

On 9 July, I'll ask each of you to turn in a **Research Paper Proposal**. This should be a document of about 250-300 words that establishes a general context, focuses on a specific topic, and then poses a research question. Exactly how detailed your proposal will be will depend on the kind of topic you intend to write about. The form of the proposal should follow the Context → Focus → Question model. The example below may offer some guidance—note that the first paragraph offers a general **context** (religion in WH), the second paragraph **focuses** on a particular topic (Nelly's religious life), and these paragraphs are followed by the research **question**.

Please give some careful thought both to the topic and to the writing of the proposal—not only is the proposal worth 100 points toward your final grade, but more importantly the better the foundation you set down now, the stronger the final essay will be. As always, I'll be happy to take printed copies of your Research Paper Proposal, but I would appreciate an electronic version as well.

A sample proposal:

It seems clear even on first reading that religion is an important theme in Wuthering Heights. The character Joseph is defined throughout by a particularly harsh and condemning sort of religious view, one of Lockwood's important dreams when first snowbound at Wuthering Heights is about a sermon by "the famous Jabez Branderham" (41), Catherine dreams that she doesn't belong in heaven, and even the devilish Heathcliff's death is figured paradoxically as a kind of earth-bound transcendence. What interests me most, however, are not these extremes of religious expression, but the quieter religious life of Nelly Dean.

At several points in the novel, Nelly Dean's narration indicates her religious convictions. While sitting in vigil over the Catherine's body, for example, Nelly describes her comfort and faith in "the endless and shadowless hereafter" (153). Later, in the closing moments of Heathcliff's life, Nelly tells him that his has been "a selfish, unchristian life" and that he should discuss his spiritual situation with "some minister of any denomination, it does not matter which" (284). Since Nelly—like Joseph and Heathcliff—is involved with the Earnshaw/Linton family story from beginning to end, it would seem that her religious views are significant—perhaps offering a positive counterpoint to the negative religion of Joseph and the amorality of Heathcliff. In any event, for my final paper I plan to consider the following question:

What does Nelly Dean's rather conventional and unassuming spiritual life suggest about the novel's representations of 19th-century religion?