*A Thousand Acres* assignments

Each section of the book has a particular focus which you will explore in your critical reader’s journal. It is important that your journal be a place where you develop yourself as both a writer and critical student of literature, and this is the rationale for the shift in assignment structure. The type of writing should be neither formal essay nor text message, *but revealing of a close reading of the material and your individual response to it*. While I expect each entry to relate to the focus, do not feel you must answer every question posed; these are merely starting points for your own thoughts (similarly, “answering” the questions does not constitute a complete entry, either).

**Book One FOCUS ON:** Character Development

**Assignment:** In your reader’s journal, comment on the development of the narrator, her father, Rose, and Jess in Book I. Each character entry should be at least a half-page and include one quote you find particularly significant regarding that character’s development (total should be about 2 pages). This is not a character summary or portrait; rather, you are analyzing the author’s style and writing for ways in which you as a reader come to understand that character. For example, Ginny’s first person narration gives us a much clearer view of her as a character and necessarily colors all other character with her perception of them. Larry Cook, the father, is not much of a character in Book I but he still has a substantial presence—why?

**Due 9/19**

**Book Two FOCUS ON:** Plot Development

**Assignment:** Offer a two page commentary on the development of the plot in your reader’s journal. Again, NOT a summary, but an analysis. What complications arise, and how are they presented as complications? How does an author craft a plot? What elements are necessary, and what is present here? How do we the audience anticipate the plot based on the elements provided by the author? Include at least 4 quotations from the text that support any points you make.

**Due 9/26**

**Book Three FOCUS ON:** Larry Cook

**Assignment:** In this section, Smiley develops Larry Cook as a true force in the plot and his character development continues not through his actions so much as through the effect he has on other characters and their reactions to him. How are his actions central to the continuation of the novel and further plot development? Explore the character of Larry and how he impacts those around him, particularly his daughters. Your commentary should be 2-3 pages and should include at least 3 quotations that substantially represent an important aspect of the character and/or his effect on others.

**Due 10/2**

**Book Four FOCUS ON:** Gender expectations

**Assignment:** Write a 2-3 page commentary on the impact of gender roles and societal expectations in this section and throughout the novel thus far. Consider the role of Mrs. Cook—though absent, she is presented through memories by her daughter. What expectations did she live up to and provide for her daughters? What responsibilities do men have within the world of the novel? Provide at least 4 quotations that reveal some element of gender roles and expectations and analyze that in your entry.

**Due 10/6**

**Book Five FOCUS ON:** Comparison to *King Lear*

**Assignment:** By this time, you should be able to draw clear parallels between this text and Shakespeare’s. How are they similar? Where do they diverge, and why? What is your opinion on Smiley’s treatment of the story of *King Lear*? Is it fair to call it a modernization, a retelling, or a reimagining, and why? Write 3-4 pages in your reader’s journal, commenting on similarities and differences between the two works and analyzing those elements. Provide 5-6 quotes from the text that contribute significantly to your commentary and analysis.

**Due 10/11**

**Book Six FOCUS ON:** Tragedy

**Assignment:** Both *King Lear* and *A Thousand Acres* could be considered tragedies. Based on the presentation of the elements of tragedy according to Aristotle, Shakespeare, and modern interpretations, what are the strongest elements of tragedy that exist in *A Thousand Acres*? Did you have a reaction to the tragedy? If it did not evoke a reaction, why not? Focus your 4 page commentary on the elements and presentation of tragedy throughout the novel (you need not focus exclusively on Book Six), and provide 4 quotations from the text that you analyze in the context of tragic elements.

**Due 10/16**