

Project 3: Culture Matters

In our Ideas Matter project, we started engaging with others' ideas by summarizing their ideas and analyzing their choices. In the Culture Matters project, we will go a step further and create a new and original analysis about one of the objects we see around us every day. We will begin to understand how the way an object is used, valued, and advertised reflects and is shaped by our cultural values.

We will practice our inquiry, observational, research, and analytical skills to make an argument about culture and a particular object's significance or purpose within our culture. In other words, **how does this object relate to our culture? What is it about our culture that makes this artifact necessary or useful? What claim can you make about our culture, using what you know about the object as evidence?**

What are the basic requirements of this piece? In this piece, you will examine an object of your choice and the ways it is portrayed, used, and valued in some part of our culture. Through describing and analyzing the artifact and an advertisement for it, and its role within our culture, you will create and defend an original claim about our culture.

Does this sound intimidating? Let's break it down:

Choose an artifact: The artifact can be anything that you feel can lead to a discussion of our culture. I suggest objects that are more mundane and "everyday"—the less obvious the artifact's significance from the start, the more interesting your argument will be. If the artifact already has an understood cultural meaning (sports equipment, religious icons, family heirlooms, etc.), it will be harder for you to come up with original ideas about it. (Also, cell phones and laptops are generally too broad of a topic to make for a focused paper.) You will also try to find an advertisement (video, still image, radio) for this product to support your analysis.

Ask questions: We completed the questions exercise in class. What similar questions can you ask of your object and the advertisement? Which questions group together with each other? What questions will lead you to the most productive and interesting answers, and to the most interesting claim about our culture?

Find answers: How will you go about finding answers to these questions? Next week, we will discuss effective research strategies and how to incorporate that research into our analysis. Are

there some questions whose answers will be harder to find than others? Are there some questions with useful answers that lead to an interesting claim? Are there others that will have less useful answers?

Develop an argument (thesis): In a typical research paper, you might start with a position in mind and then find evidence that supports your position. In this project, we will evaluate the evidence we've found and develop an argument about our culture and our culture's understanding of and use of the object. Remember: a good thesis (claim, argument) is something that can be disagreed with. Think about the difference between a claim and a fact.

Audience and Tone: The audience of this piece is the readers of an academic journal on American culture. Remember that your readers may not be familiar with the object you've chosen. The tone needs to be very formal, as this is a professional analytical piece. Strictly avoid using "I", "we", and "you" in this piece, as well as informal language or slang.

Research: For this project, you will be required to utilize at least two outside sources to support your claims and analyses. The purpose of this research will be to answer some of the questions you ask about your object and to use that information to help you develop and support your thesis. We will further discuss evaluating sources and integrating them into our writing.

Length: These pieces should be between **1300 and 1800 words**, in order to describe and analyze the object's cultural significance in detail.

The learning goals for this piece are to:

- Strengthen our analytical and research skills
- Practice creating, supporting, analyzing, and defending an argument
- Use critical thinking to gain awareness of how objects have cultural significance and how our culture affects our actions and perceptions.

Due dates:

7/9: Thesis proposal (10 points)

7/14: Rough draft (20 points) and peer reviews (15 points each)

7/21: Final draft *Culture Matters* (115 points)