

**Assignment: Writing Option Two: Final Paper (35% of your final grade)****Due: Wednesday, December 10 by 5PM***Mechanics: 8-10 pages, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1" (not 1 ½") margins, MLA format, including In-text Citation and Works Cited List***Final paper writing**

The final paper is an opportunity to pursue a claim that interests you in relation to our class readings. It must engage a cultural text (from class readings or elsewhere) through a critical lens you create from two critical essays to answer a critical question about society, culture, and/or our present historical moment. You must also include at least one researched, academic source in your paper, too, so that your Works Cited list must be at least 4 items long. Part of your intellectual task in this paper is to combine your readings of critical texts and use them to read a cultural text (or vice versa). In class we'll discuss critical and cultural texts in order to offer ways of thinking that can grow into paper topics. We will, for instance, spend class time suggesting critical lenses and applying them to the cultural texts we read. Most class discussions can grow into a paper topic complex enough for an 8-10 page paper. Your Paper Proposal will be an opportunity to hear from me about your claim, critical lens, and cultural text before you begin your paper – use this to work out your claim.

The final paper *must* include **one** cultural text, **two** critical readings (at least one of which must be from class but you may use one critical essay not in our syllabus (you must discuss this critical essay with me first)), **AND one** outside **academic** sources to include *only* scholarly journal articles of critical/theoretical thinking, literary criticism, or historical evidence (in other words, *not* newspapers, popular magazines, websites, dictionaries, encyclopedias, interviews, wiki, your mom, etc., although you can use these *in addition to* your two outside sources). Outside sources may include: academic sources discussing our critical essays *or* another theory/discussion of the social categories/stereotypes you want to analyze *or* some literary criticism or another reading of your cultural text *or* some social history that explores the racial, gendered, or sexual formation or category you've chosen.

The final paper must formulate an **academic argument** that answers a **critical question**. The question and the answer/claim of your paper must be **complex** enough to sustain an argument for 8-10 pages and **specific** enough to adequately critically engage your ideas. The final paper must include **close readings** of (at least) one cultural text and adequate **critical analysis** of all the **textual evidence** you offer from the literary, scholarly, and/or historical texts you use as part of your argument (which means close readings of the critical texts, too).

**Writing Guidelines for Excellent Papers**

1. *Every* paper must include a discussion of your intertextual **critical lens**, including 1) synthesizing the main claims of two critical essays and 2) analyzing the specific ideas you are using and their implications and 3) synthesizing those ideas into your own critical lens.
2. *Every* paper must introduce and contextualize their **cultural text**, including author, date published, etc.
3. *Every* paper must adequately **introduce one outside source** – name the author, the title, where and when it was published and give a brief synopsis of main claims before focusing on the points you want to use in your paper.
4. *Every* paper must include **close readings** of a cultural text *through* your critical lens.
5. *Every* paper must have a clear **organization** that introduces and **connects** all your points/evidence/readings to each other and to your main claim.

6. *Every* paper must have **transitions** that make connections between points and paragraphs.
7. *Every* paper must have an **introduction** that *clearly* states your claim and a **conclusion** that does more than reiterate your argument.
8. *Every* paper must include a **Works Cited list and In-Text Citations** of all textual evidence.

### **Narrowing your claim**

Any of the “keywords” of our class can be used to think about a main claim, although they need to be further narrowed to a specific claim. All papers, for instance, will need to ask: What political, cultural, social, or historical work is your cultural text doing? Your claim will be narrowed by the interrelation between your chosen topic, your critical lens, and your interpretation of your chosen cultural text. You can really begin with an interest in either of these. Narrowing might include first discussing a large social issue or theme in our class but focusing in on one aspect of that theme (for instance, focusing on the fictional representation of the figure of the “African American woman” to think about the connection between race and gender). Your argument will be built on specific ideas in your critical lens and quotes or scenes from your cultural text. I mean here that you must introduce your topic, critical lens, and cultural text but you can then focus on the parts that help you make your argument. *One way to make a claim more specific and complex is to ask why and how after every question you ask, claim you choose, and close reading you do.*

Here are a few questions to ask and ways to think about choosing and narrowing a topic:

1. Everyone needs to analyze a **cultural text** but you might begin by choosing a cultural text first and discussing the way it represents intersections of race/gender/sexuality. The text might be:

- One of our class cultural texts
- Another literary, drama, or performance text
- A film, television, or online text
- A visual or photographic text
- A musical text (opera, song, video)
- An advertising campaign
- Any other cultural text that you discuss with me

To make a claim about these you’ll want to discuss what any of our critical essays might have to say about any of their representations of race/gender/sexuality. You may want to build your critical lens around the representations you see in the cultural text. You’ll also want to ask questions about the cultural text such as: How (and why) were these texts reviewed and discussed when they were first published or shown? Or in our present moment? What kinds of interpretations have been produced about this text? What is the “normal” reading of it? What are the historical conditions of the texts we read? And of *our* reading of those texts? Critical topic questions might be: How might we think about the way the *Native* films represent African American men? How does a particular television show rely on certain stereotypes for its humor?

2. You might focus on a particular **social figure or issue** and then find a cultural text that represents it in a certain way. What kinds of “figures” do our critical readings discuss? How can these critical ideas be used to read culture? How do our readings of the cultural texts challenge or reinforce these critical figurations? What, then, makes these readings similar or different? Choose a figure (such as the “African American wo/man” or the “American man” or the “queer of color”) and analyze how it is constructed in the literary text. Critical topic questions might include: What does Fauset’s story reveal about racialized gendered social categories for African American women in 1940s America? You might also focus on a broader social issue or historical event.

What broader **social issue** does your cultural text represent or engage or discuss? How does it critique/reinforce/challenge/change ways of thinking about this social issue? How can it be situated into the discourse that exists about this issue? How can your reading be used to change ways of thinking about this issue? What do cultural texts reveal to us about particular historical events? In this option, you'd want to use our critical readings to analyze how a cultural text represents one of these issues or events.

3. You might focus on a particular **stereotype** and discuss how it is represented in a cultural text, researching the power relations behind its emergence in order to ask: What does your text reveal about the social definition of those being represented by that stereotype? And/or those *not* being represented by it? Who benefits from stereotyping in this text and how? And how is this text questioning those benefits? How might the cultural text challenge, reinforce, or change our understanding of what that stereotype or even what a stereotype is? You might use a critical lens to describe how race, gender, and sexuality intersect to build specific stereotypes. You could discuss a stereotype that describes you or with which you have experience. For instance, you could do a critical reading of yourself as a racial, gendered, or sexual subject in society or you could analyze a specific stereotype as a social text that frames the way you understand "the Other." (Don't discuss anything that makes you uncomfortable and also, if you are researching a stereotype about an "Other," be respectful of those whose everyday experience is affected by this stereotype.) To accomplish this paper you should:

1. Define and describe a very **specific stereotype** including its basis (Physical appearance? Activities? Cultural definitions? Race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, age, ethnicity, nationality or some combination of these?) Discuss where the aspects of your stereotype might **originate**. Are they things one cannot change or choices one has made (and what affected those choices)? How is this stereotype used by stereotypers? By the stereotyped? Think about the historical, social, and cultural **context** of that stereotype.

Your chosen stereotype might include any of the following:

- Jock, Popular, Nerd, Cheerleader, Emo, Goth, Frat Boy/Sorority Girl
- Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality, Ethnicity, Religion
- Nationality, Regionality (e.g. where one is from in WA or the US, Rural/Urban)
- Work, study interests or hobbies (e.g. Gamer, stereotypes for each major)

2. Find a **cultural text that represents your stereotype** to close read, using a critical lens from our readings to analyze the **power relations** surrounding your stereotype. Think about what our readings might say about your chosen stereotype and about how this stereotype affects how others see you and/or how you define others.

Critical topic questions might include: How does the Jezebel stereotype affect the way Black women are viewed in America? How do racial stereotypes work in Hughes's stories? How does Stein represent racialized gendered stereotypes? Racialized sexual stereotypes?

I'm also happy to discuss other possibilities for final papers with you with the only caveat being that you must analyze some kind of cultural or social text (perhaps an ethnographic or interview text you would like to engage) and use the required two critical essays and one researched source.