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21L.017 The Art of the Probable: Literature and Probability
Spring 2008

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21L.017 Oral Presentation Guidelines

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Each of you will be doing one presentation before the class this term. The presentations are intended to be short and concise (5 to 8 minutes). There is a lot of latitude as to their content. Essentially, the idea here is that you locate something that interests you in the particular text being discussed, and communicate that “something” to the class, arguing for why it is important or interesting in the context of what this class is about. Having said this, neither ought the presentation to be closed off, so to speak. In other words, it is intended to be the starting point for the discussion to follow, and so you are free to raise questions, and open out your ideas in a way that can be taken up by the group.

The coherence requirement is important: while I don’t expect a fully fledged argument -- such as one you might deliver in a paper -- I do want you to go beyond simply describing the phenomenon you have chosen to focus on. You need, in other words, both to describe as well as to analyse, to speculate upon (and to tell us) the import of the phenomenon, what work you think it does in the text(s) you choose to examine.

This means that I do not want merely a list of random observations. You need to organize your specific textual insights around a central idea or topic, and to present these in a cogent and coherent manner. If you provide a handout to be given to all of us to help us follow along, so much the better.

As to the “something” itself, it could be almost anything you choose, against the background of the topic for this subject (probability, in the broad sense) : a recurring set of images, for example — in which case, you would take us through a number of examples and then talk a bit about why the image is important to the text and how it functions in the text. Or you could pick a speech that seems to you important and discuss its role. Or trace the development of a particular idea. Or you could focus on conceptual ambiguities in that became apparent to you in the course of your reading. Or you could focus on what a particular character represents, and why that is important. And so on. The possibilities are endless! Have fun, speculate wildly, think deeply about how the text relates to the subject matter of this class, provide evidence!