

UNIT 1: PORTRAIT OF A WORD Analytical Essay

Draft Due: Wed. March 6th || Final Project Due: Mon. March 11th

The Assignment

The words we choose matter. It makes a difference whether I say, "What do you want to eat tonight?" or "Where would you care to dine this evening?" even though both of those questions supposedly mean the same thing. Language doesn't just impart meaning, it tells us something about who the speaker (or writer) is, and what communities they are a part of.

We're all members of multiple communities, each with their own specific language rules. For this unit, we'll look at an excerpt from *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* in which Junot Diaz looks at one word from his community ("fuku") that has so much power it rules his whole country. He wants his readers to know the importance of this word because he thinks it affects them too. Queen Latifah writes about how important it is to her to be called a "queen" and not a "b**ch," even though so many rappers think it's fine to talk about women that way.

In this first assignment of the semester, you will write an analytical essay about the language of a community that you are a part of. You will do that just as Diaz and Latifah have, by focusing largely on a particular word or phrase that is at the heart of this community. First introduce your readers to your community (thinking carefully about the rules of a discourse community that we have studied). Then, you will tell your readers, mostly outsiders from this community, why this word MATTERS (and in doing so, teach us about the community itself!).

This should be a word that many of your readers are somewhat unfamiliar with- at least in the way you use it. So this isn't a word like "family" or "love," but an insider word, one that some people can use or others can't- or a word that means different things when different people use it. This word might be in a different language, or it might be a slang word.

The analytical essay will be approximately 1000 words.

Step One: Choose and INTRODUCE your Community!

Choose a community that you are a member of. When choosing a community, it is important to choose a specific community (like a discourse community) that is relatively specific and identifiable.

Introduce your community to outsiders. Introduce your community. Describe it. What details do outsiders need to know? Think particularly about the criteria of a discourse community that we have looked at. Describe for an outsider the rules of the Community, how you gain entry (if you can!), the group's values and beliefs. Is there a unique "identity kit"? Do they have a unique way of communicating?

Write an introduction to your community. It should be about 250 words. It might be helpful to FOCUS on the SPECIFIC LEXIS (specialized language) and other unique criteria.

Due: Thursday Feb. 22nd

Step Two: Choose a Word or Phrase and then show us the word in action.

1. What is a word or phrase unique to your community that people outside the community should know about? Why? Choose a word or a phrase that you are going to focus on just like Latifah focused on B***h and Diaz focused on Fuku.

The word should be a word that many of your readers are somewhat unfamiliar with- at least the way you (in your community) use it. So this isn't a word like "family" or "love," but an *insider* word, one that some people can use or others can't-or a word that means different things when different people use it. This word might be in a different language, or it may be a slang word. The word might provide information about your way of communicating, your values, your beliefs, your "identity kit" etc. It should be a word that provides information about your community or be meaningful to the community.

2. Describe WHY the word/ phrase is important to you and your community. What was your first experience of this word/ phrase? What was your first impression of its meaning? Has its meaning changed for you over time? Is there a way using this word correctly indicates membership in the community? Who is allowed to use this word and who is not? Or how does this word change when people from outside the community use the word? Who do you think needs to know about this word? What do they need to know? Why?
3. Show us the word in action- tell us a story or two about it. Show it being used! Brainstorm scenes and memories, important events having to do with this word. Remember: you need to make a point, not just ramble about the word or phrase you've chosen. Diaz' point is that the fuku came from the Dominican Republic and to the US, and American readers should pay attention, lest they get cursed with a fuku too! Latifah's point is that language matters- she's not a bi**ch, she's a queen. Teach us WHY the word matters to your community. In fact, more than teach us SHOW US!

Write a description of your word or phrase AND show the word or phrase in action. It should be about 750 words in total.

DUE: Wed.Feb. 28th

Step Three: Write about it!

Now it is time to write your analytic essay! You will use your writing from Step 1 and Step 2. Add an introduction and Conclusion. Add transitions that link the ideas together and really, meaningfully connect your ideas.

You might write about the important word/ phrase of your community by outright explaining it to us, or you might just... use the language of your community in writing to show us how it's done! In other words, you are free to write in any way that feels natural to you and that you think best expresses the importance and meaning of the word you choose. You may either write in what you consider the language of your community or you may write in "standard written English," (SWE) if you like. *Either way, even if you write in SWE, you should be able to explain why you've chosen the language you have. Why is this language the best tool for the*

job? This whole essay is about analyzing LANGUAGE. Why are you choosing to write in the style (academic, informal, etc) that you are choosing).

Determine your audience and the purpose. Think about how to write your essay in a way that will match your intended audience and purpose.

The essay must be at least 1000 words

Step Four: Revise and Edit!

This task is often forgotten and glossed over. It is actually one of the most important parts of the writing process. We are going to separate the revision and editing process and really focus on what it means to make meaningful changes to our writing. We will also discuss the process of peer revision to allow our classmates to help us become stronger and more effective writers.

Format

Each component of the essay must be typed. Your essay must be double-spaced and have one-inch margins. Please add the word count at the top of the project. Please spell-check and grammar-check the project.

WHAT WILL I GET GRADED ON?

This assignment is 15% of your grade! What will I be looking at? A whole combination of criteria!

AUDIENCE: Aside from me, who would you want to read an article about your community? Are you writing in a way that would reach that audience?

ORGANIZATION/ STRUCTURE: Now, consider your audience further. What can you do to keep them reading? Nobody on this earth will read an essay that is one three-page long paragraph or just a random list of thoughts about this word. You wouldn't! So, strive for an engaging, clear article with a point that readers can follow.

PURPOSE: KEEP thinking about your audience. Is your essay teaching your readers something or helping them see something in a new way? Do your readers know why we are

talking about the word or phrase you've chosen? DO YOU HAVE A MAIN POINT or are you just rambling about the word/phrase?

DICTION (language choice): You can write with whatever diction (style of language) you choose, but it must be the best language for the job- as you see it. It also must be at least partially in English. That is, you may write in Spanglish if you want, but I am not able to read a whole paper in Urdu. (Some Urdu is great, though!) Take note of the way Diaz goes in between Spanish and English, though he is writing for an English-speaking audience.

ENGAGEMENT WITH "MENTOR TEXTS": I'm not asking you to quote from Diaz or Abdurraqib in your final essay—you are just using them as examples of ways you could go with this type of assignment. I do expect you to read the articles closely as a writer and choose at least one technique or style of their writing that you would like to emulate.

WORD COUNT: At least 1000 words