

FINAL PAPER

TOPIC:

This assignment asks you to choose a “wisdom text” not read in class. After choosing a text, you should explain why you consider it to contain wisdom. A successful paper will present a general theory of wisdom, and will apply that theory to the chosen text. An excellent paper will also reflect upon the interplay between universals and particulars in the creation and application of intellectual categories. A superior paper will further reflect upon the social dimensions of wisdom, at both the personal and group level (after all, I am asking you to choose a text that *you* consider “wise”). This is a paper about a text, about wisdom, and about you.

TEXT:

The choice of text is entirely up to you. At one end of the range of possibilities is the *Pacific Bell Yellow Pages*. At the other end of the range is *The Great Big Book of Wisdom*. I am allowing such a range of choices because I do not want to pre-judge for you the nature or content of “wisdom.” Although these two examples are books, for this assignment “text” does not necessarily equal “book.”

Your choice of text is very important. The text should be able to support a general theory of wisdom, but not in a way that is overly trite. This calls for strategic thinking. To treat the yellow pages as a wisdom text will require much ingenuity. If you can do this well, you’ll probably get a high grade; but if you do it poorly you might get a low one. By contrast, a text like *The Great Big Book of Wisdom* will obviously be able to support a general theory. But this text might be so obvious that it precludes your ability to say anything new or interesting. Although such a book might not lead to glory, it is also less likely to result in disappointment. Are you a risk taker or do you want to play it safe?

WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR?

Some classes emphasize the memorization of facts. Some classes emphasize the development of technical or professional skills. All classes emphasize critical thinking. *This class emphasizes the intellectual imagination*. These are two words one does not often see side-by-side. By *imagination*, I mean the ability to recombine existing ideas and images in order to create new ones. Imagination is a force or power of transformation. The final line of *Howl* — “I’m with you in Rockland / in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night” — is a perfect expression of, and commentary on, imagination as a transformative force. Of course, power can be dangerous if not channeled. By *intellectual*, I indicate how you should direct your creative energies. Be creative with ideas! Excellent scholarship can have as much art in it as poetry, music, and painting. But excellent scholarship is not poetry, etc. So, make sure that you adhere to the canons of scholarship. This means: Assert a falsifiable thesis. Use evidence to support your thesis. Document your evidence. Present your ideas and evidence clearly, and if possible, elegantly. Check grammar and spelling. You might be the most intellectually imaginative person in the world . . . if you do not write well, your mental art is half-wasted.

I encourage you to come to speak with me about the paper. I cannot *make* you smarter or more creative. I cannot give you a formula for how to be smarter or more creative. But I can help elicit, shape, and develop the intelligence and creativity that are already within you.

