

English 123C, S. Pacific Lit
Fall 2009, Second Essay Topics
Essay Due: Thursday, November 19

Your second essay assignment deals with the two New Zealand novels in the course: *The Bone People*, by Keri Hulme, and *The Whale Rider*, by Witi Ihimaera. Your essay should be about 1500 words, or six pages typed and double-spaced, and submitted online at Blackboard, as well as at Turnitin.com. If you had trouble with Blackboard on the first essay, you can submit this one as an email attachment to engl123c@gmail.com. Remember, in either case, to begin the file name with your last name, and to use either Word or RTF format.

Below, you will find some topics for the essay, but remember that these are only *suggested* topics: you are encouraged to work on a topic of your own devising, providing (1) it deals with both works and (2) you clear it with me beforehand. Even as suggested topics, the following are probably too general to be covered fully in a short essay. Therefore, focus on a limited aspect of your topic, and construct a developed thesis explaining why that aspect of it is significant; your thesis should contain a specific point to be proved, and your paragraphs should all work toward proving it. To support your readings and to make your analysis clear, you will need to quote short passages from the text, integrated into your own prose, which relate to the central scenes or themes of your essay; please cite the page number for each quotation or group of quotations parenthetically at the end of the phrase or sentence, and avoid using long, indented quotations. Using shorter quotations makes it easier to establish what your reading of each is, through discussion and analysis, as well as to employ that reading in supporting the thesis of your essay. Revise for content and to strengthen your thesis and transitions; proofread thoroughly, even if you use a spell-checker first; and follow MLA style, including a Works Cited list at the end, even if you have only used novels in their class editions.

1. **Maori culture as a literary device.** Behind the conflicts and problems of the characters in both novels, there is an issue of cultural heritage—a past that needs to be honored and understood, a tradition currently buried and lost that needs to be recovered and restored. Discuss the way cultural traditions are used in the two novels, how that heritage helps to determine the success or failure of the main characters, and whether you think the authors have presented or manipulated that heritage so that it successfully informs the novel without excluding non-Maori readers like yourself.
2. **Family and nation.** In a sense, *The Whale Rider* presents us with a very traditional extended family structure, while Joe, Kerewin, and Simon in *The Bone People* are a “new-age” family (in which none of the members is related to each other). And, while our Australian writers seemed concerned with a more general sense of literary nationalism, Ihimaera and Hulme tend to connect their sense of nation very clearly to the family, traditional or otherwise. Not surprisingly, the families in the novels encounter problems as different as they are—and as different as final resolutions of their respective works. Compare the use of family in these two novels, as the central value of each work, though not necessarily of each character.
3. **The anti-Bildungsroman.** One of the themes you may have considered, when dealing with the three Australian fictions on the first essay, was the coming of age of a main character. Children are also central figures in *The Bone People* and *The Whale Rider*, but neither grows to maturity by the end of the novel. In fact, it is important in both works, thematically and otherwise, that the children remain children throughout. Discuss the role children play in both novels, and what their special contribution as children is to the themes of each work, especially as expressed in its ending.
4. **Magical mystery tours.** Both *The Whale Rider* and *The Bone People* employ the non-rational, including religion, mythology, mysticism, magic, parapsychology, fortune-telling, and other systems of belief that conceive of or describe the world in ways beyond the limits of science and logic. In part, this is to enhance the Maori themes of each work. But the non-rational extends well beyond Maori traditions, especially in *The Bone People*, where both Simon and Kerewin (with their auras, futureprobes, sun eaters, and other devices and powers) seem to be able to tap into another side of existence. Discuss the reasons why contemporary novels would use the non-rational so extensively in our high-tech world, and what it adds in particular to both these fictions.