

Sample Reflective Statements:

Work in Translation: Reflective Statement (only 175 words; preview)

Madame Bovary

By Gustave Flaubert

The interactive oral effectively broadened my overall understanding of the cultural and contextual considerations of Flaubert's Madame Bovary. Through various examples discussed during the oral interaction, I was able to achieve a better understanding on how some cultural aspects portrayed by Flaubert are easy to understand, despite the major differences in today's social interactions in society from that of the mid 1800s. For one, it was easy to understand Emma's outright desire for the greater good. Flaubert's explicit portrayal of her extremely materialistic nature can be interpreted as her want towards a better life, with fancier items to show her higher social class. This is still accurate in most people's lives, wanting to accumulate on 'better' tangible items to show their social status, widely shown through people's unnecessary greed for items and money. In a way, the similarity between today's idealistic views and Emma's desires are clear; however her view of the ideal life was shown with a high degree of romanticism expressed by Flaubert.

Reflective Statement on "A Chronicle of a Death Foretold"

I was really glad that the second interactive oral on our translated works went further into the issue of honor in Latin American cultures. It was useful that John pointed out, first, that "Latin American Culture" is in itself an over-simplified label and that the Colombian context of this novel is not that of the Argentinean culture of Borges. Honor is one thing in a Colombian village, but the honor among the gauchos of Borges is not quite the same.

Honor in this Colombian novel became, in this presentation, much more clearly connected for me to the terms "marianismo" and "machismo" that we heard a little about in the first presentation on "Chronicle." It's worth seeing that while Angela's mother is deeply connected to family honor, to the older ideas of women being like the virgin Mary, and the need for everyone in the family to protect the honor of their women, Angela doesn't really buy into those ideas completely. She and her friends know ways to fake virginity, which itself says something about how much they are impacted by the previous generation's ideas. They don't seem particularly worried about honor even though that's what leads to Santiago's death.

And I found it useful to see that even the "machismo" (supposedly) of Angela's brothers was really undermined by the author, (is this irony?) even though the ending was a bloody macho event in defense of honor. I can see that all these terms can be used a bit too loosely, as Melody showed with her three statements including the terms, all of which could be questioned and misinterpreted. I'm seeing I need to be careful about using these terms if I use them at all when I write my essay.

(Word count: 289)

Title question: How was your understanding of the cultural and contextual considerations of "Perfume" developed through the interactive oral?

My exploration of the novel, *Perfume, a Bildungsroman*, was reminiscent of the form itself, as my experience led to personal and cultural development, a phenomenon I have experienced throughout the IB course as I explore and am exposed to a variety of literary texts, themes, and ideas.

As Grenouille's journey across France unfolds and existentialist values emerge, readers are encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs. Independent of societal expectations and pressures, Grenouille determines his own fate, suggesting man is responsible for his own destiny and that there is no higher power. Although existentialism contradicts my beliefs, I have grown to respect Grenouille, as his unfaltering dedication to his doctrine initially inhibits yet eventually leads to fulfillment.

As Süskind also satirizes Christianity, the text led me to evaluate my religious beliefs. At the end of the novel, for example, Grenouille, a wretched murderer, douses himself in the distilled essence of innocent virgins. Grenouille then becomes so attractive that the social pariahs inhabiting the *Cimetière des Innocents* devour him. Through this image, Süskind draws direct parallels to the Eucharist - the Christian ceremony of eating the "body" and drinking the "blood" of Christ - causing me to question the nature of who or what my religion worships.

Finally, during the discussion about eighteenth century Paris, I examined my own situation as an expatriate living in Nairobi. I was able to parallel the irony Süskind highlights concerning the fragility of Parisian aristocratic society with the privileged existence I lead. Süskind implies such stark social disparity in a society is immoral, that the circumstance of which I am a part is full of blatant hypocrisies. Because Süskind focuses the novel on the underbelly of society instead of the aristocracy and uses literary realism to reject romantic subjectivism and offer more truthful depictions, my idealistic and warped views of eighteenth century Paris, romanticized throughout art and popular culture, and Nairobi were shed.

Ultimately, Süskind's use of vivid olfactory descriptions brought the times and places within the novel to life. Because of this unique experience, "seeing" scenes through my nose, I was encouraged to reconsider the power of smell. As Süskind highlights the superficiality of eighteenth century Parisians, obsessed with masking or changing their odor through perfume, I questioned whether modern-day society, with its plastic surgery, airbrushed models and makeup, is similarly artificial, reinforcing one resounding message: that who we are is not good enough.

Words: 400