

Analytical Essay Assignment

For this assignment, you will analyze a minimum of three texts (novels, non-fiction books, films, TV shows, advertisements, websites, print news publications) which explore the theme of “work” in American life. At least one of the texts you analyze must come from the reading (or viewing) list of this course. The other two texts may come from outside the class. (Hint: this is your chance to adapt the assignment to your interests).

In performing your analysis, you should consider one or more of the following questions:

- 1) What narratives are these texts telling about work in American life? Whose experiences do these narratives privilege and exclude? What are the strengths and limitations of these narratives as models of American work?
- 2) What “hidden” assumptions do these texts make?
- 3) For what audience(s) and purposes(s) were these texts written? What rhetorical strategies (repetitions, strands, ethos, pathos, logos) do they use to persuade their audiences?
- 4) What are the (unexpected) similarities and differences in these texts?
- 5) How do these texts work to reinforce and/or subvert dominant social hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, religion, and/or (dis)ability?
- 6) What binary oppositions do these texts set up? How can these binaries be complicated or deconstructed?
- 7) How do these texts relate to your own experiences of work?

Rather than trying to answer all of these questions, your paper should develop and argue for a specific (yet complex) thesis about the texts—a thesis which addresses some (though certainly not all) of the above questions. In evaluating your work, I will be particularly looking for:

- 1) **Focus:** Your topic is narrowed sufficiently to allow for detailed analysis.
- 2) **Clarity:** Your argument is clear. You provide transitions, subheadings, and “signposts” to help your readers follow your thinking.
- 3) **Textual Analysis:** You go beyond recounting what the texts say to explaining *how* the texts achieve their effects. You cite and quote from specific sections of the text to advance your argument. You avoid “quote dumping”; each time you quote the texts, you provide your own analysis of the significance of the quote.
- 4) **“So What” Factor:** You demonstrate the significance of your analysis (ex: You present an original, complex reading of the texts, which moves beyond the commonsense reading; you encourage us to think about American work in new and different ways; you persuade us to think and/or act differently in our roles as workers).
- 5) **Secondary Sources:** You cite at least two secondary sources which contextualize, complicate, or extend the texts you analyze (ex: a review of or academic article about the

text; historical or contemporary media accounts of events related to the text). These sources must be documented in MLA format.

- 6) **Style:** Your sentences are well-crafted, engaging, and easy to read (see WA, chapters 12 and 13).
- 7) **Editing:** Your final draft follows the conventions of standardized English, avoiding basic writing errors (see WA, chapter 14).

You will turn in three drafts of this essay. If you fail to turn in any one of the drafts, your essay grade will be lowered by one full letter. To receive full credit for a draft, you must demonstrate substantial revision of the previous draft (not just proofreading). The first draft must be at least five pages. The final draft will likely range between 9 and 12 pages. All drafts should be written in 12 Point Times New Roman (doubled-spaced with one-inch margins).

All drafts must be posted to the WebCT discussion board as attachments either in MS Word or Rich Text Format (RTF). WebCT attachments can be tricky to do; you are responsible for doublechecking that your attachment has been posted. The best way to confirm that the attachment worked is to try to open it. Unless otherwise stated, drafts may be posted anytime (up to midnight) on the day they are due. The first draft is due on 11/5, the second draft is due on 11/17, and the final draft is due on 12/3.