

*Sound and the Fury* Essay Prompts 2014-2015

You have three options: Choose one of the prompts below; merge pieces of multiple prompts below; or, clear a thesis of your choice with me.

Your paper will be 5-8 pages in length, with at least four sources outside of the novel itself. Two of your total sources must be taken from the criticism posted in our course website.

1. The title of the novel comes from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and is part of this monologue:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow/ Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,/ To the last syllable of recorded time/ And all our yesterdays have lighted fools/ The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!/ Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/ And then is heard no more. It is a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing. (5.5)

Why does Faulkner choose his title from this monologue? What thematic elements of *Macbeth* does Faulkner use or compare to his personal *Sound and the Fury*? What else about the novel's title is significant to the reader's complete understanding of the text? To what degree is the title positive or negative to the novel? Who is the idiot?

2. Who is the main character of this novel? You can argue successfully for Dilsey, Caddy, Jason, Quentin, or Faulkner's Voice, I think. You can argue for or against elements of typical main characters, which means you have to define what a main character does in a novel. Of course you will not use a dictionary definition.
3. Most critics argue that Faulkner employs stream-of-consciousness in this novel. I argue that Faulkner's stream-of-consciousness is a unique variation of Virginia Woolf's purer form of stream-of-consciousness. Take a position on this argument, and argue for the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of this technique in this novel. Which character's thoughts are best displayed through this technique? Does Faulkner miss opportunities to make this technique more effective?
4. Argue about the presentation of the story. The story is told in a fragmented, disjointed way by Benjy, but gets increasingly more clear and thematic with each narrator? Is this true? Is this effective? Could the story be told in a better sequence or style and not lose its charm, Modernist characteristics, and/or Faulknerian style?
5. What are the Christian elements of this novel, and are they important? Is Benjy a Christ Figure? Is Jason a Satanic Figure? Why or what is the importance of setting this story on Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday? Is there any significance—a theme of rebirth, for instance—to this setting? What grander design or metaphor does Faulkner employ to make this story more than a Southern Gothic narrative? Are the four books in this novel similar to The Gospels? (the first four books of the New Testament).
6. Is this novel misogynistic? How are sexuality, gender, and relationships dealt with effectively and/or ineffectively in *The Sound and the Fury*?

7. Caddy and the image of her in her dirty underwear is a central image in this novel, and seems to drive the lives of all three brothers. Faulkner claims that he wrote the story to explain that exact image. He writes that Caddy was, “the sister which I did not have and the daughter which I was to lose,” so the reader knows he thinks Caddy is very special. I argue that Caddy fills many roles, including being maternal, promiscuous, erotic and overbearing. But the only way I know this is through the narratives told by her unreliable brothers. Is Caddy a sympathetic character? What burden for the family’s downfall should Caddy bear? Why doesn’t Faulkner let Caddy speak in the novel? While Caddy is presented as maternal and promiscuous, she is also ill-defined or maybe not able to be known to the reader, given that she can only be glimpsed in the perhaps unreliable narrations of her brothers. Does Caddy's fall cause the fall of the family, or is she merely the victim of horrific parenting?
8. When Benjy was 5, his family changed his name from Maury, which was also his uncle’s name. Why did they change it? Is the reason given by the family was not the only reason? What commentary concerning the Compsons does this evoke? Benjy “senses” Caddy’s (untimely) sexual maturation. What does Benjy do to inhibit or slow those changes? What response do we see in Caddy? Discuss the ways in which the Compsons and the Gibsons care for Benjy. Do Benjy’s caretakers function as a (normal) extended family, or does Benjy bring them even closer together? How does Dilsey treat and view Benjy? In what ways is Benjy a foil for the other characters?
9. What is Quentin’s problem with looking at clocks and watches? What is the impact and power of time in this novel? Why does Quentin commit suicide, and why does he choose water as his method? Why does Faulkner choose to have Quentin narrate his own section, even though he has been dead for nearly eighteen years? Why does Quentin obsess about Caddy’s (loss of) virginity? Why does he obsess over his family’s loss of honor, starting with the end of the Civil War up to his life? Why does Quentin falsely confess that he and Caddy committed incest when talking to his father? Why did Mr. Compson respond the way he did to Quentin? What is the significance of Quentin’s incident with the Italian girl? What does Quentin think of (Southern) masculinity and honor? What does Quentin think about the Black characters, and how does he interrelate to them? Is Quentin a “Southern Gentleman”?
10. Who suffers because of Jason’s anger? Is Jason a good head-of- household, considering the status of the Compson family prior to his leadership? Jason wants more than anything to portray normality Does he succeed in preserving the appearance of normality that is so important to him? Why did Jason prevent Caddy from seeing Miss Quentin? Mrs. Compson argues that Jason is more like her side of the family than he is like the Compsons, and she obviously favors him over his siblings. Does this benefit or hurt Jason (that he is more Bascomb than Compson)?
11. Faulkner creates the Compson family as emblematic of a defeated South. Is there any hope for a rebirth or rise of the Compson family, or is this novel a Southern “Shakespearean” tragedy? How is the Compson family affected by Southern culture and traditions? Is the application of these Southern stereotypes unfair to today’s South? What about the South in 1929? Are the major themes found in this novel applicable to all of America, and not just limited to the South?