the 1950s. *Howl* is directed at his friend in the mental hospital, Carl Solomon. It is a cry for all of the individuals in his generation who are put away by society. Looking at *Howl* in relation to "Self-Reliance," Emerson's view of society shapes the world that Ginsberg's generation is stuck in, but they do not have the same solution to break away. *Howl* is a cry to stand together in madness when it is not possible to oppose society alone.

'Self-Reliance' is self explanatory in the name and in nature. Emerson's theory is that independence through breaking away from society provides the best

way to live life. To Emerson, “society is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is...to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater,” creating a world where people survive but do not excel (558). Individuals are the only ones that can succeed and make changes in the world. Emerson will not take part in anything that he does not believe in. It is more important for him to find his own virtue with the resources that he has than to share with those who are not as fortunate. Conforming to society would be losing his identity. Emerson’s philosophy is that, “nothing can bring you peace but yourself,” stripping away all dependence on others and society (573). All of his depictions of society are evil or restraining to the individual.

Similarly, Ginsberg ridicules society for driving people to madness. Different from Emerson, he conveys this message by providing brutal and honest stories of the poor condition of people. Contrasting Emerson’s easy solution to a better life, *Howl* calls attention to the tangled problems in the world. *Howl* opens with the famous first lines: “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical/naked,” immediately capturing the tension between society and the individual (1-2). These are the people that do not fit into society and find themselves starving and struggling. Ginsberg sets up the drama that is the poverty, drugs, and rebellion hidden in the streets. His world is full of nonconformists who find themselves, “destroyed by madness,” throwing them into struggle. The passive voice in this sentence implies that it was society that drove these people mad. Ginsberg writes to Carl, stuck in a madhouse, because someone may have believed him to be mad and giving him no escape.

Ginsberg's metaphor of Moloch, the evil fire god, as society aligns with Emerson's feelings against the government. The institution that keeps people locked away is everywhere; Moloch is the institution and society is the force that puts people there. Moloch is made of "robot apartments! Invisible suburbs! Skeleton treasuries! Blind/ capitol! Demonic industries! Spectral nations! Invincible madhouses!," and everything that makes up the modern capitalist world (Ginsberg 92). Ginsberg sees capitalism as evil, fueling his anger with American society. Most of the outcasts in the first section are in horrible condition because of poverty, explaining why Moloch is made up of things like "skeleton treasuries," and "demonic industries," that are all money-driven. He even states that Moloch's, "mind is pure machinery," and "blood is running money," depicting a mechanical world with no sense of humanity (Ginsberg 86). Even Emerson's "Self-Reliance" fits into the Ginsberg's negative depiction of society: focused on improving himself, and not willing to give his money to those who do not affect him. Ginsberg, Carl, and the rest of his generation cannot use self-reliance without the monetary means to move up within society.

In spite of his discouraging condition, Ginsberg tries to find hope through the unity of mad men. *Howl's* last section provides comfort in the only way he can to his friend Carl Solomon in Rockland, the psychiatric hospital. He repeats, "I'm with you in Rockland," to make the sad circumstances sound a little better. He emphasizes, "Where there are twentyfive thousand mad comrades all together singing the final stanzas of the Internationale," coming together as a band of outcasts (124-125). There is no longer any sense of self-reliance, only the uniform rebellion against

society. All of his “mad comrades” can relate because it was it was society that put them away for their nonconformist ideals. However, they cannot do anything to help themselves but keep their spirits high because they are trapped.

Ginsberg repeats, “I’m with you in Rockland,” his chant that is possibly the only thing keeping his friend sane. However, he also sees the side of no hope, “where you scream in a straightjacket that you’re losing the game of the actual pingpong of the abyss” (114-115). The image of a straight jacket mixes the literal confinement in the hospital and the figurative straightjacket from society. As mentioned before, Ginsberg sees society as full of “invisible madhouses” that restrain people from progress. In Emerson’s “Self-Reliance,” he proclaims the same idea about society being stagnant. Both authors spread their nonconformist ideas through writing, but Ginsberg faces more obstacles. The phrase “pingpong of the abyss” demonstrates that there is no end to this game that Ginsberg fights. Ping Pong is not a team sport, emphasizing that fighting alone cannot make as much of an impact as joining together. Ginsberg mixes the desperate images with his impactful, “I’m with you.”

Twenty five thousand voices howling together are much louder than one. They are much more apt to make an impact. While some may be able to oppose the government on their own, “Self-Reliance” does not provide a solution that is guaranteed to make an impact. Ginsberg argues to stand against society with the eclectic group of nonconformist citizens. Whether they are mad, or just classified that way does not make a difference. Uniform madness unifies these men while keeping their individuality.

Emerson celebrates his own individuality through "Self-Reliance," and expects every other person to be able to get to where he is. *Howl* has a clear vision of the problems with society and calls out for a coming together to protest them. Many Americans claim to be nonconformist in some way through forms of protest. The country was built out of rebellion and the spirit continues. However, Ginsberg points out that even nonconformity takes some unity to succeed.

## Works Cited

Belasco, Susan , and Linck Johnson, eds. *The Bedford Anthology of American Literature*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. N.p.: Bedgord/St. Martin's, 2014. Print.