



Oxbridge HON 251: Prompts for writing response #1

Booth on education: “What’s Supposed to Be Going on Here?”

Instructions:

1. Choose 2-4 prompts for your essay.
2. Format: 2 pages; 12-point type; double line-spaced
3. Deadline: Tuesday, Sept. 11

Here are the prompts:

In what sense does Wayne C. Booth use the term “liberate” in discussing the intention of a liberal education? What kind of learning does he believe must take place to liberate the mind? He promises that you can learn how to free yourselves? How?

What are the four “R”s that Booth claims are the essential “arts” of a liberal arts education? Why does he believe they are so important?

How does Malcolm X’s story help Booth’s claim that learning to recover other people’s ideas is the first step toward intellectual freedom? How are you “attacking your ignorance?”

Why does Booth believe that is impossible to master the ability to learn what other men have known or believed (“Recovery”)? What difficulties hinder anyone who sets about trying to recover that knowledge?

Booth delivered his address in 1967, at the height of the Vietnam War and during a pre-Internet, pre-social media age. What do you think Booth would say about the technology today in terms of education. What is the difference between being well educated and being filled with information?

“If it’s sh—already, I don’t have to digest it.” Do you agree with Booth’s metaphor to illustrate our tendency to reject others’ ideas without considering them? Do we try to “reduce other folks’ meanings to nonsense we can reject?”

Booth illustrates his claim that “the complacent, uneducated mind does not worry when ideas do not fit” with references to incidents familiar and relevant to college freshmen in 1967. What are some more contemporary examples? Can you think of times when you have said or done things that betray contradictory ideas?

How well would you do with Booth’s challenge to write a summary of his speech that actually reconstructs his meaning?

Booth, a college professor, says college might not be the best place to learn how to recover and understand other people's meanings. Write about a personal, non-school experience that taught you something you could not have learned in school or that helped you to understand or make sense of something you had learned in school.