

SEMINAR ESSAY DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

This guide is intended to provide some thoughts, questions, and examples to help you to develop your thesis statement and essay about the seminar text. No matter which idea you use to develop your essay, be attentive to the “key concepts” from the syllabus that correlate to the text (even if we don’t seem to cover it in seminar!) Remember that you may also connect your thoughts on the text to other program activities. Though the ideas in this guide are by no means meant to limit you, there is such a thing as missing the mark.

THOUGHTS

Learn how artists relate history and place in creating works of art with a social message.

In the work of the “Culture Jammers” it might be said that the history “of the moment” is the greatest concern. Though their critique of popular culture sees the roots of our values and excess in the past, their art focusses on reclaiming the images that reflect and create our sense of Now.

Question the foundations of knowledge.

Perhaps it would be best to substitute “identity” for “knowledge” in this phrase. Culture Jammers are concerned with what makes us who we are; they are concerned with the circumstances of our intellectual and creative development; they are concerned with the whole notion of identity, how it is used/abused and how it can be reclaimed.

Identify and critique patterns across time, culture, and texts

Culture Jammers see themselves as being the avant garde of the next big liberation movement. How is their mission the same and different from, say, the women’s movement? Movements of the last few decades all seem to find themselves in Johnson’s PP&D; how does the mission of culture jammers fit into Johnson’s thinking? Does advertising oppress us?

Understand the role of perspective in the telling of history

Generally, we can see how the media tells us the story of our lives, the news of the world, etc. But perhaps it is too easy to simply say that “the people” are ignored and the “media” controls all perspectives. What does the text tell us about why this situation persists and how anyone could be satisfied with it?

Question what in history is worth telling, valuable enough to preserve, and to understand the struggle that occurs in the attempts to preserve alternative versions.

Culture Jam directly chronicles the struggle for alternative histories/alternative representations of culture. They are often criticized for their methods, their choice of issue, and their focus on relatively “artsy” graphic design tactics when they should be, for instance, saving the whales. One could ask, “what is worth telling, and what battles need to be fought?”

KEY CONCEPTS

- learn how artists relate history and place in creating works of art with a social message.
- Question the foundations of knowledge
- Identify and critique patterns across time, culture, and texts
- Understand the role of perspective in the telling of history
- Question what in history is worth telling, valuable enough to preserve, and to understand the struggle that occurs in the attempts to preserve alternative versions.
- Critically evaluate, analyze, and interpret various sources of information around a particular topic.

General QUESTIONS

How are the culture jamming tactics different in both product and process from the works of, for instance, Suzanne Lacey?

What aspects of their critique of contemporary popular culture are most compelling?

Do the tactics/artworks of the culture jammers seem to fulfill their goals?

What is the role of capitalism in producing certain cultural/social problems?

In order to counter the influence of the media, must one have an alternative vision of what culture SHOULD be?

Should corporations be protected under the first amendment (is advertising free speech?)?

In what ways should the producers and distributors of entertainment and news media be responsible for the effects of their products?

[See left column for more questions]

GOTO: www.adbusters.org

