Sample English 099 Assignment on Stereotypes in the Media

English 099
Dr. R. Morris
Assignment: Analyzing Stereotypes in the Media

The Purpose.

What is a stereotype? If you do not know what a stereotype is, defining this term is your first task. Then you will have to decide if stereotypes are harmful (and how). Do stereotypes impact the way we act towards or feel about others or even ourselves? Are we, in turn, judged according to these preconceptions? What makes someone cool or “in?” Why are some people accepted and others not? How much are kids influenced by the images or stereotypes they see every day in the media?

For this paper, select (only) ONE advertisement and closely examine the stereotypes you find in it. On the surface the images of people may seem pretty simple or even harmless, but I want you to dig in deeper and uncover what is really going on in regard to the ways people are portrayed. What messages are sent by these stereotypes? What is the impact of these images on children? How, you ask, do I go about this? Start with the critical tools we will discuss—KEY TRAITS, EXPECTATIONS, CULTURAL MYTHS, POINTS OF VIEW, MASTER TERMS, and LINE OF ACTION—and decode the stereotypes in ONE ad.

The Audience. For this assignment, I want you to write for parents with young children. Choose someone you know who has kids. What do they know? What don’t they know but need to? How are you going to reach them? Why do others need to know this information?

A Method of Analysis:

♦ Find the SURFACE. Look at the details. Find your key traits and make a list. These tell the surface narrative, the obvious picture. Start by looking at what particular types of people are used. Look specifically at the Externals: race, class, age, ethnicity, body type, clothing, jewelry, “toys” (such as cars, pools, motorcycles, games, servants), home, place to hang out. Also look at the Internals: their behaviors, attitudes, the way they treat others, the way they are treated by others. Don’t rush through this; take a good in-depth look at your ad. ♦

♦ Move to the SUBSURFACE. What is used here and thus privileged and portrayed as positive? Why? What is portrayed as negative? What expectations do you notice? That is, what values, behaviors, and attitudes do you find in the characters in the ad? Is there a contradiction between the surface values (what we see without thinking about) and the subsurface (the messages we don’t readily notice)? Why? Who is your ad aimed at? Who is excluded? Your job is to use evidence to support your reading, your interpretation, of your ad. ♦

♦ Make an ANALYTICAL LEAP. Finally, make a larger application. This is the “what’s the point” part. Find the Master Terms. What larger issues are involved? Are ideas such as insider/outsider, acceptable/unacceptable, secure/insecure, or cool/uncool set up? How do the values, behaviors, expectations, and attitudes that you have uncovered in the stereotypes of this seemingly simple ad relate to the society at large? That is, how do these stereotypes impact upon or relate to kids? Do these stereotypes have implications in relation to our children’s views on gender, race, class, age, body type/aesthetics, sexuality, etc.? Where do you “buy in?” Can you resist the images these stereotypes attempt to “sell you?” As you look for insights, use the article we have read and class discussion to give you insights and strategies for writing out your ideas. ♦
Remember the other Invention strategies we have discussed in class. Use several of these—including some you might not usually use. I want you to turn in all of these Invention exercises when your final draft is due, so keep/print out/record these. I will go over these, and we will work on these in class.

In moving to Arrangement, think about what areas you want to discuss and how you want to present them. Look at the Writing Process Tip Sheet I gave you. Use some of these strategies to help you find a pattern. I will also give you an Organization Map to help you start finding a sequence or order. Refer to The Little Brown Handbook—especially pages 42-46—for good organization strategies/tips. I will discuss Revision strategies in class, and we will work on Style issues when you get your papers back.

Suggestions.

♣Before you begin to write, you need to map out, plan, and/or outline your essay. Think about building your paragraphs around the particular images, ideas, or issues you find in your ad. Your critical grid should help you get ideas for this “road map,” and you must turn the grids and your plan in with your final draft. ♣

♣As you get ready to write, remember that you cannot write about everything in these forms of media. Furthermore, these questions are here to get you started; you should not just answer them in writing. You need to start sorting and developing your ideas into a coherent academic essay. We’ll begin this process in class, but I want you to become aware of your writing process and how effective it is (or isn’t). If your current process is not as effective as it should be, consider what we’ve discussed in class about writing (particularly, the Writing Process Tip Sheet) and how you can make writing an easier and more effective process for you. ♣

♣As you move from planning to writing, think about how to best prepare yourself physically and mentally to do the actual job of writing. Set up the best conditions for your success. If your usual methods of writing are not working, try others that we’ve discussed in class or that are suggested by the Little Brown Handbook. ♣

♣If you get stuck, do not sit and stare at the screen or page for hours. Find someone to talk this out with: call a classmate, talk to someone at hand, go to the Writing Center, or see/call me. Moreover, you do not always have to begin writing the first or opening paragraph. You can also start on a part of the body of your essay that is most clear in your mind, then do the introduction. ♣

♣If you freewrite to get started, be brave enough to go back and delete the early writing that does not apply to your essay. I have often seen freewriting produce a focus, but usually several pages later. If you use this method, you must use a strong hand in editing this work down.

♣Also, if you find your focus or viewpoint changing as you write, don’t change the body of your essay or force it to unnaturally conform; go back and change the introduction, topic direction, and thesis to fit your new and improved direction. ♣

You must turn in: 1) rough draft, 2) the actual ads or a video tape of the commercial or television show 3) complete, detailed Critical Grid Sheets, 4) Organization Mapping or plans or outlines, and 5) Revision Mapping/Peer Editing Sheets. All these are part of your composition process and must be turned in with the final paper. They will be 10% of your final paper grade, and you must turn in all these to get the 10% credit. It’s all or nothing. Also, if you miss the early drafting days, Rough Draft day or do not have the writing for that day, you will lose up to 10%. We will work on this process in class; we will especially work on development and arrangement of ideas together.
Your paper should be a minimum of 3 1/2 pages long, word-processed, MLA formatted, standard 12 point font, double spaced. Use good standard composition form and MLA formatting. Off-topic papers will fail. If you have problems or questions, call or see me. These essays will be due _______________________.

I will give bonus points to those students who get help in the Writing Center for Invention or Arrangement work. Be sure to take this assignment sheet and have specific areas/problems you wish to discuss with the tutor.

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Writing Center Bonus Points

______________________________ (print your name) visited the Writing Center on  
______________________________ (write in date), and we worked on  

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Signed ________________________________ (tutor’s name)

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