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**Master Syllabus**

**Course: ENL 372 Writing About Popular Culture**

**Cluster Requirement: 4B – The Nature of US Society**

This University Studies Master Syllabus serves as a guide and standard for all instructors teaching an approved course in the University Studies program. Individual instructors have full academic freedom in teaching their courses, but as a condition of course approval, agree to focus on the outcomes listed below, to use comparable assignments as part of the course work, and to make available for assessment the student-generated artifacts, essays, exams, or assignments that fulfill 4B learning outcomes.

**Course Overview:**

This course is designed to introduce students to a variety of critical approaches used in the study of popular culture. Although this course will draw on our familiarity with popular culture, we will approach the subject from a scholarly perspective. The overall objective is to explore how popular culture, in its various forms, not only reflects the world around us but also how it influences the way that we perceive the world.

In this course we will analyze artifacts of popular culture through a critical and reflective lens that draws on a variety of academic disciplines in order to engage in the scholarly pursuit of explaining how and why popular culture works the way it does in our society. The course is designed as primarily a study in theories and applications of writing and rhetoric, but will also draw on theories developed in cultural studies, sociology, economics, and psychology among others.

**Learning Outcomes**

The goals of *Cluster 4: The Social World: Humanity and Society*of University Studies include the following:

1. To introduce students to questions about human knowledge and the human condition, as well as the relationship of the individual to the broader world.
2. To foster an understanding of the diversity within US society.
3. To encourage a deeper understanding of one’s place and role in US society.
4. To engage students in critical thinking about humanity and society.
5. To foster awareness of global cultural perspectives.

The learning outcomes of *4B: The Nature of US Society* are as follows and must be included verbatim on each syllabus:

1. Explain: a) the development of US culture and sub-culture from different perspectives; b) US social and cultural domains in relationship to other regions of the world; or c) the different facets of citizenship in the United States.

2. Locate, analyze, summarize, paraphrase and synthesize material from a variety of sources.

3. Evaluate arguments made in support of different perspectives on US society.

ENL 372 syllabi will hold closely to the University Studies Learning Outcomes with slight variations depending on the instructor’s focus. Additional learning outcomes specific to *Writing About Popular Culture* might include:

1. Explain the development of popular culture and its varied sub-cultures in the US
2. Explain the social and cultural context and implications of popular cultural artifacts and practices
3. Recognize ethical issues in popular culture and evaluate the positions taken on these issues by various individuals and communities
4. Draw on the academic study of popular culture in order to evaluate perspectives on popular culture’s role in our society.

***Note: The examples below address Cluster 4B “The Social World: Humanity and Society–* *The Nature of US Society” Outcomes. All 4B outcomes are addressed across the examples. Assignment specifics may vary across courses, but all should meet the common goal of assessing student learning by evaluating their understanding and articulation of how popular culture reflects, constitutes, or challenges social meaning though its signifying practices and artifacts.***

**Example Texts for ENL 372 Writing About Popular Culture**

Books:

* Grazian, Walter. *Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2010
* Danesi, Marcel. *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives*. 2nd Ed. Rowman & Littlefield, 2012
* Storey, John. *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2003
* Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. 6th Ed. Routledge, 2012

Other supplemental readings can be provided in .pdf format on the course website or through handouts.

**Example Learning Activities and Assignments for ENL 372: Writing About Popular Culture**

Sample Essay Assignment (Meets 4B-1, 2, 3)

This assignment will require that you do some **reflecting** on ways of **critically examining** popular culture that we have discussed in class. Like the analyses of the Beatles, Oliver Stone/JFK, Boyz N The Hood, raves, hip hop/NWA/Dynamite Hack, Bob Marley/Reggae, Disney World, Miley Cyrus, and the many other examples we’ve read about and discussed this semester, you should choose an **artifact of popular culture** **for in-depth analysis** drawing on the **ideas, terminology, and theories** we’ve discussed this semester. You can choose a band, a movie, a TV show, celebrity, a book, or any other artifact of popular culture. It must however, fit the definition of popular culture we’ve established in the course. Your essay must include:

* A **summary** of the artifact and why it’s interesting or needs study
* A detailed **discussion** of the aspects of the pop culture artifact that is interesting to you including the ways in which your examination of the topic answers the “what’s new” and “so what” questions about the topic or your particular analysis.
* An **explanation** of why it’s important for us to understand this cultural artifact in the way you’re presenting it
* Quotes from people you’ve interviewed about the topic
* Summative comments about the **artifact** and how a **critical analysis** of it presented in the way you’ve done in the essay reveals certain things about it and **our society**
* In-text citations of **scholarship** you are drawing on to back your claims

Creative Project (Meets 4B-1, 2, 3):

In this assignment you should create a **thought provoking** presentation for the class that highlights issues of race, gender, class, representation, commodification, or anything else we’ve discussed in class with regard to popular culture. You can make a documentary, mashup video, poster series, photo essay, lecture, slideshow, interview, or anything else that **creatively** and **critically** explores aspects of our culture. You can use PowerPoint, Quicktime, or Windows Movie Maker. It can be filmed by you, created out of images, compilations of other videos, include text, voice-overs, simply be a lecture or presentation, or anything else you would like. More than anything: be creative; make us think.

Exam: Example exam questions (Meets 4B-1, 2, 3)

Which of the following is NOT one of the reasons why Disney has largely resisted cultural critique according to Watts?

* 1. **Because Disney has received backing from powerful and influential politicians**
  2. Because Disney is enormously popular and commercially successful
  3. Because much of the opinion on Disney is polarizing -- you either love it or you hate it
  4. Because the sheer output of Disney makes it hard to analyze as a whole

Which of the following is NOT one of the warnings that Street has for reading too much social significance into music?

* 1. **Record collections and playlists are not a memoir of a particular time**
  2. Music and fashion mark the passage of time, but do not make social/political change
  3. Music as product of political history is too simplistic
  4. There is no causal relationship between the times and its musical sounds

True or False: Many of the programs directed at children are violent and war related, and between 1983 and 1986, just after deregulation, war toy sales increased by 600 percent.

* **True**

Amusement parks such as Coney Island, Riverview Park, and various baseball stadiums were some examples of what?

* 1. Paces where poor and rich would intermingle
  2. Sources of financial hardship for cities
  3. **Demise of popular urban amusement**
  4. Places of white and black cultural unity

Grazian describes the shared feeling of identity in which individual members of a group experience a sense of unity and togetherness (such as watching a sporting event) as what?

* 1. Rituals of solidarity
  2. Imagined community of viewers
  3. Pseudo events
  4. **Collective effervescence**

Which of the following is NOT one of the social functions fulfilled by gossip about celebrity babies?

* 1. Provides a compromise between celebrities and gossip news in which everyone wins
  2. **Encourages reflection on our own mortality and the cycle of life**
  3. Encourages discussion of universal anxieties of pregnancy and childbirth
  4. Encourages sharing of opinions about parenting styles of others without appearing judgmental

**Sample Course Outline for ENL 372: Writing About Popular Culture**

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|  | **Topic** | **Assignment Due** | **Readings Due for Class** |
| Wk 1 | What is popular culture I |  | * “Fact and Fiction: An Introduction” Palahniuk (pdf) * “Popular Culture” Storey (pdf) |
| Wk 2 | What is Popular Culture II |  | * “The Straight Story: The Social Organization of Popular Culture” Grazian (Ch. 1) * “Pop Culture Has Turned Against the Liberal Arts” Craft * “Time Travel in Looper Dubious” Fetters * “Homeland vs. Last Resort” Rosenberg (pdfs) |
| Wk 3 | Television, Disney, and American Popular Culture icons | Blog Post 1 | * “Friday Night Lights: A Functionalist Approach to Popular Culture” Grazian (Ch. 2) * “Pop Culture in the Age of White Flight” Avila (pdf) * “Walt Disney: Art and Politics in the American Century” Watts (pdf) |
| Wk 4 | Film and Critical Approaches to Pop Culture | Blog Post 2 | * “Monsters Inc.: A Critical Approach to Popular Culture” Grazian (Ch. 3) * “Risky Business: How the Media and Culture Industries Work” Granzian (Ch 6) * “Why Sequels Will Never Die” Thompson (pdf) * “Film Media and American Tales” Franklin (pdf) * “Does the 4th Amendment Protect Us?” (pdf) |
| Wk 5 | Rock and Roll and Social Classes | Blog Post 3 | * “Bright Lights Big City: Creating Popular Culture” Grazian (Ch. 5) * “Manufacturing Consent” Herman & Chomsky (pdf) * “Rules of the Game: Cultural Consumption and Social Class” Grazian (Ch. 7) * “Rock, Pop, & Politics” Street (pdf) |
| Wk 6 | Rap & Hip Hop | Blog Post 4 | * “Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance” Martinez (pdf) * “Did the Decline of Sampling Cause the Decline of Political Hip Hop?” Nielson (pdf) * “Rap Music as Environmental Lit” Rosenthal (pdf) |
| Wk 7 | Rap, Hip Hop, & Reaggae | Blog Post 5 | * Dynamic Hack Covers NWA” Hess (pdf) * Bob Marley’s ‘Redemption Song’: The Rhetoric of Reggae & Rastafari” King & Jensen (pdf) |
| Wk 8 |  | **Essay 1**  **Mid Term Exam** |  |
| Wk 9 | Feminism and Popular Culture | Blog Post 6 | * “Six Degrees of Separation” Grazian (Ch. 4) * “Feminist Perspective” Sellnow * “Miley Cyrus twerking was Cultural Appropriation” Freeman * The Miley Cyrus Complex – An Ontology of Slut-Shaming” Penny * “Not Pretty Girls” McCarthy (pdf) * Shut Up & Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity” McRobbie (pdf) |
| Wk 10 | Beatlemania and feminism | Blog Post 7 | * “Beatlemania: A Sexually Defiant Consumer Subculture” Ehrenrich, et. al. (pdf) * The Tyra Banks Matriarchy: A Scholar's Take on America's Next Top Model” Fetters (pdf) * “Post Feminism and Popular Culture” McRobbie (pdf) |
| Wk 11 | Shopping, malls, and the Search for Meaning | Blog Post 8  **Essay 2** | * “The Searchers: Audiences and the Quest for Meaning in Popular Culture” Grazian (Ch. 8) * “Scenes from a Mall: Experiencing Popular Culture in Everyday Life” Grazian (Ch. 9) * “Rihanna Keeps the Diamonds in the Sky Cliché Burning” Kornhaber |
| Wk 12 | Rhetorical analysis of Popular Culture |  | * Rhetorical Structure of Oliver Stone’s JFK” Medhurst |
| Wk 13 | New theories in Pop Culture | Blog Post 9 | * “Toward a Theory of Popular Culture” Parker * “Pop Goes IR” Grayson (pdf) |
| Wk 14 |  | Blog Post 10  **Final Project Presentations**  **Final Exam** |  |