

Sample Summary Paragraphs (taken from student writing)

In the essay “A Look Under the Hoodie,” journalist Dennis Wilson traces the origin and history of the hooded sweatshirt. He explains that, although popularized by the character Rocky Balboa in the film *Rocky* (1976), the hooded sweatshirt actually began in the 1930’s as a means to keep laborers warm during the cold, New York winters. During the 1970’s, however, the hoodie (thanks to *Rocky*) became known as the appropriate attire of the tough, “workingman’s hero, a street thug, a striving athlete” (632). Therefore, the hoodie entered the popular imagination associated with a specific type of person, the social and economic underdog. Simultaneously, Wilson notes, the hoodie was developing in the streets of New York City as emblematic of the growing hip-hop culture, the perfect means to create a “shroud of anonymity” for graffiti writers and muggers alike. The common theme between these two types of hoodie-donning personalities is that the hoodie, as Wilson argues, “signifies outcast status” (632). In other words, the hoodie was a way for subcultural groups to both identify with other members of their own social and economic class and outwardly represent themselves as resisting the trends and lifestyles of the middle and upper classes. Wilson points out that the rising popularity of hip-hop led the co-optation of the hoodie by mainstream and corporate clothing makers, like Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren. He deplores this practice, adopting local trends and selling them back to the mass public, and suggests that corporations are essentially stealing the allure of the original idea, removing or redefining the context, and then attempting to make it appear as though the corporate

version was part and parcel of the movement all along. Wilson's little known explanation of the popularity of the hoodie may, therefore, actually be a useful way of understanding how corporate conglomerates continue to post huge profits, despite the fact that more and more people are attempting to "buy local."

Robert Scholes, academic scholar and author of the novel *Protocols of Reading*, points out the ability of texts to manipulate readers in his essay titled "On Reading a Video Text." In his essay, Scholes talks about the tools that creators use to control what the viewer sees and understands within texts and the ability for such texts to deliver persuasive messages. He uses a well-known Budweiser commercial to illustrate his claim that commercials build upon what a viewer already knows or believes to create and sell a product. The commercial Scholes analyzes follows a black man who has just had the opportunity to umpire a big league game. The umpire makes a call in the game that the opposing team's manager disagrees with, who then comes out to argue with the umpire. The umpire stands firm in his decision of the call. Later, the umpire runs into the angry manager at a bar, where the manager toasts him with a Budweiser for making the right decision and making the call stand. Scholes argues that viewers react well to this because it is not only selling the beer; it is also selling the idea of the "American Dream". The audience wants the umpire to make it in the big leagues, and is happy when he succeeds because it enforces the notion that "America works". This is what Scholes calls "cultural reinforcement," because it confirms and re-presents the ideological positions of viewers (para 4). Scholes is concerned that most viewers are

unaware of how these texts manipulate them into buying into something other than what is obviously being advertised. Scholes' essay could be useful way of understanding how visually-oriented texts affect people and, most importantly, provides a framework for analyzing the barrage of advertising media that most modern Americans see every day.

Cynthia L. Selfe, a Humanities professor, speaks about the positive and negative representations of technology in her essay, "Lest We Think the Revolution Is a Revolution: Images of Technology and the Nature of Change." Selfe states it is unwise to associate technological progress with social progress because, in reality, society is far from overriding social injustices. She suggests that technology promotes the idea that everyone has equal chances and access, since these are also ideas that have been assigned to computer and internet usage. This media narrative suggests that one can reap the benefits of hard work and establish a perfect life portrayed in certain advertisements regardless of race or class through their consumption of technology (791). Selfe explains, "[The Land of Equal Opportunity] is available to all citizens who place a value on innovations, individualism, and competition, especially when tempered by a neighborly concern for less fortunate others that is the hallmark of our democracy" (790-791). Therefore, those who follow the standard "American way" will ultimately have no significant problem using or accessing technology. She continues explaining that, "Our cultural experience, indeed, tells us something very different – that America is the land of opportunity only for some people" (792). What Selfe means by this is that as much as it is reinforced in media that all people are able to strive for the same goals, do the same jobs, and simply get to "be" who they are, this is not an accurate depiction of life. She explains that living life is proof that the system has not changed, and is continually inhibiting the opportunities of historically oppressed people, despite the fact that technology was supposed to be, and is often seen as, the "great equalizer." Selfe's analysis of media representation of technology could be used as a way to understand how a variety of image-based media can be used to create a perception of reality that

does not necessarily line up with people's lived experience.