**Assessing *Wuthering Heights* as Representative of its Era**

**Subject area/course**: English/Language Arts, English Literature

**Grade level/band**: 11–12

**STUDENT PROMPT SECTION**

1. **Task context**:

Often, literary critics point to a novel and describe it as being “representative of its era” because it accurately reflects the issues and concerns that were of interest during the author’s historical moment. This term also most often refers to a text that has gained acceptance into the literary canon, meaning that it is a cultural touchstone from the past.

For example, Emily Brontë’s novel *Wuthering Heights*, published in 1847, is typically regarded as “representative” of the Victorian era because it addresses many of the issues and concerns to arise in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century. Like the nation itself was confronting matters concerning its imperial involvement in other countries, its class structure, and its religious morality, so the novel also gives expression to these questions. It did so with a literary style and a romantic plot that was engaging across a broad reading audience.

A novel need not, however, come from the past to demonstrate a literary ability to engage with the issues, anxieties, and questions that arise in a specific place and time, and so even a contemporary novel could be regarded as “representative of its era.” You may have read a book that resonates with your own interests and concerns, yet is not considered “literature.” Consider the novel *Twilight*. Does Bella’s broken family structure find a parallel in today’s culture? What of her romance with Edward, and the eternal romance that can never die? What of her low self-esteem, and her feelings of being the outsider, except when she is with the adoring Edward? Is *Twilight* “representative?” Or are other, contemporary novels (the *Harry Potter* series, *The Hunger Games* series, *The Giver*) popular because they address the issues that are familiar to their readers?

1. **The task**:

After reading *Wuthering Heights*, write a 3- to 4-page paper that considers the question of how a novel earns the label of “representative.” In your consideration of Brontë’s work, find some issue that would have been of concern for her contemporary readers, and articulate a position on whether or not that concern remains valid for us. Finally, you should relate this Victorian novel to a contemporary one with which you are familiar

Your paper should:

* Demonstrate valid reasoning and articulate a clear thesis.
* Support your analysis with strong and thorough evidence from the texts.
* Be organized effectively.
* Employ standard English grammar and usage.
* Use in-text citations correctly and include a Works Cited page using MLA format or another style that your instructor selects.

1. **Materials/resources:**

* You will need a copy of Emily Brontë’s novel *Wuthering Heights*.
* You will need to find and use a contemporary novel to create a comparison to *Wuthering Heights.*

1. **Time requirements:**

You teacher will give you one to two weeks to read *Wuthering Heights.* Most of the reading will be done outside of class time. Your teacher will provide you with specific instructions and due dates for your paper.