

English 110

Fall 2014

Essay 3

Made to Mean: Researched Rhetorical Analysis of a Cultural Object

Format

- 2000–2500 words. See syllabus and *Little Penguin Handbook* for information about how to properly format a paper according to MLA style.
- Use at least four secondary sources drawn from books, newspapers, magazines, or academic journals obtained via the University of Delaware library.
- Be sure to include a Works Cited page.

Description

Identify a specific cultural object/artifact/icon that is being repurposed, remodeled, or reclaimed in a specific new context (such as an advertisement, a movie, an episode of a TV show, an article, a book, a piece of art, a monument, a song, a product design, an article of clothing, a bumper sticker, a tattoo, some graffiti, etc.).

In an essay, develop a thesis about the significance of what this act of repurposing reveals about the object and/or the context from which it originally emerged, the context in which it is now being used, the entities who use it, why they use it, and its intended and unintended meanings. Use the following questions to guide your research and writing:

- Who created the object in its *original* form and context? What was its creator's intended purpose or meaning? How do particular elements of the object achieve that purpose or convey that meaning?
- Who is repurposing the object in its *new* form and context? What was the repurposer's intended purpose or meaning? How do particular elements of the object achieve that purpose or convey that meaning?
- What audiences are capable of understanding or making meaning of the object (consider both its original and new forms)? How do you know this?
- What underlying assumptions are necessary to understand the intended meaning of the object?
- Which of the object's contradictions or complexities are revealed when it is repurposed in this new context? Why had they been concealed/unseen before? How and why does the new context reveal those complexities?
- Does the way that the object is being repurposed imply a critique of the object? Is one of the goals of repurposing the object to reveal complexities, contradictions, or assumptions about the object that had been overlooked? If so, why? And what is significant, interesting, or important about this critique and the things it reveals?

- If the object itself isn't being critiqued, is its new or old *context* being critiqued? Is its new or old *audience* being critiqued? Is something else associated with the object being critiqued? What is significant/interesting/important about this critique and what it reveals/conveys?
- Has this object ever been repurposed before? How so? Is the new repurposed form in conversation with any other repurposed forms? What's the significance of those connections? What does this new form add to the conversation?

Like all of the essays you have written this semester, this essay should be grounded in your own analysis and interpretation. Your goal in writing the essay is to analyze the ways in which a cultural object is being repurposed and to make related interpretive claims about the significance of that repurposing—specifically, how the act of repurposing sheds new light on the intended or unintended meanings of the object.

So, this essay builds on all the skills you have been developing this semester: observation, interpretation, synthesizing ideas, identifying and exploring significant similarities and differences, developing a thesis from your ideas and observations, thinking critically about the ways in which a writer/artist's decisions are shaped by the complexities of a rhetorical situation (the relationship between audience, message, and intended purpose), and smoothly and ethically supporting your own ideas with summary, paraphrase, and quotations from outside sources.

This essay is an opportunity to not only practice those skills, but also to add another skill to your scholarly writing toolbox: *library research*. In order to analyze the object and understand the significance of its repurposing, you will need to research the history of the object and the ways it has been/is being used.

Your final essay should ultimately contain *at least* four outside sources; however, you should consult many more sources throughout the writing, rewriting, searching, and researching process. *These sources must be drawn from either books or articles that were published in newspapers, magazines, or academic journals accessed via the University of Delaware library.* There are many reputable online-only periodicals that could be great sources; however, if you choose to use one of these, please ask me first. What kind of sources should you seek? You should seek out sources that provide background information about your object and its contexts and creators. You should also seek out sources by other writers and thinkers who, like you, are exploring the significance of the ways in which the object has been used and made to mean.