Comparative Civilizations & Religions 12

Book Review Assignment

**Intro:**

Books, great books, are essential foundations to a great education – of literature, philosophy, history, science, arts and culture. It seems, however, ours is a society less well-read than previous generations.

You are required to read a ‘great book’ from the list provided (or of your choosing, provided you clear it with your instructor beforehand). This book should integrate some discussion of history, civilizations, religion, philosophy, and/or cultural studies of some kind – for which this course is based. After reading the book, you are to write a book review and present an argument as to why your peers should read it.

**Book Review Guidelines**

1. Read the book carefully, taking notes on material that you think may be relevant or quotable and on your impressions of the author’s ideas and arguments.
2. Determine the author’s principal argument, the chief themes of the text, the kinds of evidence used, and the way in which the author uses them.

**Organizing the Review**

Book reviews will be approximately 1500 words (roughly 4 pages in length). An essential feature of a good book review is the reviewer’s ability to write concisely so that a comprehensive evaluation of the book can be obtained from a brief reading. So, ***do not write more, write more concisely*** – find creative ways to communicate your critical evaluation of the book in a short essay.

1. All reviews begin with bibliographic information: the author’s name, the book’s full title, place of publication, publisher, edition, date, pagination, and cost, if known.
2. In no more than two paragraphs, introduce the book. Give your initial appraisal of the work, including your key observation on the text (your thesis). Do not being with a flat statement such as ‘This book is interesting.’ Begin with an anecdote, a challenging quotation, or a key observation.
3. Follow with a descriptive analysis and evaluation of the text. You may either treat these topics separately, first describing the books contents, the author’s argument, presentation, and evidence, and then offering your own evaluation, or you may weave the together. In either case,
   1. explain the author’s purpose in writing the book and whether or not the author has succeeded.
   2. describe arguments and themes of the book, give your appraisal of their validity, effectiveness.
   3. describe the sources and evidence the author uses to prove his case, and evaluate them.
   4. comment on the author’s organization and writing style.
   5. it’s not a bad idea to read some book reviews (NY Times Book Review?) to familiarize yourself with the format for writing a book review (also, see what others have said about your book…).
4. Conclude with more general remarks about the text and the ideas presented in it. If you have not already done so, indicate whether you feel the book is worthwhile, and for what audience. Is the book outstanding? Will it make a long lasting contribution to its field, or is it less satisfactory?

**Ancient Literature …..the list is much more extensive, and the content esoteric….**

Meditations by Marcus Aurelius

The Epic of Gilgamesh

The Odyssey by Homer

The Illiad by Homer

The Art of War by Sun-Tzu

The Histories of Herodotus by Herodotus

The History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides

**Societies and Civilizations, Histories & Transdisciplinary Offerings …..readable hypotheses?**

No God, but God: The Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam by Reza Aslan

Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age by Robert N. Bellah The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World by Wade Davis

Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies by Jared Diamond

Civilization: The West and the Rest – Niall Ferguson

The Silk Roads: A New History of the World – Peter Frankopan

The Creative Spark: How Imagination Made Humans Exceptional by Augustin Fuentes

Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking by Malcom Gladwell

A Brief History of Time by Stephen Hawing

Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy

Sapiens: A Brief History of Human Kind – Yuval N. Harari

The Weirdest People in the World by Joseph Henrich

Salt: A World History – Mark Kurlansky

Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging by Sebastien Junger

Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations – Dave Montgomery

The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s Eye-View of the World by Michael Pollan

A Short History of Progress – Ronald Wright

**Philosophical Undertakings …….again, your findings might prove more fruitful….**

The Human Condition by Hannah Arendt

The Plague by Albert Camus

The Foucalt Reader by Michel Foucault

The Female Eunuch by Germaine Greer

Siddartha by Herman Hesse

The Tao of Pooh by Benjamin Hoffman

The Shock Doctrine by Naomi Klein

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values by Robert M. Pirsig

The Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie

Orientalism by Edward Said

The Big Questions: A Short Introduction to Philosophy by Robert C. Solomon

Thus list is a beginning…..I would encourage you to consider this list, but also talk to othrs – your parents, your peers about great books – on the individual and society, civilizations, philosophy religion, gender roles, human psychology and evolution, art & culture, anthropology, archeology and modernity.

**A book must be brought to class on Tuesday, October 13th – or at least have it decided what book…..**