Your assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to ask, and answer, a deep question about the Civil War. This question can be about anything directly concerning the war. Want to know about hospitals? How about the weapons? Or do you want to know how soldiers kept in contact with their families? What the heck was Walt Whitman doing in D.C? What were the acts of resistance during the war? What was the public perception of prominent generals? How did newspapers cover the war? What about the poor on each side? What about freedmen? Slaves? Women? This is your chance to learn about any topic of your choosing! **You do not need to have an answer to your question right now to ask it.**

Requirements:

* Must be in some way related to the Civil War.
* Minimum of five paragraphs. Longer is fine, shorter is not.
  + Each paragraph should be build upon the thesis
* I will be showing the *Valley of the Shadow* archive to class to help you find primary sources to bolster your arguments. **You must use *at least* three different primary sources for this essay**. These do not need to come from the *Valley of the Shadow* archive, but it is a fantastic resource containing a trove of journals, letters, newspaper clippings, bureaucratic forms, photos, and some interactive maps.
* Must contain an answer to your question
  + Hint: That’s your thesis

We will have at least four days in class, with COWS to help you research. **Do not expect to finish your essay in entirety from these days, but they should be productive enough that you only need corral a few loose ends at home.**

Here’s a general layout of what you should expect to accomplish each day. Don’t panic if you don’t get that done each day. In fact, its just best if you never panic.

* Day one
  + Explore *Valley of the Shadow* archive
  + Decide on topic
    - Write a one-sentence question that you want to answer. **Turn in question when done. This is due next class.**
    - What question are you trying to answer? What do you want to know? What have you not learned that you want to know more about?
* Day two
  + Explore topic
  + Gain framework of essay
    - Don’t need a thesis yet, but rather topics to explore
    - Sometimes a good strategy for this is to list the topics related to your question in a cloud or other framework so that you can begin to see the structure of your essay materialize.
* Day three
  + Formulate thesis/argument
    - At this point, you should have slogged through enough primary and secondary readings to have some sort of answer to your research question.
    - Once you feel like you have a concrete answer to your question, begin structuring your essay. **Your first decision is to decide what your body paragraphs will cover. They should directly support your thesis in some manner.** For example, if your essay is discussing soldiers letters home, you might compare officers and enlisted men, what letters looked like at different points in the war, black vs. white soldiers, Northern and Southern letters, letters from home. What did soldiers have to say about the causes of the war? What did they believe they were fighting for? Who were they writing? Mothers? Friends? Brothers? Romantic partners? **Great essays have a structure of direct comparison throughout.**
* Day four
  + Begin writing/formation of essay forming.
  + At this point you’ve found all your primary and secondary sources, you have an answer to your question and you’ve turned that into a thesis, and you’ve generated enough thought and content that you know what the structure of your essay will be and **you’re ready to write!** **Make sure you refer to the rubric below to ensure you are writing an essay that fulfills the rubric.**
* **Alternative assignments negotiable**
  + If you want to do an alternative assignment **you *must* discuss it with me** by the start of our second day with COWS.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Civil War Essay Rubric | |
| Marks | Level Descriptor |
| 36-40 |  Thesis is clearly focused and directly answers question, showing a high degree of awareness of the question’s demands. Where appropriate, answers may challenge the question successfully.   In-depth and accurate historical knowledge is applied consistently and convincingly to support critical commentary. In addition, answers may reveal a high level of conceptual ability.   Events are placed in their historical context. There is a clear understanding of historical processes and (where appropriate) comparison and contrast.   There may be evaluation of different approaches to, and interpretations of, historical issues and events. This evaluation is integrated effectively into the answer to support and supplement the argument. In addition, an awareness of the reasons for circumstances that produced differing and often conflicting historical interpretations is present.   Essay is well structured and clearly expressed, using evidence to support relevant, balanced and well-focused arguments. Synthesis is highly developed, with knowledge and critical commentary fully and effectively integrated. |
| 32-35 |  Thesis is clearly focused and responds to question. Shows a high degree of awareness of the demands of the question. Answers may challenge the question successfully.   In-depth and accurate historical knowledge is applied consistently and convincingly to support critical commentary.   Events are placed in their historical context. There is a clear understanding of historical processes and (where appropriate) comparison and contrast.   There may be evaluation of different approaches to, and interpretations of, historical issues and events. This evaluation is integrated effectively into the answer to support and supplement the argument.   Answers are well structured and clearly expressed, using evidence to support relevant, balanced and focused arguments. Synthesis is well developed, with knowledge and critical commentary fully and effectively integrated. |
| 28-31 |  Thesis is clearly focused and responds to the demands of the question.   Relevant in-depth historical knowledge is applied as evidence. Critical commentary indicates some in-depth understanding but is not consistent throughout.   Events are placed in their historical context. There is a sound understanding of historical processes and (where appropriate) comparison and contrast.   There may be awareness and some evaluation of different approaches to, and interpretations of, historical issues and events. These are used to supplement, in a relevant manner, the arguments presented.   Answers are well structured using evidence to support relevant historical arguments. Synthesis is present but not always effectively or consistently integrated. |
| 24-27 |  Thesis indicates that the demands of the question are understood and addressed, though not all implications are considered.   Relevant, largely accurate in-depth historical knowledge is present and applied as evidence. Critical commentary indicates some understanding.   Events are generally placed in their historical context. There is an understanding of historical processes and (where appropriate) comparison and contrast.   There may be some awareness of different approaches to, and interpretations of, historical issues and events. However, responses that mainly summarize the views of historians and use these as a substitute for, rather than a supplement to, the deployment of relevant historical knowledge cannot reach the top of this band.   There is a clear attempt to structure answers chronologically or thematically. Synthesis is present but underdeveloped. |
| 20-23 |  Thesis indicates that the demands of the question are generally understood.   Relevant in-depth historical knowledge is present but is unevenly applied throughout. Answers are presented in a narrative or descriptive manner.  Alternatively, there is a limited argument that requires further substantiation. Some attempt at analysis may be present but limited.   There has been some attempt to place events in their historical context and to show an understanding of historical processes and (where appropriate) comparison and contrast.   There is evidence of an attempt to follow a structured approach, either chronological or thematic. |
| 16-19 |  Thesis indicates some understanding of the question.   There is some relevant, accurate historical knowledge but detail is insufficient.   Understanding of historical processes and (where appropriate) comparison and contrast may be present but underdeveloped.   While there may be a recognizable essay structure; the question is only partially addressed. |
| 12-15 |  Thesis reveals little understanding of the question.   While historical details are present, they are largely inaccurate and/or of marginal relevance to the task.   There is little or no understanding of historical context or historical processes.   While there may be a recognizable essay structure, answers consist of little more than poorly substantiated assertions. |
| 7-11 |  Answers lack understanding of the demands of the question or accurate/relevant historical knowledge.   Answers show little or no evidence of structure and consist of little more than unsupported generalizations |
| 0-6 |  The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors above. |