

## STORY ADAPTATION

In every culture in recorded history, and in every language alive or extinct, people have told stories. Story and narrative are (and have always been) our primary vehicles for sharing cultural knowledge. Our affinity for creating and consuming stories is an essential component of our overall cognitive framework. It is how, as a language-using, meaning-creating sub-group of bipedal great apes, we share the abstractions of sound and symbol upon which we have built the entirety of our civilization. The conceptual foundation of our ability to communicate in symbols as opposed to grunts is organized to tell stories – about love, about honor and sanctity, about war and competition, and about our very survival.

The *ur-myth*, or the first story that is told throughout history in every language, is one of adaptation. It is the story of surviving the inevitable challenges of life by evolving in the face of these challenges. It is the story of this redemption, or the consequences of its failure. This universal story structure, brought to popular study by the anthropologist Joseph Campbell, is the one of human survival.

For this assignment, you will tell a story of your own. More to the point, you will adapt a story that in some respect represents the *ur-myth*. Why adapt? Because all stories are adaptations from other stories. Stories aren't as much created as they evolve through adaptation to new needs and circumstances. These stories are part of the living culture that we generate by making meaning with the materials we have available to us.

What story? Well, that is up to you. Don't have a story? Of course you do. Your life is filled with them. From childhood until now you have consumed and absorbed them constantly. Many of the stories of your life contain elements of the *ur-myth*. What you will do is re-tell this story. Do so however you wish, in whatever media supports your ability to retell the story, but be sure it is a story that *you* consider worth retelling.

Specifically, what the deliverables of your project will be are:

- 1) A creative work of your own design, in a format and medium of your choosing that tells an intelligible story. Past students have used paintings, cupcakes, rap videos, visual essays, collages, dioramas, LEGOs, performances, and PowerPoints among other ideas. If you are wondering what I would think of your choice of story and medium, you can ask me. Just be sure that it is a story that *you* have adapted for this class and that it represents *your* experience in words, pictures, sound or other media/modalities.
- 2) A short essay in MLA format that reflects on the experience of adapting your story and addresses the following: What story did you adapt? Why? What are the heroic elements that speak to you? What creative choices did you make while adapting the story? How would you characterize the experience of creating an adaptation?

As you complete this assignment, keep in mind the overall goals of your work:

- Choose a story to adapt that you can portray in a personally meaningful retelling and retell it through a new medium and/or modality.
- “Locate” the story in a new cultural context—from the context you first consumed it to the present one of this class and this audience. In other words, don’t try to retell the same story in the same way.
- In your reflection, as you answer the questions (or choose your own questions to respond to) speak to what you learned in the experience. Show a relationship between your own ideas and experiences as the adapter, and the other voices within the story.
- Show insight through critical self-reflection that challenges previous assumptions that you have held about yourself or the story you have adapted.

### Directions

- a. Read “Excerpts from Myth and the Movies” by Stuart Voytilla (in Drive). This reading discusses the *ur-myth*.
- b. Write a two-paragraph proposal for your project where you discuss the story you want to adapt, it’s meaning to you, and how you want to adapt it (due no later than 3/22 on Blackboard Discussion). If I see a problem with your idea or execution, I will let you know, but you don’t need my approval to begin work. This proposal is just to keep me informed.
- c. If your creative work is not something you can upload to Drive directly, you must find a way to document it so that it can be uploaded. Don’t worry about not being an artist. The purpose of this project is to simply get you thinking about the experience of adapting a story.
- d. Write a 750’ish word (around 3-4 pages double spaced) reflective essay in MLA format that integrates the following aspects of your experience:
  - i. Introduces, describes, and situates the adaptation, the original story, and your connection to it. Think about how will you frame this experience. What is the main idea? What are the supporting ideas? How do they go together?
  - ii. Describes the experience of creating the adaptation “thickly,” using sensory details (i.e., touch, smell, sight, hearing, and taste). Did it affect you? If so, how?
  - iii. Discusses what impact completing the project has had on you. This does not need to be a profound impact—only a sense of what the experiences was like. What were you thinking about? Did anything surprise you about retelling this story? Would you tell the story in the same way again?

### Schedule

Here are the due dates for the remainder of the project:

March 22<sup>nd</sup> – Two paragraph proposal on Blackboard Discussion.

April 5<sup>th</sup> – Story Adaptation due in Drive.

April 7<sup>th</sup> – Reflective Essay due in Drive.

## Assignment

### Film From Literature

ENG 2400-OL67 (#35735)

Due: 4/7/21 (Monday)

### Grade

This project is worth 150 points.

- The two-paragraph proposal is worth 15 points.
- The adaptation is worth 70 points.
- The reflective essay is worth 65 points.

Your grade will depend on timely and thoughtful completion of each aspect of the project to produce an engaging adaptation and a robust reflective response.

## INTERTEXTUAL FILM JOURNAL (525 POINTS POSSIBLE)

Each week of class, you will be responsible for watching a primary film and writing a 250+ word journal entry on it in MLA format. You will write 13 journal entries on the primary films we screen plus two additional films from the comparison list for a total of 15 entries in all. Any additional film journal entries you write (we screen a total of 26 films) will be eligible for extra credit to supplement your grade.

While the content of your journal entries is up to you and open-ended by design, you should produce a basic “intertextual analysis.” What this means is that you will focus your journal entry on your chosen film, but you will also make the object of your analysis other media, including the assigned comparison film, academic readings, adapted literary sources that inform the film, published film criticisms, and other texts such as blogs, interviews, parodies, etc. Each week, I will assign a small selection of these other works that connect to the films in ways that we will be discussing in class. You may use one or more of these works in your film journal, or you may source your own comparison texts to include. While you decide the content and analysis of your film journal entries, they must not do the following:

- 1) Be simple synopses of the film or other media. You do not need to explain what happens except and unless it is directly relevant to a larger, more incisive point you are making. I’m looking for your ideas as they range across several texts and synthesize what you feel are key points to make.
- 2) Be simple “compare and contrast” exercises among the film and related “texts.” Your effective analysis will develop some relationship between two or more texts and the analysis will be their common frames of reference. This frame of reference will be derived from independent analyses of the things to be compared, much like you have been doing informally with your journal responses.

So, what should you do? As you analyze the film along with its antecedent/consequent texts, you may see common relationships or themes. Use these themes to roughly develop a main idea (you do not need a “thesis”). An effective intertextual analysis is organized around this main idea that is argued by the writer (you!)

For example:

If I was writing an intertextual analysis of *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*, I wouldn’t just write what happens in the film or compare it to another Star Wars film. I might link it to the stories of the larger Star Wars canon of lore. Or even better, I might reach back to the director’s first film, *THX 1138*, which has a radically different sci-fi storyline, but had the visually compelling cinematics that paved the way for Star Wars. I might explore its relationship to the samurai films of Akira Kurosawa and the complex “spaghetti western” film characters of Sergio Leone. The basis of comparison, or the main idea, in this instance would be the story-telling and visual traditions that Star Wars drew from that allowed it to be a pop culture success. And then, the influence it had itself on future films, including an entire story universe that grew from it.

Of course, your film journal entries **DO NOT** need to be this complex or well-researched. You simply need to watch the movie(s), read the text(s), and have something (hopefully) insightful to write about that connects them. To maximize the credit you receive, prepare yourself with notes on key ideas and the better your entries will be.

## DIRECTIONS

For background on what intertextuality is, read the short essay, “Semiotics for Beginners” by Daniel Chandler (in our class Drive folder). This article will give you a theoretical sense of what intertextuality is and the vocabulary associated with it.

For each primary film we screen (plus two more of your choice), write a 250+ word MLA-style film journal entry in MS Word format and upload it to your individual drive folder with the file name <film title – Journal Entry – Your Last Name>. Your journal entry may be on a topic or focus of your own choosing, but should align with the film and your interest in it. *Reflective* intertextual analysis where you will develop a larger narrative of significance around a film that you found to be particularly impactful is encouraged. This is a fancy way of saying that your own opinion, supported by evidence from the film and other sources is most welcomed. Ideally, your analysis will cohere around a main idea that presents **your own clear frame of reference** and **develops an argument** around this main idea that falls within the frame. Your frame of reference should be centered on what you personally found relevant between the film and its intertextual/metatextual/hypotextual relationships (from the chapter above). I encourage you to think broadly and loosely as well as deeply and narrowly through this process.

Remember that while you must write 15 different film journal entries, and they need to show some level of preparation, each one does not need to be your best writing or your best ideas. I encourage you to explore, take chances, and think through your writing as you explore something that struck you as interesting (or maybe even profoundly boring) about the film. Think of these as potential seeds for further exploration if you were called upon to write something more extensive about the film in question. They are exploratory in nature.

## EVALUATION

Each film journal entry is worth up to 35 points (525 points total). You will be graded on complete entries, as well as the basic quality of your preparation to discuss the film and one or more other sources. Use the basic MLA format for your analysis. Show evidence of revision and editing.

Keep in mind the following:

- **PLEASE USE THE PREFERRED DOCUMENT TITLE FORMAT.**
- Your analysis must be in MLA format, and in .doc, .docx, or .rtf file formats. For this assignment I will not accept Google Docs, printed summaries, or .pdf documents.
- You can find an example of MLA format on the Purdue OWL by searching for “MLA Sample Essay.” I’m not grading you on whether your MLA style is perfect, but it should be approximately correct.
- Your analysis should be re-read and at least copy-edited before you hand it in.
- Film journal entries are due as files located in your individual folders the Thursday that we screen the film in our synchronous sessions.

## MULTI-MODAL FILM COMPARISON (200 POINTS POSSIBLE)

This intertextual comparison of your chosen films will be more than a “compare and contrast” exercise. Your effective comparison will be an analysis presented via a PowerPoint deck (or Google Slides) that develops a set of commonalities among a film that we cover in this class with another film of your choice and creates an analysis out of this comparison. The frame(s) of comparison that you will use are to be derived from your own interpretations of the films and any additional cited research that you do to support your position(s).

As you analyze the films, and conduct your research, look for common relationships. Use these relationships to develop a main idea (you do not need a “thesis”) to anchor your presentation. An effective intertextual analysis will do more than simply list what is similar or different among the two films being compared. It will do more than present a common theme between the films. An effective analysis will develop AND analyze the similarities and differences between the films and their supporting materials along one or more common themes. The main idea for the analysis is what you develop out of your exploration of the two films.

### For example:

If I was creating an intertextual analysis of *Black Panther* (dir. Ryan Coogler) and *Boyz n the Hood* (dir. John Singleton), I might look at these films as black male coming-of-age stories with very different depictions of the relationship between father and son, and the relevance of the father-son relationship. In both movies, father-son relationships are seen as relevant—almost sacrosanct. But they function differently across families and with different outcomes for Trey, Ricky/Doughboy, and T’Challa. I would trace the influence of the source material for the films (e.g., a comic with a complex history vs. John Singleton’s early life), and the larger cultural moment the films were released in (e.g., the emergence of the New Black Cinema for *Boyz* and emergence of Trumpism for *Black Panther*). I would examine what aspects of the film (e.g., cinematography, animation, sound, etc.) that contributed to building the sense of relationship between father and son. And out of this, I would develop the main idea (I think...haven’t actually done it yet) that in both films, there is a common ideological depiction of the father as necessarily being at the center of family structure for adolescent males to develop into men. If the father isn’t there, his presence has to be either accounted for (like with Trey) and reconciled with (like for T’Challa) or there can be tragic consequences (like Ricky and Doughboy).

## DIRECTIONS

Read the short essay, “Semiotics for Beginners” by Daniel Chandler (in our class Drive folder). This article will give you a theoretical sense of what intertextuality is and the vocabulary associated with it.

Using the language and ideas from this essay, along with your own interest in the films you choose, you will compose a PowerPoint deck that develops a larger narrative of significance around films that you found to be particularly impactful. You will establish **your own clear frame of reference** (like I have done above) that **develops an argument** (like I begin to do above) around a main idea across two films. Your frame of reference should be centered on what you personally found relevant between the films and their

intertextual/metatextual/hypotextual relationships (see the reading). I encourage you to think broadly and loosely first, then deeply and narrowly through this process.

Your PowerPoint deck should have the following components:

- A title slide with an informative title to your presentation, date, your name, and the class.
- An abstract slide that discusses in one or two paragraphs the films you are working with, what intersection of ideas are under analysis, what evidence and findings you are presenting, and what relevance exists for the reader to take away.
- 8 to 10 slides of key points that you develop with one major idea per slide. These ideas must be synthesized (e.g., not just one simple idea unless it is a very, very good one), interconnected with each other, and transitioned effectively from slide to slide. Use images and or clips of film as appropriate.
- A conclusion slide that presents something new (e.g., not just recapitulates what you have already presented).
- A references slide, including the readings and movies you used, in MLA format.
- A final slide with a two-paragraph reflection on what you were trying to accomplish with this project and how you think you did.

## EVALUATION

This assignment is worth 200 points. You will be graded on the quality of your analysis the films, your ability to use the terminology of film and intertextuality effectively, and producing a coherent, well-constructed slide deck of your own design, and reflecting productively on this process. Use the basic MLA format for your analysis. Show evidence of revision and editing.

The deliverables for this project are:

1. A PowerPoint slide deck of your own design (no stock templates) with the components listed above (uploaded to Drive) – 200 pts.
2. The meta-reflective statement as a final slide – 75 pts. (graded in place of Traces of a Stream).

Keep in mind the following requirements:

- **USE EFFECTIVE DOCUMENT TITLES AND FILE NAMES. DO NOT USE YOUR NAME AS A FILE NAME.**
- Include a bibliography slide of your sources in MLA format.
- Provide proper attribution to the source materials you paraphrase and quote.
- Your analysis must be in PowerPoint or Google Slides document formats.
- You can find examples of MLA format for your bibliography on the Purdue OWL website.
- Your analysis should be revised and copy-edited before you hand it in.
- This assignment has the following due dates: Friday, May 14th at 11:59 p.m.