

SHORT ESSAY TOPIC

We have looked at a wide range of biographies so far this quarter. These have taken different forms and have described very different people. At the same time, each of the ancient biographers that we have read wrote their biographies for a purpose. They are making an argument about the character of an individual. They use his words and his actions to convince readers that he had a particular type of character or possessed a particular sort of virtue. Biographies also respond to rumors or accusations that suggest that their subject was a less virtuous character than the biographer has argued.

In each of your essays this quarter, I want you to spend some time with one of these texts. Look at the individual who is being portrayed, the manner in which his life is described, the counter examples that others may have raised, and how the biographer tries to dismiss these counter examples. When you have done this, write a 5-page essay analyzing the argument in the text. You should consider what the author wants you to believe about his subject, how he uses specific stories to make you believe this, and how he treats counter examples that opponents might use to discredit his argument. Your essay should use this analysis to argue that the biographer's efforts either are or are not convincing.

Among the questions that you may want to address are the following:

- What was the author trying to get his readers to believe?
- How do stories and memorable anecdotes encourage the reader accept his view of his subject?
- What objections could someone raise that might make his text less persuasive?
- How does he attempt to neutralize these objections?

For Essay #1 you must write on one text. This can be either Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch's *Life of Caesar*, Suetonius's *Augustus*, Suetonius's *Caligula*, or Suetonius's *Domitian*.

For Essay #2, you must write on one text. This can be either Lucian's *Alexander the Oracle Monger*, *Galatians*, or *Matthew*.

For Essay #3, you must write on one text. This can be either Eusebius's *Life of Constantine* or Augustine's *Confessions*.