ENGL 2026: Viewing Response prompts

Note: These are the first twelve prompts (of sixteen). You should be able to connect them to the texts they are responding to by looking at the syllabus.

Note 2: I have not yet created prompts for the princess films as of posting this online.

Try to watch Episode IV as if you have never seen it. Answer one of the following questions:

- If you know, what references within the film are only explained by some other, later text within the Star Wars universe? How does your knowledge of what is coming change your understanding of Episode IV? How would your understanding of the film change if you did not know what is coming?
- If are less familiar with the Star Wars universe, identify something unexplained within the film. What effect does this lack of explanation have on your understanding or appreciation of the film?

At the time (2013), Patton Oswalt's Stars Wars filibuster on *Parks and Recreation* was a comedic response to Disney's acquisition of Lucasfilm in relation to its prior acquisition of Marvel. In retrospect, and in light of Oswalt's prediction of the first shot of anew Star Wars film, some might see it as a grim foreshadowing of an inevitable franchise mashup between Jedis and Avengers. Based on your viewing of the first three episodes of *The Book of Boba Fett*, how do you feel about the business model we call "franchise," in which the stories we tell about a given fictional world or universe seem less important than leveraging the world itself (and related intellectual property) for telling more story and making more money?

Episode III is probably less interesting as a standalone film or even as a one of the Star Wars Saga films than it is in relation to Episode IV as a bookend for the voluminous materials that come between the two films such as *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, and *Solo: A Star Wars Story*. This lack-of-being-interesting might have to do with knowing the end of the film (at the broad level of story) before you even see it. How do you feel about knowing that Anakin Skywalker will become Darth Vader, that his children will be hidden from him, and so on before you even see the film? Does this knowledge add to or detract from your appreciation of the film, or are you simply indifferent to this knowledge? Is such foreknowledge simply a consequence of the nature of franchise fictions? Is this something you are concerned about?

In his book *Star Wars After Lucas*, Dan Golding describes Episode VII as a "legacy film," meaning that it serves as a handoff from an older set of characters to a newer set of characters and, crucially, from an older set of fans to a newer set of fans. How does Episode VII accomplish these handoffs? Are they successful? What aspects of the film detract from or add to this success?

Star Wars: The Clone Wars (2008) was the first Star Wars film to be animated, a production technique that carried over into *The Clone Wars* series and other canonical series in the Star Wars Universe. How does this animation (in terms of how it looks, in terms of what other genres or forms it alludes to, such as video games, and so on) affect the overall universe? How does it affect your appreciation of the universe, the characters and settings that is consists of, and the stories that take place within it?

On the one hand, the animated Star Wars series seem to appeal to children, both in terms of being animated and in terms of dialogue, characterization, and so on. On the other hand, they also introduce to the universe things that the saga films largely ignore: the effects of constant war on regular individuals, the political machinations that provide the impetus behind that constant war, the duplicity

of Dark Side users, the small events that contribute to the larger story, and so on. Do you feel that this contradiction--between those elements that might appeal to children and those that might appeal to adults--is successful in these series? Is this the right or wrong question to ask? What questions might we ask instead?

The Mandalorian is not the first Star Wars television show (or serial narrative, if you prefer), but it was the first live-action one. Moreover, it makes significant use of characters and plot arcs that first appeared in animated form (in *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*), in novels (e.g. *Asohka*), and comics (the Darth Vader comics, for example). Does *The Madalorian*'s seriality and/or its reliance on non-filmic events and characters add to or detract from Star Wars, a set of films that were rarely interested in small stories, minor characters, and fleeting events? What does Disney/Lucasfilm's focus on this form of narrative suggest about its understanding of Star Wars and the future of the franchise?

In some respects, *Endgame* seems like just another sequel, a form that Hollywood has been committed to for decades. In other respects, *Endgame* seems radically new, the culmination and climax of a decade of films that share a universe and some plotlines, but which in many cases stood as independent entities (or at least, independent series) *and* the starting point for a whole new series of narratives some of which are somewhat obvious from within the film itself (Sam becoming Captain America in *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*) and some of which are not quite so obvious (*WandaVision, What if...?*). How do you understand this film? Can we even call it a "film" in any conventional or historical sense of the term given its numerous commitments to the past and the present of the MCU?

Among other things *WandaVision* continues Disney's (and Marvel Studios') commitment to representing families (the Stark family, the Avengers as family, the Guardians of the Galaxy as family, Antman's family, and so on). It also represents Marvel Studios' first foray into television (although the show's exclusive existence on Disney+, a streaming service with only a scant relationship to broadcast or cable tv, complicates this foray a bit). How do these two aspects of the show--its focus on family and its appearance in a new medium for the MCU--relate to one another? Does this relationship teach us anything? Is it successful?

In the first episode of *Loki*, we discover that the event that leads to the series itself is contained, but not seen, in a film from 2012 (*The Avengers*) and refined in a film from 2019 (*Endgame*). What does this sort of narrative foundation suggest about storytelling in the MCU? How does it relate thematically to the events and plotlines that we see developing in the first two episodes of the show?

Based on your understanding of *Loki* so far, what is the show's view of the TVA? If we accept that the TVA is a metaphor for Marvel Studios/Kevin Feige and the Sacred Timeline a metaphor for the MCU itself, what does the show *Loki* think about attempts to create a single coherent narrative fro which nothing can diverge?

Eternals presents all sorts of challenges to the status quo in the MCU. It introduces powerful characters who existed before the Blip and yet refused to help fight Thanos. It complicates the various notions of family and familial relationships explored in previous Marvel films and shows. Perhaps most important, it is the first major aesthetic transformation to the MCU--in terms of its color palette,

cinematography, and other visual elements of film--since perhaps the first *Guardians of the Galaxy* film, which introduced the MCU to worlds beyond earth much more effectively (and much more interestingly in terms of aesthetics) than previous films such as *Thor, Thor: The Dark World*, and (briefly) *Avengers*. How does this new aesthetic depart from the aesthetics we have seen so far in our viewings? Does this new aesthetic, in your estimation, amount to a welcome innovation to the MCU or does it seem like a move in the wrong direction that compromises the integrity of the franchise?