From the Daode jing to the Vimalakirti sutra, the texts we will read in this course are not only the literary building blocks underpinning Chinese religious traditions but are also the tangible extensions of a different, semi-cohesive network of ideas and ideals. These Eastern perspectives raise questions we often fail to address. They posit answers we might misunderstand without the proper context. This course is about putting those Eastern answers into context.

As indicated in the course catalogue, we will emphasize the three institutional faiths of Classicism (a.k.a. Confucianism), Daoism and Buddhism, collectively known as the Three Teachings (Sanjiao 三 教). The course's structure regards each religion as an idea system and therefore endeavors to find relationships between each religion's key facets such as rituals, ethics and conceptions of the invisible realm. Every effort will be made to place these religions within their proper historical frame, including our reading a brief history of China in the first week and a group project that is chronology-conscious at the end. (For greater emphasis on the diachronic perspective, participants in this course are invited to continue their study with its companion course, namely "The history of Chinese religions.")

I. Resources
This course is heavy on reading, and almost all the readings are primary sources in translation. Fortunately there has been a recent upsurge in scholarship on Chinese religions.

Required texts

- Religion 157 reader.
Library reserve materials
All materials listed above are for purchase in the bookstore, although copies of everything except the reader are also on reserve in the library. If there are specific terms or traditions requiring explication, please use the library’s Encyclopaedia of Religions (either hardcopy or CD-ROM). Finally, please make use of myself as a resource. If you find particular materials of interest, I might be able to assist you in learning more about them.

II. Requirements
1. Eight exploratories (1 page, single-spaced). Except for weeks when papers are due (see below), a discussion question relevant to the materials is listed in the syllabus. The question is intended to be broad and conducive to thoughtful analysis, and your concise answer is due at noon on Tuesdays via blitzmail. Please bring a hardcopy to Wednesday’s discussion. (You are welcome to choose a topic other than that addressed by the question, but a rigorous, thoughtful treatment will still be expected.) Appended to this syllabus are some suggestions as to how to construct an exploratory.
2. Three short papers (4-6 pages). Each annotated paper will derive from a focal text, namely the Mencius, the Daode jing commentaries, and the Vimalakirti Sutra. Below I pose a specific question for the first paper and a set of parameters for devising a question in the second, but if you find a particular issue in the text of interest, you can pursue it if you clear it with me in advance. Please note that the papers are required before class on the due dates, namely 1 October (Mencius), 31 October (Daode jing commentaries) and 26 November (Vimalakirti sutra). Please give me your papers as hardcopies.
3. Non-traditional projects. In the past, Reedies have very much enjoyed creative challenges that have a serious educational side to them. For example, poetic discourse and Chinese religious thought are closely intertwined. Near the end of the semester, I will ask you to take up a theme that you found of interest and manifest it in your own poetry, and as you do, I ask you to consider why poetic expression is akin to religious expression. Other non-traditional projects will include an explication of an attempted k_an experience, beta-testing a new Internet educational program introducing Buddhism in a graphic environment, and contributing to the “Reed ledgers of merit and demerit” begun by your predecessors over the past four years.
4. Active and informed conference participation. Please note that as I am sectioning this course to foster more direct interaction, I expect active participation every day. Please be fully prepared for each conference, preparation consisting of both reading and thinking about the materials. Appended to this syllabus are some suggestions on conference dynamics. If conference does not seem to be going well in your opinion, please talk to me, and we will endeavor to remedy the situation. I seek your comments and take them very seriously.
5. Quizzes. Near the middle of the semester, I may occasionally begin giving short quizzes to ensure that everyone is on board for that day’s discussion. I don’t like quizzes. My goal is to get you to look forward to the readings – to love this stuff as much as I do – but experience tells me that in all classes there is a point in the semester when high standards and ambitions can slip a bit. I don’t want to leave anyone behind. These quizzes are not on the syllabus.
6. Final group project. The content of this project, due 17 December at noon, is not yet determined, and I am open to suggestions. It may take the form of a creative timeline to give more emphasis to the diachronic approach to Chinese religions.

Policy on paper extensions and incompletes: Only for medical problems and extreme emergencies and only then accompanied by a note from the Dean's Office or Student Services. As the deadlines are already indicated on the syllabus below, multiple-paper crisis does not count as an excuse. Late papers will still be considered, but the lateness will be taken into account and no comments will be given. The later it is, the more subjective I become. (I apologize in advance for being draconian, but it is necessary due to our large numbers and due to the fact that I want your papers before the group discussions devoted to the respective focal text.)
III. Syllabus

Introduction
3 September

A synchronic approach
5 September

Required reading
• Geertz, "Religion as a cultural system" in The Interpretation of Cultures (chap. 4) (reader).
• Ching, "Introduction."

A diachronic approach
8 September

Required reading
• Hucker's China to 1850.

Exploratory 1: Synchronic v. diachronic understanding -- Can we serve two masters? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach? Which approach is more scholarly? What assumptions predicate your choice? Which leads to a better understanding, a better grasp of meaning? For that matter, what is "understanding" or "meaning"?
10 September (with exploratory due at noon on 9 September)

The Classicist Tradition 儒 家

The Classicist net (lecture)
12 September

Required reading
• Ching, Chap.s 1-3.

Recommended reading
• Enc. of Religions, 4.7-42.
• Begin reading Mencius.

Classist symbol systems
15 September

Required reading
• Sommer, 41-54 (Confucius, Mozi).
• Brashier, "The Classicist ancestral cult as a 'system of symbols'" (reader).
• Lau, Mencius, II.A.6 (p. 82), VI.A.1-8 (pp. 160-165).
• Sommer, Xunzi's "Human nature is evil," 69-70.

Exploratory 2: Zhongyong concept map. Using Wing-tsit Chan's "Spiritual dimensions: The doctrine of the mean" (handout), create a concept map of the key phases, indicating their hierarchies and how they link to one another. (I will give you a handout on concept maps to coincide with this exploratory.) Note that this primary text is in fact the basis of Tu Wei-ming's essay that you will read for Friday, but before you read his interpretation, I want you to form your own opinions through this concept map first.
17 September (with exploratory due at noon on 16 September)

Classicist ethics
19 September

Required reading
• Tu Wei-ming, Centrality and commonality (Chaps. 1.2 & 4).

Recommended reading
• Sommer, 101-112 (Wang Fu, Ban Zhao); 187-188 (Zhang Zai); 227-232 (Wang Yangming).
Explaining mishap via Classicism

22 September

Required reading
- Brashier, "Classicist meditation and visualization in the Han ancestral cult" *(reader)*
- Ching, Chap. 9.
- Sommer, 189-196 (The writings of Chu Hsi)
- Lopez 7: "Zhu Xi on spirit beings."

Recommended reading
- Sommer, 13-16 (ritual bronzes).
- Lopez 1: "Early oracle inscriptions."
- Lopez 22: "The law of the spirits."

Exploratory 3: Must the sacred be separate from the secular in religion? Read Fingarette's small book *Confucius -- the Secular as Sacred*. Highlight a particular facet of Fingarette's famous and provocative argument you find of interest. For example, is this religion anymore? Is he making a reasonable philosophy religious? Is it "magic"?

24 September (with exploratory due at noon on 23 September)

Classicist ritual

26 September

Required reading
- Sommer, 17-39 (Book of Odes, Zuo zhuan, Rites of Zhou, Book of Rites); 63-70 (Xunzi).
- Lopez 18: "Record of the Feng and Shan sacrifices"
- Lopez 23: "Shrines to local former worthies."
- Lopez 4: "City gods and their magistrates."

Classicism in context

29 September

Required reading
- Tu Wei-ming, Centrality and commonality (Chaps. 3 & 5).
- D.C Lau's Mencius.

Paper discussion: What is the relationship between heaven's agency and human ethics in the Mencius?

1 October

(First paper due in class.)

Beyond heaven: embellishing a grander cosmology

3 October

Required reading
- Brashier, "A poetic exposition on heaven and earth" *(reader)*.
- Sommer, 3-12 (Book of Changes, History); 183-185 (Zhou Dunyi).
The Daoist Tradition 道 家

The Daoist darkness (lecture)  
6 October

Required reading
- Ching, Chap.s 5, 6.
- Bokenkamp, "Introduction."
- Brashier, "Essentials of the six schools" (reader)

Recommended reading
- Enc. of Religions, 14.283-317.
- Begin reading the commentaries to the Daode jing, namely the "Xiang'er commentary" (Bokenkamp, 29-148) and "the Wang Bi commentary" (the footnotes in Paul J. Lin's translation).

Exploratory 4: Your interpretations of the Daode jing (aka Laozi). As you read Lin's A translation of Lao Tzu's Tao te ching (here main text only, not the footnotes), please ponder two questions: 1.) What role does language play in clarifying the Dao, and 2.) How does one employ the Dao in practical government? Devote your exploratory to one question, but be sure to think about the other as well. (You can hear my interpretation on 13 October in my Hum 230 lecture [Phys 123, 11 a.m.].)

8 October (with exploratory due at noon on 7 October)

Daoist symbol systems  
10 October

Required reading
- Paul J. Lin's A translation of Lao Tzu's Tao te ching (i.e. reread it!)
- Lopez 2: "Laozi."

Daoist ethics  
13 October

Required reading
- Bokenkamp, 149-185 ("Commands and admonitions").
- Lopez 27: "Abridged codes for Master Lu."

Recommended reading
- Sommer, 197-198 (Chen Chun).

Exploratory 5: The Zhuangzi. This exploratory is perhaps the toughest of the course. I want you to read the excerpts (Sommer, 77-83; Owen's Zhuangzi in the reader) from the greatest Chinese philosophy text ever. The text appears enigmatic at first, but think about it in terms of what you have already read in the Daode jing. Take one passage from Owen's translation, and write a commentary to it, endeavoring to reach below the surface enigmas to see if you can find a rational argument.

15 October (with exploratory due at noon on 14 October)
### Explaining mishap via Daoism
**17 October**

**Required reading**
- Bokenkamp, 230-274 ("The great petition").
- Bokenkamp, 275-372 ("The upper scripture").

**Recommended reading**
- Sommer, 113-116 (Cao Zhi); 145-151 ("Secret instructions," Ge Hong).
- Lopez 13: "Answering a summons."
- Lopez 24: "Daoist ritual in contemporary Southeast China."

### Daoist ritual
**27 October**

**Required reading**
- Lopez 8: "The inner cultivation tradition of early Daoism."
- Lopez 9: "Body gods and inner vision."
- Lopez 10: "An early poem."
- Lopez 11: "Declarations of the Perfected."
- Sommer, 85-98 ("Songs of the South").

**Recommended reading**
- Lopez 12: "Seduction songs."
- Lopez 20: "The purification ritual."
- Sommer, 177-180 (Bo Juyi).

### Daoism in context
**29 October**

**Required reading**
- Bokenkamp, 186-229 ("Scripture of the inner explanations").
- Bokenkamp, 373-438 ("The wondrous scriptures").

**Recommended reading**
- Lopez 36: "Record of occultists."

### Paper discussion: Transforming a philosophy into a religion
**31 October**

Are the "Xiang'er commentary" (Bokenkamp, 29-148) and "the Wang Bi commentary" (the footnotes in Paul J. Lin's translation) more similar or dissimilar? Think about what components group or separate them and how we weight these components against one another to determine whether we have here one Daoism or two. From your comparison, derive a clear question relevant to this course (to be stated near the beginning of your paper) that you then explore and answer with evidence from the texts.

### Regroup: The general nature of "religion" from our new Classicist and Daoist perspectives
**3 November**

**Required reading**
- Oxtoby, "The nature of religions" *(reader)*.
### The Buddhist Tradition

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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Buddhist wave I: The synchronic approach (lecture)</strong></td>
<td>5 November</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ching, Chap.s 7, 8.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Vimalakirti sutra introduction and glossary.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Buddhist wave II: The diachronic approach (lecture)</strong></td>
<td>7 November</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Begin reading Vimalakirti sutra. (You will probably need to read it more than once.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Buddhist symbol systems</strong></td>
<td>10 November</td>
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<td>• Watson, &quot;Simile and parable&quot; from the Lotus sutra (handout).</td>
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<td>• Lopez 19: &quot;The scripture of the production of Buddha images.&quot;</td>
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<td>• Sommer, 155-164 (Huineng, Yixuan); 249-252 (&quot;The Mural&quot;); 331-342 (Sheng-yen).</td>
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**Exploratory 6: Buddhist mysticism and the nature of k_ans.** "If you meet a man of the Dao on the way, greet him neither with words nor with silence. Now tell me, how will you greet him?" Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed and focus at this k_an for fifteen minutes. Now track the process of your thoughts. Where did you attention go? What difficulties did you encounter? What dangers are there to unguided meditation? Why do you think k_ans are so important to many Chan Buddhists throughout history? 12 November (with exploratory due at noon on 11 November)

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<tr>
<td><strong>Buddhist ethics</strong></td>
<td>14 November</td>
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<td>• Lopez 28: &quot;The scripture in forty-two sections.&quot;</td>
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<td>• Sommer, 119-143 (extracts from Scripture of the Pure Land, Lotus Sutra, Vimalakirti); 239-246 (Monkey gets scriptures).</td>
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<td>• Vimalakirti sutra, chap. 6.</td>
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**Explaining mishap via Buddhism** 17 November

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<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>• &quot;Mindfulness of death&quot; <em>(reader)</em>.</td>
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<td>• Lopez 5: &quot;Bodhisattva Guanshiyin.&quot;</td>
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<td>• Lopez 6: &quot;The white-robed Guanyin.&quot;</td>
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<td>• Vimalakirti sutra, chap. 5.</td>
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**Recommended reading**

- Lopez 25: "Calling on Souls."
- Lopez 26: "A funeral chant."

**Exploratory 7: Mulian rescues his mother.** Mahamaudgalyayana *(reader)* exploratory topic is open. 19 November (with exploratory due at noon on 18 November)

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<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Buddhist ritual</strong></td>
<td>21 November</td>
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<td>• Lopez 14: &quot;Visions of Manjusri on Mt. Wutai.&quot;</td>
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<td>• Lopez 21: &quot;The burning-mouth hungry ghost.&quot;</td>
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<td>• Sommer, 133-135 (&quot;The heart sutra&quot;).</td>
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<td>• &quot;The significance of AUM&quot; <em>(reader)</em>.</td>
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<td>• &quot;A prayer for the long life&quot; <em>(reader)</em>.</td>
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<td>• Grimes, “Sitting and eating” <em>(reader)</em>.</td>
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Buddhism in context
24 November

Required reading
• Lopez 29: "Perfect wisdom for humane kings."
• Lopez 30: "The Buddhism of the cultured elite."
• Lopez 31: "Buddhist ritual and the state."
• Sommer, 169-175 (Han Yu).

Recommended reading
• Lopez 32: "Biography of a Buddhist Layman."

Paper discussion: The Vimalakirti Sutra. Note that I am not setting a question for this paper. My only restriction is that you formulate your paper in the form of a question that you will clearly demarcate in bold type somewhere within the first paragraph or two of your paper. (Anyone desiring comments must include a stamped, self-addressed envelope with this paper.)

26 November

The Three Teachings ☰ ☯

Merging the three teachings of Classicism, Daoism and Buddhism
1 December

Required reading
• Lopez, "Introduction," 21-25, 32-36.
• Ching, Chap. 12.
• Sommer, 257-265 ("Ghost-girl Xiaoxie").
• Lopez 3: "The lives and teachings of the divine lord of Zitong."
• Sommer, 205-223 (Seven Taoist Masters, "Chang boils the sea"); 233-238 ("Poetry of the Spirit"); 317-325 ("Marshal Tian").

Recommended reading
• Sommer, 199-203 (Wang Zhe).
• Sommer, 257-265 ("Ghost-girl Xiaoxie").
• Lopez 3: "The book of good deeds."
• Lopez 34: "Supernatural retribution."
• Lopez 35: "Tract of the most exalted."

Traditional religions in modern contexts I
3 December

Required reading
• Sommer, 165-168 ("Cold Mountain"); 267-278 (religious skepticism in Cao Xueqin); 303-307 (Mao Zedong); 309-316 (Jung Chang); 327-329 (Ling Chung); 343-348 (Kerouac).
• Lopez 16: "Teachings of a spirit medium."

Traditional religions in modern contexts II
5 December

Required reading
• Sommer, 281-292 (Lu Xun); 293-302 (Zhang Tianyi).
• Andresen, "Coffee-shop mandalas" (reader)

Exploratory 8: The relationship between Chinese religion and poetry. In this non-traditional assignment, I want you to take a particular aspect of Chinese religions and transform it into verse (no restrictions on content or form). As you do, think about the nature of symbolic discourse and why Chinese religion and poetry frequently find close associations.
8 December (with poems due on 8 December in class)

Coda: Heading for the cold, white sea
10 December

Final group project due 17 December at noon
IV. Consciousness of conference technique

Much of our educational system seems designed to discourage any attempt at finding things out for oneself, but makes learning things others have found out, or think they have, the major goal. -- Anne Roe, 1953.

At times it is useful to step back and discuss conference dynamics, to lay bare the bones of conference communication. Why? Because some Reed conferences succeed; others do not. After each conference, I ask myself how it went and why it progressed in that fashion. If just one conference goes badly or only so-so, a small storm cloud forms over my head for the rest of the day. Many students with whom I have discussed conference strategies tell me that most Reed conferences don't achieve that sensation of educational nirvana, that usually students do not leave the room punching the air in intellectual excitement. I agree. A conference is a much riskier educational tool than a lecture, and this tool requires a sharpness of materials, of the conferees and of the conference leader. It can fail if there is a dullness in any of the three. Yet whereas lectures merely impart information (with a "sage on the stage"), conferences train us how to think about and interact with that information (with a "guide on the side"). So when it does work . . .

I look for the following five features when evaluating a conference:

1. Divide the allotted time by the number of conference participants. That resulting time should equal the leader's ideal speaking limits. (I talk too much in conference. Yet when I say this to some students, they sometimes tell me that instructors should feel free to talk more because the students are here to acquire that expertise in the field. So the amount one speaks is a judgment call, but regardless, verbal monopolies never work.)

2. Watch the non-verbal dynamism. Are the students leaning forward, engaging in eye contact and gesturing to drive home a point such that understanding is in fact taking on a physical dimension? Or are they silently sitting back in their chairs staring at anything other than another human being? As a conference leader or participant, it's a physical message you should always keep in mind. Leaning forward and engaging eye contact is not mere appearance; it indeed helps to keep one focused, especially if tired.

3. Determine whether the discourse is being directed through one person (usually the conference leader) or is non-point specific. If you diagram the flow of discussion and it looks like a wagon wheel with the conference leader in the middle, the conference has, in my opinion, failed. If you diagram the flow and it looks like a jumbled, all-inclusive net, the conference is more likely to have succeeded.

4. Determine whether a new idea has been achieved. By the end of the conference, was an idea created that was new to everyone, including the conference leader? Did several people contribute a Lego to build a new thought that the conferees would not have been able to construct on their own? This evaluation is trickier because sometimes a conference may not have gone well on first glance but a new idea evolved nonetheless. The leader must be sure to highlight that evolution at the end of the conference.

5. Watch for simple politeness. "Politeness" means giving each other an opportunity to speak, rescuing a colleague hanging out on a limb, asking useful questions as well as complimenting a new idea, a well-said phrase, a funny joke.

Note that most of the above points (with the exception of the fourth) are content-free. Content obviously counts most of all, but the proper dynamics can serve as a catalyst to fully developed content. If you feel a conference only went so-so, instead of simply moving on to the next one, I would urge you, too, to evaluate the conference using your own criteria and figuring out how you (and I) can make the next one a more meaningful experience.

In the end, as long as you are prepared and feel passionate about your work, you should do well, and if passion ever fails, grim determination counts for something.
V. The exploratory

Sometimes conferences sing. Yet just when I would like them to sing opera, they might merely hum a bit of country-western. After my first year of teaching at Reed, I reflected upon my conference performance and toyed with various ideas as to how to induce more of the ecstatic arias and lively crescendos, and I came up with something I call an "exploratory."

Simply put, an exploratory is a one-page, single-spaced piece in which you highlight one thought-provoking issue that caught your attention in the materials we are considering. This brief analysis must show thorough reading and must show your own thoughtful extension --

- Your own informed, constructive criticism of the author;
- Your own developed, thoughtful question (perhaps even inspired by readings from other classes) that raises interesting issues when seen in the light of the author's text;
- Your own application of theory and method to the primary source;
- Your own personal conjecture as to how this data can be made useful; or (best of all)
- Your own autonomous problem that you devised using the data under discussion.

I am not here looking for polished prose or copious (or any) footnotes -- save all that for our formal papers. (I do not return exploratories with comments unless a special request is made.) Exploratories are not full, open-heart surgeries performed on the text. Instead, exploratories tend to be somewhat informal but focused probes on one particular aspect in which you yourself can interact with the text and can enter into the conversation.

What is not an exploratory? It is not merely a topic supported by evidence from the book, nor is it a descriptive piece on someone else's ideas, nor is it a general book report in which you can wander to and fro without direction. Bringing in outside materials is allowed, but the exploratory is not a forum for ideas outside that day's expressed focus. (Such pieces cannot be used in our conference discussions.) It is instead a problematique, an issue with attitude. I also want the exploratory's specific problematique sentence in bold or underscored so that it is indeed the focus of your piece.

The best advice that I can give here is simply to encourage you to consider why I am requesting these exploratories from you: I want to see what ignites your interest in the text so I can set the conference agenda. That is why they are due a day or two before a conference. Thus late exploratories are of no use. (Being handed a late exploratory is like being handed your salad after you've eaten dessert and are already leaving the restaurant.) I base roughly half my conferences on exploratories, and I will use them to draw you in, parry your perspective against that of another, and build up the discussion based on your views. Exploratories help me turn the conference to issues that directly interest you. They often lead us off on important tangents, and they often return us to the core of the problem under discussion. So if you are struggling with finding "something to say," simply recall why I ask for these exploratories in the first place. Is there something in the text you think worthy of conference time? Do you have an idea you want to take this opportunity to explore? Here is your chance to draw our attention to it. Your perspectives are important, and if you have them crystalized on paper in advance, they will be easier to articulate in conference.

Since I began using exploratories, most students have responded very favorably. Students like the fact that it is a different form of writing, a bit more informal and more frequent, somewhat akin to thinking aloud. It forces one not just to read a text but to be looking for something in that text, to engage that text actively. And it increases the likelihood that everyone leaves the conference singing Puccini.