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TEACHING MEDIA LITERACY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM:

ARE WE THERE YET?

by

MISTY DAWN CARMICHAEL

Under the Direction of Lynée Lewis Gaillet

ABSTRACT

Despite the prevalence and ubiquity of media in North American culture, educators still show reluctance to embrace media literacy as a necessary literacy. This study examines two media literacy activities using descriptive teacher research, and defining usefulness based on student response and applicability to composition objectives in the English 1101 classroom. Both lessons produce useful findings, with students rating the second activity as more useful than the first activity. This research lends sample assignments and confidence to instructors seeking to employ simple media-literacy tactics in the introductory composition classroom.

INDEX WORDS: Media Literacy, Media Education, Visual Analysis, Visual Rhetoric, Rhetorics, Multiple Literacies

TEACHING MEDIA LITERACY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM: ARE WE THERE YET?

by

MISTY DAWN CARMICHAEL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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TEACHING MEDIA LITERACY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. iv

LIST OF TABLES. vii

LIST OF FIGURES. viii

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION. 1

Methodology and Purpose of the Study 3

Bias and Expected Results 4

2 WHY MEDIA LITERACY IS UNDER-VALUED IN LITERACY EDUCATION. 6

Reluctance Born from Classical Attitudes. 9

Revival of Negative Attitudes. 13

3 MEDIA LITERACY'S PLACE IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM: AN ARGUMENT IN FAVOR. 16

Media Immersion as a Teaching Opportunity. 17

Putting Media Literacy to Work for Educators. 21

4 PRACTICAL MEDIA LITERACY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM. 25

Analysis Summarizations and Critiques. 24

Media Literacy Activities in Action: Discovering Effective Teaching Strategies. 32

Die Hard/DeMott – Activity 1. 33

Bebe®/Browning – Activity 2. 38

Factors to Consider When Teaching Visual Analysis 43

5 CONCLUSION AND CLOSING THOUGHTS. 47

WORKS CITED. 50

APPENDICES

A FRAMEWORK FOR VISUAL ANALYSIS. 54

B FORMS AND TALLIED RESPONSES. 56

C CLASSROOM TOOLS. 59

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: Silverblatt's "Worldview" Media Literacy Tips. 29

TABLE 2: Silverblatt's "Ideology and Stereotypes" Media Literacy Tips. 29

TABLE 3: Responses from the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity 36

TABLE 4: Responses from the Bebe®/Browning activity. 41

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Audience Timeline Using Dates from James Porter's Audience and Rhetoric. 7

FIGURE 2: Fleming's "The field of media theory in relation to practical criticism". 27

FIGURE 3: Comparison of Extreme Responses between the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity and the Bebe®/Browning activity. 42

INTRODUCTION

Many American parents and educators feel the sting of acknowledging that our culture is media-sated. The living room television provides a particularly convenient means for our students to avoid homework, chores, listening to others, and exercise. Seeing a relationship between television and our culture's commercialization, concerned parents and educators have even gone so far as to badmouth television as the cause of laziness, ADHD, obesity, etc. Echoing John Milton's wisdom, name-calling and censorship are not the answer to this media-spurred dilemma. Also, we're not very good at our jobs if we are unable to turn our lemons into lemonade. Media isn't the adversary, our negative attitudes and persnickety old prejudices are.

I should first clear the air by admitting that I currently don't own a television. Who needs one? Any program I deem of value I can access on the internet, oftentimes commercial-free. Despite the crucial omission of an actual TV set from my home, I can still generally name the five most popular shows at any given time. How? Our culture is *that immersed* in television. Monitors are everywhere; you don't need to own a television to watch television. My point is: commercially biased media isn't going anywhere because it's already everywhere. As instructors we're stuck with commercialized media's presence, and educators must cast off the idea that media is too compromised or not scholarly enough to use in the classroom. I'm not suggesting that we replace "Ode on a Grecian Urn" with *American Idol*, but rather that we use the more accessible medium to illuminate that ideas of fame are recycled from generation to generation. Perhaps such pedagogical plans sound absurd to us, but they may not sound quite so ridiculous to those students who constantly nap in the back of our classrooms.

As an instructor, I seek to make each class as easy as possible for myself. I'm not lazy; I simply want the most effective means to communicate my lessons in a way that doesn't confuse or alienate my students. Embracing media-influenced communication entails some degree of resilience, including doing a few things that some of my colleagues *still* find unscholarly, despite that my approaches and analytical methods are far from novel. After all, it is only through "examining rhetorical and cultural uses of word and image, both historically and currently" that scholars first came to understand the symbolism that is text (Hocks and Kendrick 1). By integrating these media literacy lessons, I feel confident that I'm teaching my students skills they can use beyond the walls of the classroom. Besides, what better place to understand culture and how the individual is situated within that culture than in the composition classroom? What better place to learn analysis that students can continually practice? What better place to understand yourself and others as audience and the rhetorical triangle? And I can't think of a better arena to introduce visual analysis as a means of understanding prevalent societal exclusion or stereotypes. It is with this personal motivation that I embrace media literacy as an integral part of composition curriculum. As an instructor immersed in media culture teaching students immersed in media culture, media literacy seems a natural way to approach meeting composition objectives.

Along with personal convictions about media messages, I also acknowledge the importance of studying visual rhetoric and its implications for composition instruction. "Visual Rhetoric" remains an often-contested phrase, and this complication arises from the many impacts visuals have on our culture. Visual rhetoric "is intertwined with how we construct and analyze texts for particular readers at different points in history,"

making a definition difficult to follow. Visual rhetoric communicates different messages simultaneously to different individuals, cultures, genders, etc. (Hocks and Kendrick 5). Despite dissention over an exact definition, technological innovations across mediums calls for rhetoricians and composition scholars to further examine this ubiquitous communication and its relation to our culture.

Methodology and Purpose of the Study

I initially sought to discover how my media literacy tactics "work" for me in the composition classroom, specifically concerning ways that I have previously implemented them in my teaching career as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Georgia State University. My goal was and still is to better understand how I can implement media literacy in the composition classroom setting in the form of visual analysis while yielding positive student response. I wanted to know whether or not my personal preferences for teaching visual analysis are interpreted as helpful to my students in relation to the standard objectives for the composition classroom as defined by Georgia State University's English department. At the end of the day, my goal was to be able to say to my fellow colleagues "this lesson works for me; maybe it will work for you."

Using primarily feminist methods, this study entails mainly descriptive research. First, I research historical rhetoric and audience, going back to Classical definitions of rhetoric and determining how ancient definitions effect modern views on rhetoric and communications. I employ methodological pluralism by conducting some primary research with my students, research consisting of open-ended free-writes and Likert scale rating questions. Free-writing, Peter Elbow's infamous expressionist classroom tool which asks students to write for a given period of time without lifting their pencil in an

attempt to force introspection, gives the students a chance to vent about the assignments. Since "the best words come from deep down inside, from one's voice," I wanted to tap into this personal honesty by making students write their initial impressions about the assignments (Myers, 450). I chose to combine methods and methodologies because I want my research to be as thorough as possible within the given constraints of my specific classroom setting. I also chose these methods because they allow me to get feedback from students in quick, unencumbering ways. Although the results of my study are extremely specialized and tailored to suit my own rhetorical style of teaching, I am still in the process of learning much about myself as an instructor and much about the dynamics of the composition classroom setting. I hope to offer other instructors new to teaching media literacy some companionship by testing the effectiveness and popularity of these assignments. My purpose involves "examin[ing] the evolving relationships among images, visual culture, and the text-based traditions of research" through my own teacher research (Hocks and Kendrick 8). This research gives me cues to how I should or should not approach media literacy and visual analysis praxis in the future.

Bias and Expected Results

I am biased. I entered this study with the preconceived notion that media literacy is a valuable teaching tool that composition teachers should use to teach analysis. My teaching goals include the desire to make students more aware of American consumer culture, following the praxis of visual and social constructivist pedagogies. I also believe students benefit most from lessons employing Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) applications, since seldom do composition instructors have more than one or two declared English majors in a given class. Media literacy is a means to increase awareness

about consumerism and what I perceive to be the epidemic of "affluenza" in North American society (Kasser, xii). Addressing consumer culture and showing students how to interpret capitalist ideologies in a social context is a part of, if not the crux of, my teaching goals. I interpret Americans' insatiable consumption and the resulting "affluenza" as a result of students' inability to read media messages with a discerning eye. Media's prevalence also necessarily means advertisements' prevalence, and students need skills to decode covert messages (such as commercially-sponsored product placement in movies) as persuasive attempts. As an instructor, I use my biases as motivation to help students achieve the intertextual objectives of the composition curriculum.

With these personal and professional goals in mind, I encourage and participate in teacher research. Instructors should approach every lesson as an experiment in the ever-changing context of the classroom. Teaching is oftentimes hit-or-miss with each lesson depending on the classroom dynamic: therefore, I choose to gauge personal success based on student response. Using these responses, supported by both traditional research and Elbow's theories on the benefits of free-writing, I can justify teaching media literacy using visual analysis, even if only to myself. In addition, every lesson in which I seek out student response helps me discover which strategies produce the most positive student response in classes with similar energy levels and/or with similar class sizes. Ideally, the results of this study encourage me to devise similar media literacy activities. However, if this teacher research only helps me to better understand myself in relation to my classroom then the process will be worthwhile.

I'd like to see other first-year composition teachers use the results of this study as encouragement to create their own lessons addressing media literacy. Why is this study worthwhile, despite the limited applications and my severe bias? As Jane Tompkins puts it, my continuance comes "from a need to finally trust myself. . .to my own experience I need to turn for enlightenment" (xii).

WHY MEDIA LITERACY IS UNDER-VALUED IN LITERACY EDUCATION

"One may well ask: what is meant by the *rhetoric of vision*, why should it be studied now and of what use or interest might it be?" – Stanley Meltzoff, 1970.

Since the prevalence of television in the educational system circa 1980, composition has shifted towards progressive pedagogy, namely cognitivism, expressionism, and social constructivism. With the rise of these trends also came an undercurrent of ideological views simply because current traditional practices were under attack. Although these composition theories did not all arise simultaneously and were not entirely new ideas, the accompanying praxis came as a tsunami to the United States' educational system. The figure below serves as a small-scale attempt to show general attitudes towards pedagogy in the American educational system.

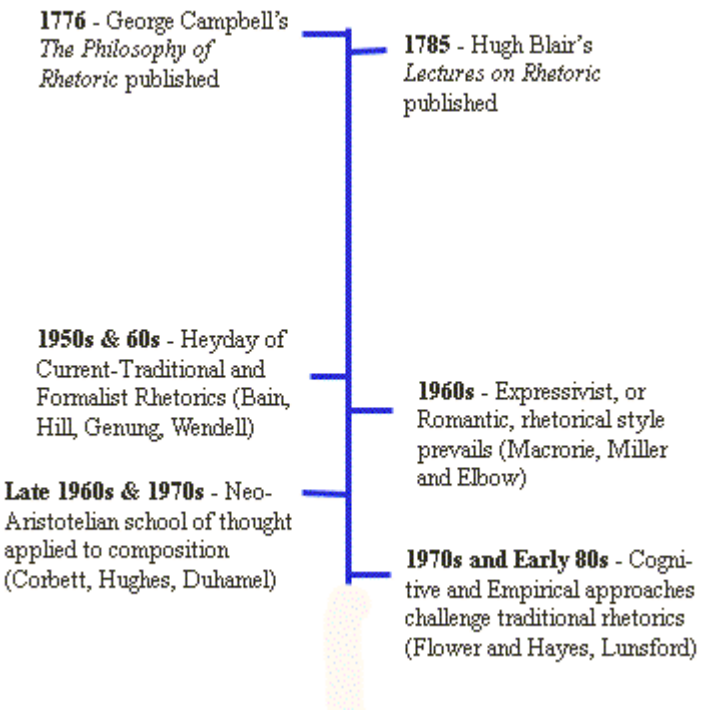

Figure 1: Audience Timeline Using Dates from James Porter's Audience and Rhetoric

Scholars embraced the idea of multiple literacies in the 1980s with the acknowledgement of family and cultural dialects that made too much grammatical sense to ignore (Smagorinsky 132). Media literacy, however, is still a relatively new idea, arising not because scholars had not contemplated visual rhetoric before, but because of the drastic increase in Households Using Television (HUTs) and integration of literacy programs such as *The Letter People*, *Sesame Street*, and later, *Reading Rainbow*, into public education classrooms. From 1970 to 1977, the sale of television sets doubled from 2.5 to 5 million a year, and by 1978 78% of households in the United States owned a color television (http://www.tvhistory.tv/facts-stats.htm).

Educators recognized relatively early on that television was a powerful teaching medium. In 1983, a report by the UK's *Popular Television and Schoolchildren* asserted that "teaching about television was too important to be left to specialists: 'all teachers', it

argued, 'should be involved in examining and discussing television programmes with young people" (Buckingham 89). What educators did not foresee in the 1980s was that television would eventually become almost solely controlled by commercial enterprises. Like Vanevar Bush's "Memex," where he envisions the internet as an entirely academic machine, television became yet another scholarly idea cum commercial enterprise.

An increase of commercial dominance in television, meaning more advertising spots and the launching (and success) of advertising-only networks such as the *Home Shopping Network*, prompted inquiry as to how education could compete with television. Realizing television's influence over people, the demand for commercial spots increased – as did prices for those spots – to such an extent that the "business" of television became far more profitable than educational motives. Television programming's commoditization left little room for educational programs, aside from the haven of the Public Broadcasting Service, simply because the educational system has relatively little purchasing power compared to commercial moguls.

With this shift came resentment; educators began to see television as a competitor. Even today many seasoned college educators see television as something of a "guilty pleasure." With the mass consumption of television sets comes an aversion to taking the medium seriously. One can easily draw parallels to the novel and comics. Bronwyn T. Williams points out the absurdity of this argument:

> Television as it currently exists is [not] equivalent to print. Such comparisons of the two media strike me as reductive and irrelevant. I am also not interested in engaging in a subjective debate as to whether what is considered high-quality television is or could ever be the equal of high-quality print. I do believe that on

> advantage of print is that it allows for kinds of thinking and reflection that are not available on the screen; that's why I am a writing teacher. (Williams 109)

Many educators still see television as an obstacle to thought; "if not through the elite media of literature and the arts, [nothing] is worth thinking, feeling, or saying" (O'Neill 21) . A colleague of mine even recently stated, "I don't use T.V. in the classroom; they get enough of that at home." This statement is disturbing on many levels, but it should not be surprising. Dismissal of persuasive/commercial communication as part of education has strong classical roots.

Reluctance Born from Classical Attitudes

Ideas towards popular media and mediums are held over from Classical time. As far back as 340 B.C., scholars tagged rhetoric as inferior and frivolous, denying that the communication had any sway over *their* lives or lines of thinking.

> Now I myself am beginning to lose heart, and I should like, with your permission, to pass over the question of possibility at present. Assuming therefore the possibility of the proposal, I shall now proceed to enquire how the rulers will carry out these arrangements, and I shall demonstrate that our plan, if executed, will be of the greatest benefit to the State and to the guardians. First of all, then, if you have no objection, I will endeavour with your help to consider the advantages of the measure; and hereafter the question of possibility. (Republic)

The acknowledged founder of modern Western philosophical thought, Plato advocated a strange optimism, often "consider[ing only] the advantages" once he had stated his opinions on a subject (Republic). Plato often refutes rhetoric's usefulness in favor of philosophic thought, thereby giving Western educational systems ample tactics to dismiss

teaching rhetoric. He argues that rhetoric should not be taught because it is inferior to philosophy, and the pathos of such crafts is dangerous to society. This Platonic method of teaching has impeded the progress of media literacy groups to educate young students how to interpret visual rhetorical appeals. Wysocki attributes this halt of progress to our scholarly "assumption behind the critique of the visual," saying, "we each take in what we see, automatically and immediately, in the exact same way as everyone else, so that the visual requires no interpretation and in fact functions as though we have no power before it" (Wysocki 43). Visual rhetoric's power lies in our own simple self-deception concerning its ability to communicate deeply, made more potent by our arrogance. Here commercialism of the medium comes in – the commodification of television through advertising spots allows visual rhetoric to influence us and our students through ubiquity, and media literacy becomes a necessary tool for textual analysis.

Neither Plato nor Aristotle considered how visual rhetoric could complement and reinforce even mildly persuasive arguments, both men only considering the power of speech. A primary school audience is possibly more vulnerable than older student bodies to the rhetoric of educationally-supported commercial advertising broadcasts during class. It would be foolish to assert that Plato and Aristotle's dismissal of simple, relatively unconvincing rhetorical methods was intended to impede the teaching of media literacy, as it would have been impossible in 400 BCE to predict the inventions of the technology so commonplace now. However, by making their teachings the foundation of Western thought, we have not given simple rhetoric the respect of efficacy that occurs when it is combined with visual reinforcement. Because of visual rhetoric's progression

and prevalence, scholars must reevaluate the teaching of rhetoric and expand it to adapt to the ways in which it applies to the communication of modern ubiquitous media.

Although Aristotle addressed how rhetoric can be used to deceive or misguide the public to some extent in *On Rhetoric*, he could not possibly have foreseen how visual our society would become with the invention of television and various forms of graphical advertising. Scholars often dispute the persuasiveness of visual elements based on individual perceptions. Has Aristotle and Plato's "brushing off" even of Gorgias' rhetorical teaching lead us to the level of confusion we now face in dealing with extended forms of rhetoric? Yes. Aristotle undermined the effectiveness of blatant attempts to persuade by structuring rhetoric and assuming that "moral" people would identify manipulative rhetoric as "unjust" and simply ignore it. Because Aristotle and Plato did not consider those who do not pursue "honesty" in discourse and knowledge, they left Western society vulnerable to "bad" rhetoric – T.V. advertising and other commodified communications. The dilemma then becomes how to combat "bad" rhetoric, now so omnipresent and integrated into our culture that few, regardless of educational level, are immune to its influence. O'Neill notes that, "none of us escapes [media's] assault upon the mind and body. Yet, it is extraordinarily difficult to discipline ourselves in the proper exercise of that analytic and aesthetic thinking which needs to be fed by an imaginative grasp of the ordinary events that determine our lives" (7). Western society need's Neitzche's "idols," to escape the mundane nature of existence, but teaching *why* these idols are so influential is taboo. Why? Education is under-funded, and computers and televisions are expensive.

Realizing the prominence and teaching power capable in these two mediums, under-funded schools turned to commercial sources for monetary aid. In exchange for technological supplies such as television sets and computers, schools often allow companies to sponsor a building. This compromising of educational standards started with disadvantaged public schools, then crept its way into schools without funding issues. For example, at the University of Georgia, Coca-Cola created a "refreshment area" in the Terry College of Business, complete with internet access. Many companies realize that sponsoring an educational building is a philanthropic way to advertise in a school and associate the companies' brand with the educational system, thereby building ethos. Oftentimes companies build this ethos visually, simply by associating their brand and/or logo alongside the school mascot.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle does address persuasive rhetoric, even if only in an attempt to scientifically categorize it. In *On Rhetoric* he characterizes rhetoric as "tekhnē," making an exception for the "pisteis," or means of persuasion involved in a "logical proof" (Kennedy 29, 30). The term "artfully deceived" not yet coined, Aristotle classifies art only as what is good and true, following his teacher Plato. Aristotle continues his didactic, optimistic view of rhetoric by qualifying that orators must only be "good men, bending the truth only when necessary," and by arguing that the main reason "rhetoric is useful" is because "the true and the just are by nature stronger than their opposites, so that if judgments are not made in the right way they are necessarily defeated" (Kennedy 34, 83). Aristotle reiterates that persuasive rhetoric should only be effective for a good and noble man, neglecting any in-depth commentary on how a man can use persuasive rhetoric for dishonest purposes. In avoiding such discussion, Aristotle appears above such

dishonest deviance – a stance many use to appear self-righteous in their ethos. Surely Aristotle has done a disservice by not equipping his students with the tools available to identify and combat pathos-only appeals that lead to illogical decisions.

Aristotle's approach to teaching rhetoric is evident in modern-day media literacy approaches. Media literacy, by nature, exposes advertising appeals as a form of untruthful persuasive rhetoric. Examining how some television programs and advertisements embody untruthful rhetoric would inadvertently reveal how to create untruthful rhetorical appeals. By Aristotelian standards, canvassing manipulative rhetoric acknowledges that untruthful rhetoric is capable of being effective, thus undermining the Platonic tenet that the only effective orator is a "good" orator.

Revival of Negative Attitudes

But how does philosophy from circa 400 B.C. become directly related to modern praxis? Perhaps Classical modes of thinking would have died out if not for the Reformation and ensuing revival of rhetorical culture. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Protestant Christianity imposed on revived Platonic ideals led us to our current Western philosophical views. Castiglione's *The Courtier* paints a picture of a "Ladder of Love" which imposes Christian ideals onto Platonic visions of love by defining a "good" woman in biblical terms (Castiglione 648). Classical thought was somewhat hijacked by religious courtiers, hoping to back their Platonic ideals with divine providence. At this time church and state were in great turmoil in England due to Henry VIII's sudden Protestant inclinations after the Catholic Church would not grant him a divorce from Catherine of Aragon to marry Ann Boleyn (Greenblatt 491). In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the English citizenry simultaneously juggled

religious and monarchial upheaval, a renewed interest in science due to Darwinism, and the advent of the industrial revolution. This unwieldy trio prompted the public to seek security by resurrecting Classical ideals. At a time nothing was absolute, the public found solace in Platonic and Aristotelian lines of reasoning.

The Renaissance and Tudor styles emphasized proper manners and then-antiquated respect for the ancients. A revival of chivalry and adherence to the polite and acceptable mores of the day was a must for courtiers and court-attending officials, who were also the arbiters of educational standards that consequently influenced the fairly recently settled United States as well. Some scholars refer to this period as the height of rhetorical acknowledgement; many manuals on etiquette and proper manners were published at this time. Despite this renewed interest in rhetoric, the emphasis on political correctness stunted extensive examination of what was perceived to be deceptive rhetoric. Rhetoricians since then have unsuccessfully fought this obstacle of associating rhetoric with "good," as James Porter notes:

> Rhetoric must have an aim, and not simply an internal or tautological aim either. It is not enough to say that I am writing to persuade my readers. *Why* am I writing to persuade them? *Why* should they accept my position? Because it is *good* for them. To exercise rhetoric, the rhetor needs a notion of "the good" – at least a selfish notion of what is good for the self, if not a sense of what is good for "all." (120).

Here Porter links rhetorical ethics to the dilemma of defining audience. Not only has this difficulty created divisions among composition theorists, it also adds to the aversion many educators face in teaching media literacy. How can one define audience if the

audience is the self? The complexities of visual rhetoric and, therefore, media literacy are easier to shelve away than to tackle this, most basic of questions. Porter argues that the audience question is what has led modern universities to simultaneously teach rhetoric in both English and Communications disciplines in post-secondary education. In communications departments, scholars define audience using user statistics and demographics, while the more philosophically-geared English sect tends to treat audience as author-centered, in which case audience is sometimes of no importance. Scholars further dispute audience's importance within English studies. If both the term "rhetoric" and the importance of audience are still so disputed, how can we build on such a shaky foundation? The answer is simply that we must find a way in order to deconstruct the messages that persuasive images convey.

One approach to understanding the messages within visual rhetorical appeals comes by way of culture theories. The culture theory of hermeneutic imperialism seeks to "decode or unpack existing texts" using context-sensitive analysis and "interest in the sociological and the material" (Sánchez 62, 63). Sánchez asserts that "this claim" of importance "allows English to bid for conceptual and political centrality in the humanities" to "regain position" (63). This move to accept cultural theory further complicates literary studies by resurrecting the question concerning definition of the cannon, along with the question of what is art. Due to many scholars' unwillingness to open this Pandora's Box, the study of media and media literacy often hangs in limbo between composition and communication departments in many colleges and universities.

Regardless of where audience and media studies *should* be placed within the disciplines, composition scholars need to make teaching media literacy a priority in the

composition classroom. Teaching media literacy is crucial to understanding of the various ubiquitous texts-turned visuals in our culture, including but definitely not limited to sitcoms, advertisements, animated series and movies. These texts are the new "novels" of our youths' culture, and are so commonplace and familiar that their social impact is often overlooked by scholars. Popular technology and media influence is so embedded and reflected in every self that it has become hard to notice. Teaching media literacy is the only feasible way to unpack the highly contextual messages sent to today's specialized audiences. Fortunately for current composition trends, media literacy and visual pedagogy make the classroom more interesting for students and teachers alike because of the constant newness of strategies and constant stream of fodder for lessons. Regardless of the ethical stance, pedagogical theory, and praxis the composition teacher adopts, media literacy enhances the practical usefulness of composition by providing avenues for students to better understand and analyze their worlds. I argue that media literacy doesn't displace any lessons in the first year sequence, but rather serves as a tool capable of meeting several objectives at once, creating a more efficient classroom.

MEDIA LITERACY'S PLACE IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM: AN ARGUMENT IN FAVOR

Many otherwise "illiterate" people are already fluent in media language. Compositionists must rethink the boundaries of *literacy*, and embrace what John F. Szwed calls "a plurality of literacies" (423). Victoria Purcell-Gates' article "A World Without Print" traces an otherwise illiterate adult woman's literacy: "I asked her to look through a newspaper and its advertisements to find something she could read. With great difficulty, she could decode a few words in a story accompanied by a picture." Purcell-

Gates includes that her subject commented that the items she was able to identify were "'things [she] knew what they mean even if I can't read the words'" (Purcell-Gates 410). In this adult woman's case, interviews assessing her media-based fluency reveal a complex literacy. In this sense, Americans are more literate than they've ever been – unfortunately, it's a literacy of which they are unaware. Purcell-Gates' test subject had been interpreting visual cues from sales fliers and had been making purchasing decisions based on those interpretations. Teaching media literacy is crucial for people to understand what factors influence their decisions and why they make them.

This understanding is necessary for children as well. Purcell-Gates analyzes Denny Taylor's study of "highly literate" children, and notes that the children Taylor studied "daily confronted store signs and advertisements both in the environment and on television" (408). She goes on to note that it was "within this literate context that these children learned much about the nature and forms of written language" (Purcell-Gates 408). Whether educators like it or not, children and adults alike learn much about social language from media sources, specifically advertisements. In "The Development of Initial Literacy," Yetta Goodman noticed that "many children develop conscious knowledge about written language before they receive formal instruction in school" while interacting with a four year-old boy. Goodman showed the boy a card with the word *Ivory* on it and the boy's response was, "It says soap" (319).

Media Immersion as a Teaching Opportunity

In addition to Purcell-Gates, Yancey, and Goodman's media-influenced test subjects, many of us have felt Dennis Barron's frustration when trying to do something as simple as write a memo with pen and paper at a meeting:

> The physical effort of handwriting, crossing out, revising, cutting and pasting (which I couldn't very well do at a meeting without giving away my inattention), in short, the writing practices I had been engaged in regularly since the age of four, now seemed to overwhelm and constrict me, and I longed for the flexibility of digitized text. (71)

The debate over whether this dependency is a positive or negative shift continues, but either way the fact remains: technology makes us dependent.

With the advent of the printing press, the novel proliferated throughout Europe. The rise of literacy, albeit slow, created a high demand for the novel and made the medium a popular genre with the middle class. Although novels were popularly circulated as early as the sixteenth century, scholars did not embrace literary criticism of this new medium until almost a hundred years later (Davis 11). From a scholarly perspective, novels equaled recreation, which in no small part was due to the public's residual fear from the monarchy's censorship laws in the early Seventeenth century, which rewarded rogue publishers with beheadings (Greenblatt 1246).

The media of television, movies, and internet have received similar criticisms from modern-day academics. Scholars show an aversion to pop culture studies despite that "linguistic meaning is produced culturally via a set of shared conventions" (Schoenfeldt 116). Schoenfeldt is not alone in his progressive thinking. Compositionist Susan Brown Carlton calls for composition scholars to adapt a poststructuralist approach. Carlton notes that "Poststructuralists do not reject the insights of structuralism but identify within structuralism's very assertions a need to think beyond its limits. The need to reject structuralism as an origin and a *telos* by rethinking its cultural implications and

methodological blind spots" (78-79). Disciplines thrive on this type of debate. Isn't poetry a variation on syntax, created best by those with a deep understanding of grammatical structures? Once one has learned the foundational principles of any artistic discipline, one has a duty to keep the discipline fresh by challenging and manipulating those foundational principles until finding what way best allows for self-expression.

Although the mention of television brings tawdry imagery of network exploitation of everyman on reality shows, such shows reflect our consumer culture. Many academics' reluctance to accept television as a viable medium for study reveals a disconnect from life: proof that the ivory tower still exists and is well-populated. Considering the aversion, one would think academics never watch television, much less advertisements! The truth is that few, if any, of us are exempt from the influence of television's cultural cues. Companies spent over 6.5 billion dollars in advertising television spots in 2005 (Outsell). It is naïve to think that that immunity from influence is possible when advertisers and companies spend such an exorbitant amount of money and energy on this industry. How does advertising affect us? Advertisements create "affect transfer," a psychological device that elicits emotional responses from people when they encounter certain objects due to successful advertising (Hill 37). Advertisers are able to successfully manipulate peoples' minds by showing complex visual images that cause people to associate certain feelings with their product. Charles Hill comments that "what bothers many of us [about the process of affect transfer] is that our attitudes, opinions, and even our actions are influenced without any conscious processing on our part. In fact, most people are probably convinced that such manipulations do not work on them. But advertisers and political consultants know otherwise" (37). Hill also notes that "many of

us would no doubt like to think that we are not so easily manipulated. Nevertheless, classical conditioning has been shown to work in humans" (37).

Fortunately for composition teachers and rhetoricians, this phenomenon is a teaching opportunity. Students are already subconsciously deconstructing and applying these complex visual rhetorical messages to their everyday lives; why not reveal this mental process to students? Composition scholars and educators alike must accept that "literacy is more than the act of reading and writing. In this view, literacy is given an extended definition to include ways of perceiving, thinking, speaking, evaluating, and interacting that characterize a group of individuals and set them apart from others" (Akinnaso 139). Accepting this view, praxis that reflects these multiple literacy avenues will open up. Unfortunately, television's consumer-influencing nature gives the medium a bad reputation in the academic realm. However, using television as a teaching tool is often seen in opposition to teaching more prestigiously viewed texts, and Bronwyn T. Williams says this phenomenon occurs "because [television's] content is different from that of print media" (Williams 109). Williams conducted various studies in early 2000 examining how students perceive and experience television, specifically how they "read" television as texts. He addresses the scholars who deny the value of television as a complex communicative text, saying:

> Television programs are regarded as shallow, manipulative, and broadcast only as a means to get viewers to stick around long enough for commercials. This is obviously true and was obvious to students I interviewed. It is worth noting that many print texts are no less manipulative, shallow, and devoted to the propagation of commerce as can be demonstrated with a trip to the magazine aisle at the

> grocery store or the bookstore at any airport. Both media also offer texts that are not provocative and intelligent, and whose value transcends the imperative of capitalist markets. (109)

However, history tells us that we can overcome our judgment and recognize the teaching opportunities the medium offers. "When writing was introduced as a means of recording land transfer in eleventh-century England, it was initially perceived (and often rightly so) as a nasty Norman trick for stealing Saxon land," according to Michael Clanchy (Baron 76). The medium of television faces similar biases. Many programs marketed for their entertainment value embed various product advertisements in the show. Marketers often pay for product placement in popular sitcoms. Media literacy would make viewers more adept at noticing such subconscious attempts at advertising, thereby making viewers both more literate and aware of their present literacy. Still, many scholars see television in opposition to print. Williams retorts,

> To criticize television watching, in comparison to reading print, for its isolating effect and for its limitations on viewer response is a shaky argument and distracts from the more important issue of teaching people how to watch television, and to read print, more critically, more selectively, and with an eye toward making connections to other texts and experiences (Williams 109).

Putting Media Literacy to Work for Educators

Cast in the setting of American culture, media literacy transforms television into a tool that reflects and highlights the social nature of text, which can be a particularly powerful means to introduce cultural analysis. When teaching media literacy to a homogenous group of students, the mediums of television and movies also create

awareness of Pratt's "contact zones," as well as provide opportunities for students to see where contact zones do and don't exist (34). Media discussion and analysis create these "contact zones" by analyzing the representations of different races and cultures. These "contact zones" are simply "social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today." Many television sitcoms touch on modern cultural power dynamics by mentioning the hot topics of race relations and homosexuality to get ratings. Obviously these programs don't resolve such issues, but if students view these television programs as a text to discuss, they could examine how these issues affect their own lives. For example, some schools in the United States still have segregated proms (CNN.com). Students could analyze channel segregation, evident in separate networks for separate groups on public television such as the Black Entertainment Network (BET) and the Spanish network Telemundo. Educators might ask questions such as "why are these networks necessary," and "when do viewers violate these boundaries (assuming boundaries exist) and why?" Such analysis would allow students to talk about segregation without necessarily pointing fingers inside the classroom. Discussing these issues would also give students a forum to voice concerns on issues that they feel are beyond their control, empowering them. In this way, media literacy teaching emphasizes the public and social nature of writing.

Luis C. Moll and Norma González's studies of language-minority children reveal that "capitalizing on cultural resources for teaching allows both teachers and students to continually challenge the status quo, especially in terms of how the students are using

literacy as a tool for inquiry and thinking, and to refurbish their learning with new topics, activities, and questions" (Moll and González 168). Television is one such readily available cultural resource, and Native Americans are spectacularly absent from television programs. Moll and González's also found that "emphasis on inquiry generated active participation and verbalization in both languages from the children – that it allowed the children, through their own interactions and explorations, to use their knowledge to solve new problems" (Moll and González 168). Emphasis on inquiry combined with viewing of popular culture would provide a diversity that otherwise would not exist in a reservation classroom. It would also allow reservation students to regularly interact with a segment of the popular culture that they otherwise would not encounter. Students could discuss how the media/medium did or did not reflect their personal interactions with non-Native Americans.

In the composition classroom, television is incredibly useful as a teaching tool for students even if they are already aware of how the medium effects their decisions. Bronwyn T. Williams comments that many students he interviewed "watched some of the best programming on television and could make insightful comments about its content and structure" (109). If that happens to be the case, Williams says, great! He adds that, as educators, we should still study television because "if my students read television texts often, and often well, I have to consider how that will affect my work as a writing teacher" (109). In "A New Framework for Understanding Cognition and Affect in Writing," John R. Hayes describes the social environment of writing:

> The act of writing is not social just because of its communicative purpose. It is also social because it is a social artifact and is carried out in a social setting. What

> we write, how we write, and who we write to is shaped by social convention and by our history of social interaction. . . The genres in which we write were invented by other writers and the phrases we write often reflect phrases earlier writers have written. 177

Television is an excellent example of a universally-engaging social artifact with a communicative purpose. Colloquial phrases frequently appear in formal papers, and teaching media literacy reveals to students how much they are affected by pop culture in their thoughts and writing. This awareness would ideally lead to a better understanding of codeswitching and discourse communities. An analysis of a sitcom also provides cues to help students better understand the rhetorical situation. Pitting a comedy up against a drama and analyzing the mood of the audience emphasizes the context-sensitive nature of identical lines of text. Audience identification of such mediums alone helps students to achieve a higher level of understanding about the social nature of writing. And television shows and movies provide a bevy of rhetorical situations to discuss.

David Buckingham argues that media education has a place in WAC initiatives as well, citing applications in throughout various disciplines. In History class, examining media shows how "events and periods can be represented in different genres as media texts" in the area of Science, media analysis reveals "how appeals to scientific credibility are used in advertising sales pitches," and in Music studies, "students should study how generic forms of music are used to create atmosphere and 'cue' emotional responses among audiences" (90-91). Television effects the way people perceive our present and our past, our educational disciplines, and how students relate to instructors. Also, studying the audience/creator dynamic of media not only helps the students understand

certain educational dynamics, but also keeps the instructor aware of how s/he is portrayed in popular media.

In essence, media literacy teaches analysis, and deeper levels of analysis are necessary to interpret more complex texts. In teaching higher thinking, media literacy not only reveals a new world to students, but also reveals to them a social aspect of their world that was previously too difficult to unpack. Once students are able to interpret complex visual texts, they will more easily be able to interpret denser literature. In addition, revealing to students their capacity for analysis provides a sense of confidence in approaching further analysis, making composition even more useful across curricula. Regardless of the chosen discipline, understanding how to analyze the ubiquitous media in her life allows the student to continuously practice this analysis in new and diverse situations.

PRACTICAL MEDIA LITERACY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

When engaging in media education, it is important to for the instructor to understand that "the competencies that are involved in making sense of the media are socially distributed, and that different social groups have different orientations towards the media, and will use them in diverse ways" (Buckingham 39). Teaching media literacy should be viewed as a learning experience for both the instructor and the students in the spirit of social exchange. In his recount of Sue Turnbull's study of instructors using media in an Australian high school, Buckingham offers a cautionary tale to instructors seeking to expose the evils of media:

> The teachers' views reflected both a feminist critique of the 'objectification of women' in popular culture. . .yet far from simply swallowing the anti-feminist

> ideology of the media (as the teachers supposed), the students adopted a much more complex attitude. While occasionally ridiculing romance, they also valued it because it addressed them as sexualized adults rather than (like school) as children; and because it represented a gesture of independence in relation to their parents' aspirations for arranged marriages. Rather than constructing these students as deluded and in need of teacherly liberation, therefore, Turnbull suggests that their uses of media provided one way of 'living the contradictions' of their current social experiences. (116)

The lesson here is that the teacher can expect only to show students what messages the medium conveys. The students must then analyze what those messages mean from their individual perspectives as audience or perceived audience members. Media literacy teaching requires some humility on the part of the instructor, and an open mind towards understanding the ever-reactive nature of all texts to the ones that precede them. Dan Fleming goes so far to say that "the expertise of the media teacher" should be "kept separate" so that no "separation then divides teacher from learner and marginalizes what the learner already knows about the media" (16). Because of this teacher-student dynamic, media literacy is necessarily low theory. Fleming calls this the "the degree of insider/outsider distinction," and couples this factor with "theory/practice distinction" in the following figure:

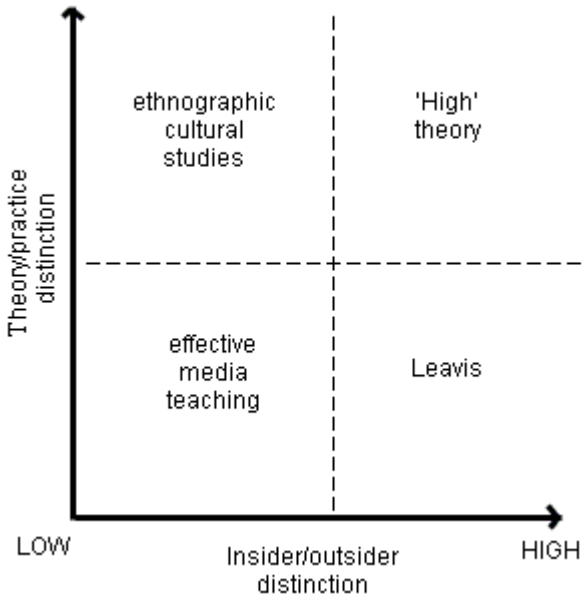

Figure 2: "The field of media theory in relation to practical criticism" (Fleming 16)

This dynamic makes teaching media analysis ideal for composition classrooms, where instructors must focus on praxis taken from theory and not discussion of theory itself in order to be effective. Figure 2 posits low insider/outsider distinction, which Fleming defines as "the extent to which the expertise of the media teacher, academic researcher or writer is kept separate from the common knowledge of the classroom or the t.v.-saturated domestic environment", and low theory/practice distinction, which Fleming defines as "the extent to which thinking and doing are kept separate" (16). Fleming asserts that media teaching requires low distinction in both of these elements to maximize effectiveness.

Because effective media teaching requires low theory/practice and low insider/outsider distinctions, many scholars avoid media analysis altogether. Educators must approach media teaching with the understanding that "the languages we are born into now include those of the modern media," and students are as well-versed in that

language just as much as (if not more so than) the instructors. Therefore, in order to teach media educators must accept the social nature of media literacy. Often reluctance to teach media literacy comes from instructors' inability to see themselves as "equals" with their students, not that this fault rests entirely with instructors. It's not always easy to get students outside of the primary school-mindset where current-traditional praxis prevails. Teaching media literacy requires effort on the instructor's part to allow students some degree of social power in the classroom: the power to express their views with authority and/or to guide discussion. More than once while analyzing visuals students have mentioned a detail that I had missed in my own analysis. Rather than make an "oh, that's nice, but we can only discuss what I have previously had time to ruminate over" approach, the class took time to examine previously unnoticed visual facet that piqued the students' interest. Instructors must allow the students to "own" the lesson with the instructor so that they are able to discuss the medium with confidence. With this cultural and social pedagogical foundation, media literacy lessons naturally fall within the scope of composition curriculum.

Analysis Summarizations and Critiques

After examining the chosen medium, the instructor's next step is to proceed with analysis. Fortunately media literacy advocates have extensively researched ways to analyze various media, so novices don't need to reinvent the wheel when designing assignments.

As to deciphering the actual media message, Art Silverblatt provides the following simple guide for analysis of advertisements:

Table 1: Silverblatt's "Worldview" Media Literacy Tips

MEDIA LITERACY TIPS
WORLDVIEW Questions to ask with regard to worldview in advertising include: ➢ What kind of world is being depicted in the ad? ➢ What kind of lifestyle is promoted in the ad? Consumers may actually be attracted to the lifestyle depicted in the ad, of which the product is only a small part. ➢ What is the role of the product within the worldview of the ad? Imagine the ad without the appearance of the product to see whether that consumer item is indeed an essential part of the world. ➢ If you did not know what product was being promoted, what would you think was being advertised? Consumers who are interested in the primary product may also be compelled to purchase the other consumer items depicted in the ad. (Media Literacy, 192)

This guide is both simple and concise. Students can easily understand the information without feeling daunted by advertising or literary jargon. Silverblatt also provides a more ideologically-focused chart:

Table 2: Silverblatt's "Ideology and Stereotypes" Media Literacy Tips

MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

IDEOLOGY AND STEREOTYPES
 	
As you analyze ads, ask the following questions with regard to ideology and stereotype:
 	
➢ To what groups (or subgroups) do the characters belong?
➢ In what settings are they presented?
➢ Are they the primary or secondary characters?
  o Are they at home or at work?
  o What kinds of products do they promote?
➢ What do the stereotypes reveal about cultural attitudes toward these groups?
(Media Literacy, 192)

Guidelines such as Silverblatt's give students condensed, focused information matching the specialized delivery of the information in advertisements. While these note cards may

be helpful in stimulating conversation once students have recorded their initial impressions, working card-by-card would be very time-consuming and the instructor might have a hard time coalescing all of the visual elements. This in-depth analysis would be helpful if the students were working on one or two specific elements of a visual (i.e. ideological message and stereotypes), but the questions are rather intense and require some knowledge that basic writers might have a hard time grasping (i.e. what do the stereotypes reveal about cultural attitudes towards these groups). Not all first year students are ready to jump to this level of analysis in such a condensed format.

Marguerite Helmers proposes that students begin analysis by creating a blank chart that they can easily complete for every image they assess. First students fill in the literal design elements: color, value, line, shape, form, texture and space (34-35). Next students fill in a chart of the arrangement principles of design: perspective, angle and vantage, point of view, framing, dominance (emphasis), balance, proportion, pattern, contrast, and grid (36). Helmers provides detailed definitions of all of these terms of literal design elements and arrangement principles of design, but these definitions are artistic and formal. These definitions are workable for the advanced design student, but this level of analysis would be overwhelming for students who have never deconstructed visuals before. These complex definitions coupled with the limited time (one semester) an instructor has to work with first-year composition students makes Helmers' approach a bit difficult to follow.

This study employs the elements of analysis defined in the composition textbook typically used in English 1101 classes at Georgia State University (fall 2006 – spring 2007). The text is Motives for Writing, and the chapter titled "Writing to Analyze

Images" begins with a short explanation explaining why analysis is important. The chapter continues and gives a "framework for analysis" that students can apply to images. Below is an abbreviated list of the framework.

Subject: Who or what is in the image?

Number: How many figures or objects appear in the image

Placement: How are the figures or objects arranged?

Pose: Do figures appear naturally, or do they seem posed?

Gaze: If there are people or animals in the picture, where are they looking?

Mouth: Are figures smiling or unsmiling?

Clothing: How are the people in the image dressed?

Color: If the image is in color, what does the color communicate?

Light: How is the image illuminated?

Size: How large is the image?

Context: Where and when did the image originally appear?

Association: Does the image seem similar to other images you've seen?

(Miller 306-307)

The entire framework is available in Appendix A. This model for analysis is particularly helpful in the introductory composition classroom because it does not require the instructor to provide a new vocabulary for discussing the visual elements. Students at the introductory level can begin analyzing visuals immediately with this list, and even when viewed out of context these elements make sense.

Unfortunately the Motives for Writing textbook introduces these elements and then moves on to analyze texts as compliments to essays. While this visual analysis

strategy works well in a text with many chapters, the visuals compete with the text. Students are likely to privilege the written text and allow the essayist's message to influence their perception of the image rather than share their own opinions. Therefore students are more likely to agree with the opinions of the educated author in discussion, taking on the author's bias. However, these elements for visual analysis are succinct and effective in an introductory classroom, and encourage students to expand on definitions and interpretations of certain aspects – i.e. for "mouth," what is the significance of a genuine smile vs. forced smile – while giving them guidelines for analysis.

Media Literacy Activities in Action: Discovering Effective Teaching Strategies

In my study, I used the Motives for Writing analysis. I asked fourteen students whether or not they thought visual analysis helped them better understand analysis and whether or not they felt visual analysis helped them meet composition objectives both before and after they were given the guidelines for visual analysis. I also asked them to write several statements addressing whether or not they liked the exercise, having students respond in the form of a free write exercise or as part of answering a series of questions. These students were all enrolled in the English 1101 composition course at that time, which covers different types of writing and is the mandated introductory English course for incoming freshmen.

I wanted to use a Likert scale for the questionnaire (available in Appendix B) because it renders the students' responses easy to quantify, and because I also felt the perceived "scientific formality" of rating their experience would mentally distance them from the friendly classroom atmosphere. The Likert scale includes values from 0 to 4, with the following ratings attached to each number: 0 = Not sure, 1 = Not at all, 2 = A

little, 3 = A little, 4 = Somewhat, 5 = A lot (see sample form in Appendix C.) I chose informal wording for the ratings so that students wouldn't be intimidated by the language – for example, somewhat instead of moderately – and was sure to include the category "Not sure" in case any of the students were confused about either the rating system or the objectives. Although I am aware that generalizing one of the responses as "Not sure" further complicates making assertions about the results, this project is admittedly biased and informal, and I did not want to force students to answer questions about which they were unsure. The standard objectives for Composition 1101 at Georgia State for the 2006-2007 academic year are listed in the GTA Handbook and serve as the basis for the questionnaire. I asked students to rate whether or not they felt the lessons involving visual analysis gave them practice with/helped them meet the composition objectives, and then handed them the form. After the students rated how well the lesson met their objectives, I had them "free-write" on whether or not they liked the lesson, which was prefaced each time with the disclaimer that I was researching the lesson's usefulness to them as students and simply did not want to continue the lesson if they found it unhelpful. I also stated that this research would in no way effect their grade and hoped they would be honest both for the sake of research and for future students.

***Die Hard*/DeMott – Activity 1**

For the first activity, I wanted to help students understand how visuals can enhance text, and I wanted them to read a scholarly essay that commented on a movie. Students read an essay titled "Putting on a Happy Face: Masking the Differences Between Blacks and Whites" by Benjamin DeMott after they read a series of essays both for and against racial profiling. At the beginning of the essay, DeMott's references a

scene at the opening of the movie *Die Hard With a Vengeance* as a primary example of how modern media visually assert that "racial injustice has been amicably resolved" (53). As a complement to this essay, I brought in *Die Hard With a Vengeance* and showed the opening scenes to which DeMott refers, asking students to keep in mind the claims DeMott makes in his essay. Because this movie was released in mid-1995, most of my 18 year-old students had never heard of this movie. When I asked how many of them had seen this movie, three (3) students raised their hands. What I hoped to achieve in this activity was to get students to connect the medium to the scholarly essay, and see how the two texts both addressed a cultural issue – the way that different races cooperate in the arena of film versus in real life. I anticipated that students would rate this activity as helpful with the following composition objectives: "use language to explore and analyze contemporary multicultural, global, and international questions," "critique your own and others' work in written and oral formats," and "engage in the collaborative, social aspects of writing, and use writing as a tool for learning." Although I do not limit the applicability of the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity to these three objectives, these are the three main objectives I think the activity most obviously meets.

I began the activity by showing the first scene in *Die Hard.* After showing the movie clip, I then asked students to answer two questions at the end of the essay that refer directly to the movie clip and DeMott's interpretation in their peer review groups of three (3) and four (4) students. I instructed the students that they would be turning in these questions for a daily participation grade and, told them I would not assess this assignment for correctness. Despite the low stakes of this assignment, students answered the questions thoroughly, and most were able to provide an example of a movie depicting

racial harmony like the one in *Die Hard With a Vengeance* that match DeMott's description of falsely-represented harmonious race relations. After the students answered the questions, I had them fill out the form asking them to rank how well the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity matched up with the composition 1101 objectives. After they rated the objectives, I had students free-write for five minutes with the prompt "how did you feel about this activity," for the purpose of allowing students to express themselves with words rather than numbers. The results of the objective ratings are as follows, with each objective and the number of respondents that rated the objective as by its helpfulness in achieving that objective, and with one incomplete form omitted:

Table 3: Responses from *Die Hard*/DeMott Activity

Objective: Respondents' Ratings:

	Not sure	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot
engage in writing as a process, including various invention heuristics	0	2	2	5	5
gather evidence, consider audience, draft, revise, edit, and proofread	2	2	4	4	2
engage in the collaborative, social aspects of writing, and use writing as a tool for learning	0	1	4	8	0
use language to explore and analyze contemporary multicultural, global, and international questions	2	2	4	6	0
demonstrate how to use writing aids, such as handbooks, dictionaries, online aids, and tutors	2	8	1	3	0
gather, summarize, synthesize, and explain information from various sources	0	0	6	5	2
use grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences	3	4	4	2	1
critique your own and others' work in written and oral formats	3	1	6	1	3
produce coherent, organized, readable prose for a variety of rhetorical situations	2	2	2	6	2
reflect on what contributed to your writing process and evaluate your own work	3	1	3	4	3

What I initially found most disturbing about these responses was the high number of "not sure" ratings each objective received. Nineteen students indicated that they were "not sure" whether or not the activity aided them in achieving a specific objective, while students reported eighteen incidences of the activity helping "a lot" in giving them

practice with an objective. The high occurence of “not sure” responses could result from students’ confusion over several different unaccounted-for variables: misunderstanding/lack of understanding concerning the objectives, lack of confidence in a lesson asking them to relate a movie to a text, or uncertainty about which outcomes applied to the activity. Of course, some students may have been unsure about or uninterested in the lesson entirely. Whatever the cause, students generally appeared a little daunted and confused about the connections I was trying to get them to make between the text and the film.

With the students’ confusion in mind, the three objectives I felt the activity most applied to received relatively high ratings. Students gave two of the objectives, “engage in the collaborative, social aspects of writing”, and “use writing as a tool for learning and use language to explore and analyze contemporary multicultural, global, and international questions,” no ratings of helping “A lot,” but gave eight and six ratings of helping “Somewhat.” The other objective I singled out, “critique your own and others' work in written and oral formats,” received 3 “A lot” ratings, but also received three “Not sure” ratings, indicating to me that students were not confident in analyzing or critiquing either the film or the essay. The objectives that students rated as the most helpful was “gather, summarize, synthesize, and explain information from various sources,” with only two ratings of “A lot,” five of “Somewhat,” and six of “A little,” but zero ratings of “Not sure” or “Not at all.” Students’ confidence with this objective may lie in the confidence of their ability to gather, summarize and explain more than their application of the lesson to the objective. Objectives that I expected students to indicate as unhelpful, namely

"demonstrate how to use writing aids, such as handbooks, dictionaries, online aids, and tutors," students did indeed mark as less applicable to the lesson.

The students' free-writte responses to the activity were equally ambivalent. Responses include statements such as "I guess [the activity] was okay. I liked it better than grammar stuff," and "[the activity] was okay," or some variation thereof. After examining all the responses it was clear that the students passively accepted this activity without strong feelings concerning its usefulness.

Bebe®/Browning – Activity 2

Between the *Die Hard*/DeMott and Bebe®/Browning activities I scheduled a day in Georgia State's Library to review research methods. I was unable to avoid this time lapse between lessons, as the library is in the process of being remodeled and I had to accept the assigned day. However, this occurrence may have given students some time to forget about the previous visual analysis lesson and as a result, the students may have seen the lesson as new and therefore engaging. Whatever the case I'm sure the lapse had some effect.

Before I began the Bebe®/Browning activity, I gave students the visual analysis elements as defined by the Motives for Writing textbook. The media application I hoped students would achieve in this lesson was to make the transfer of visual analysis from an advertisement to a poem. I wanted students to understand the social nature of communication by examining the social nature of two different texts. Ultimately, I wanted them to be able to take a difficult text, a romantic poem from the early 1900s, and

feel confident about examining and attempting to interpret this poem. I hoped my students would be able to see the communicative relationship between the different mediums by identifying both of the pieces as descriptive texts, and would begin their analysis from there. The objectives I anticipated that students would find most helpful were "gather evidence, consider audience, draft, revise, edit, and proofread" (particularly the "consider audience" part), and "engage in the collaborative, social aspects of writing, and use writing as a tool for learning."

I reserved ten minutes of class time for students to read a handout of the framework for visual analysis in class, and then student volunteers and I read over each element aloud for reinforcement. After that, the class and I reviewed a Bebe® Advertisement using the elements of analysis. Students were eager to participate in this analysis, and when I asked "How easy or difficult do you guys find visual analysis to be?" all the students that responded said "easy." Students clearly felt comfortable with this medium; they encounter advertisements every day.

Next I told the students we would be "kind of switching gears" and gave them a copy of Browning's "Porphyria's Lover" to read, which I chose for its abundant imagery and storied theme. As I handed out this eighteenth-century poem, I instructed students to "think about this poem in terms of visual analysis." I received some puzzled looks from a few of the students, but I did not ask for nor answer any questions. I gave the students approximately three or four minutes to read the poem. After I was sure most students had read through the poem, I went through each of the elements of visual analysis and simply stated the elements one by one (i.e. I said "Color," and waited for a response). Students

were very responsive and more willing to engage in deconstructing the poem's elements compared to the previous semester, when I presented this poem without incorporating the framework for visual analysis. After analyzing the advertisement and the poem, I had students complete the objectives rating and then free-write a response to the activity exactly as I conducted in the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity. I was tempted to go over the composition objectives to make sure the students understood what each objective meant, but I did not want to skew their responses in relation to the previous activity. Below are the documented responses for the second activity.

Table 4: Responses from Bebe®/Browning Activity

Objective: Respondents' Ratings:

	Not sure	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot
engage in writing as a process, including various invention heuristics	1	0	1	6	5
gather evidence, consider audience, draft, revise, edit, and proofread	0	1	3	4	5
engage in the collaborative, social aspects of writing, and use writing as a tool for learning	0	1	1	2	9
use language to explore and analyze contemporary multicultural, global, and international questions	1	0	4	2	6
demonstrate how to use writing aids, such as handbooks, dictionaries, online aids, and tutors	0	2	4	4	3
gather, summarize, synthesize, and explain information from various sources	0	1	3	3	6
use grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences	2	4	1	2	4
critique your own and others' work in written and oral formats	1	3	1	4	4
produce coherent, organized, readable prose for a variety of rhetorical situations	0	0	5	6	2
reflect on what contributed to your writing process and evaluate your own work	2	0	3	5	3

After tallying the responses, I noticed that the highest-rated objective for the "A lot" category was "engage in the collaborative, social aspects of writing, and use writing as a tool for learning" with nine responses, an objective I originally anticipated meeting with this activity. Although this activity merited one "Not at all" response, the students

clearly responded. Students' reactions, both numerically and verbally, were engaged and positive, and for the lowest-rated objective only four students indicated they were helped "Not at all," a difference of four less than the least helpful objective for the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity. When compared to the responses in the last activity, there are only seven versus nineteen instances of students marking "not sure" whether or not one of the objectives helped them on any level. While this decrease may be a reaction to students' increased familiarity with the objectives, the responses more reflect a feeling of confidence about the lesson. In addition, the students reported forty-six instances of the Bebe®/Browning activity helping them with a specific objective as opposed to only twelve instances of not being helped "not at all," compared to an 18: 23 ratio in the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity. (see figure 3, below).

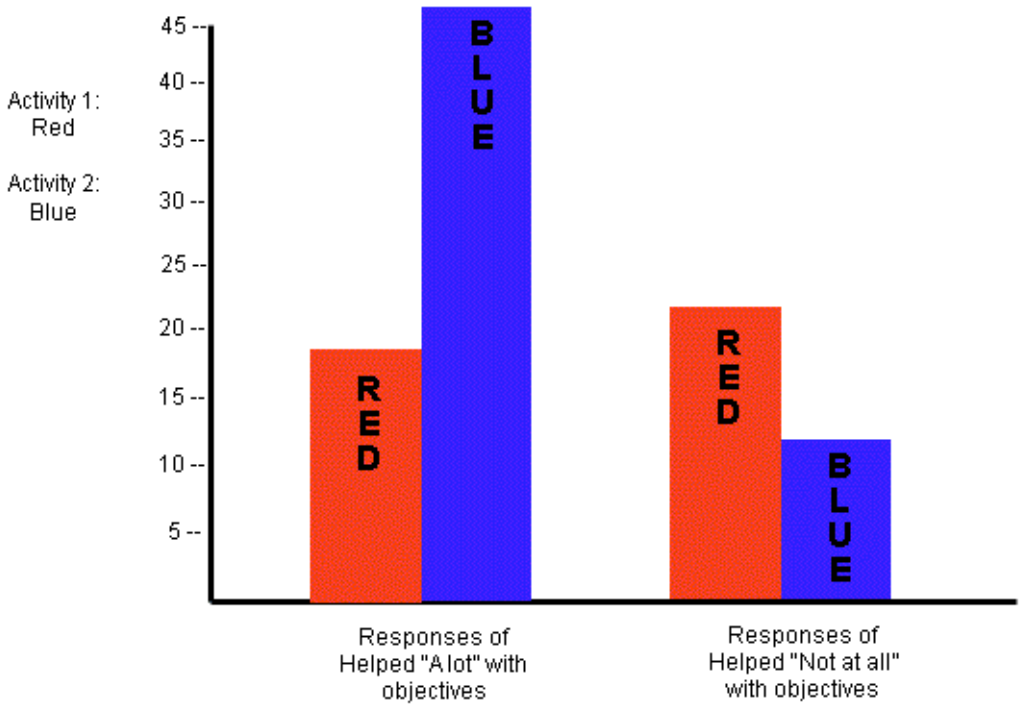

Figure 3: Comparison of Extreme Responses between *Die Hard*/DeMott and Bebe®/Browning Activities

After the students rated the applicability of the objectives to the lesson, I had them free-write on how they felt the visual analysis affected their interpretation of the poem. One student raised her hand and asked me, "Do you mean if it helped or not?" to which I responded "yes."

Students' written responses for the Bebe®/Browning activity were overwhelmingly positive. Out of the fourteen written responses, twelve students included some variation of the statement "analyzing images helped me analyze the poem," while the other two students wrote a distanced observation of how the overall process of analyzing images using the framework for analysis.

Factors to Consider When Teaching Visual Analysis

While teaching the *Die Hard*/DeMott and Bebe®/Browning activities, I realized that teaching visual analysis involves much more than simply popping in a DVD at the beginning of class. Before engaging students in visual analysis, there are several factors to consider. This chapter considers only the usefulness of television and magazine-based print advertisements used in the Composition classroom.

Class size

Teaching media literacy is ideal in the low-enrollment composition classroom, because discussion is key to creating intimate contact zones. Also, high numbers of students makes it easier for students to "hide." In addition, the larger the classroom, the harder it is to make the medium viewable to everyone, regardless of enrollment. Instructors with large classrooms should not abandon media literacy lessons; many classrooms are well equipped to project large visuals at high quality resolutions. "Before you can make

intelligent and useful plans," St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing cautions, "you'll want to find out" such basic information as enrollment and classroom size to gage what you'll be taking on with each lesson in trying to reach all the students (3).

Time available to teach lesson

It's important to give students ample time to deconstruct the text; the more complex the message, the more time it will take to examine the text. Texts that might seem easy to the seasoned rhetorician may be loaded and difficult for students. It helps to begin with simple images and progress to more detailed and symbolic ones. Students generally have an easier time with popular advertisements at first. Once the students feel comfortable with a simple analysis, then they can move on to more complex visuals such as works of art. Once they feel comfortable with single-frame analysis it's safe to move on to television. It really depends on the comfort level of the teacher and the students. Although students are probably able to deconstruct television messages on the first day of class, it's wise to start by examining single-frame ads and art to ensure the students don't miss the basics of visual analysis. Generally analysis of one advertisement in relation to a short text will take approximately ten to fifteen minutes without accounting for class discussion. The length of time students want to discuss a lesson generally depends on how personally invested they are in the topic and how relevant it is to their surroundings. I find that my students are particularly receptive to discussion of class issues, because students typically aren't in the class level they desire. Regardless of the way the classroom progresses, it's vital to the lesson to allow time for discussion of interpretation – visuals are rarely cut-and-dry and contact zones will never emerge if there's no time for discussion.

Age and Maturity of Students

Advertisers often air risqué and/or culturally offensive ads just to get noticed. The idea is that negative attention is better than no attention, which can work to the instructor's advantage if the class seems relatively unengaged in analytical discussion. Instructors should consider the interests of students when choosing visuals. St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing notes that "in some classes you may have a back-of-the class group, whose responses are less apt to be raised hands than whispers or snickers," and in these cases "the best thing to do is to ask them direct questions, to watch for a flicker of interest or knowledge, to invite them to speak to you and the others as often as possible" (Glenn et al 55). Typical introductory composition courses consist mostly of freshmen, who are encountering personal freedom for the first time. Although an advertisement for dish soap is not guaranteed to disinterest students, an advertisement for liquor or beer is probably more age-appropriate. Just as the advertisers have carefully considered their target market, so should the instructor. Students will respond more to advertisements that relate to their age group's popular culture because they're immersed in it. When I chose the Bebe® advertisement for the second activity, I chose it not only for the brand's ample presence in malls and around the Georgia State area, but also because it featured a scantily-clad model in a sexually charged pose. Pointing out the appeals in a liquor advertisement also allows students to discuss social issues; liquor ads are notorious for promoting promiscuity. In addition, since many first-year students participate in underage drinking, examining these ads creates a forum for students to discuss the draws and dangers associated with the activity. Asking students to bring in advertisements that they

like or dislike early in the semester will also give instructors a good idea of the issues students feel are important.

Genre/ Type of Visuals

Advertising, especially the print medium, are just as representative of genre writing as essays. Some advertisements are more textually expository while other advertisements are purely visually descriptive. Analyzing these types of advertisements alongside their academic counterparts allows the students to relate the two genres and expands the definition. Many model essays in introductory composition textbooks make reference to works of art, modern industry, or movies. Bringing in complementary visuals corresponding to the essays makes the text "come alive" and reinforces the author's message, thus I brought the movie DeMott mentions in his essay, *Die Hard*. Although the lesson did not yield the positive results I hoped for, the texts were directly related. Although it now seems obvious, I realized during the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity that, when showing a movie you want students to pay attention to, it is best to keep the lights on; some students will put their heads down if the instructor dims the lights.

Function of the Chosen Medium

All advertising seeks to persuade. How they attempt to persuade serves as a nice introduction to the rhetorical situation. Examining how advertisements build ethos with news-like layouts, actors in laboratory coats, and spokespersons not only makes students focus on the subconscious impact of the message. Is building ethos through subconscious association wrong? Is it up to the consumer to notice these details? Caveat emptor! Bringing in advertisements that convey one idea visually that does not back up those ideas with text, or is undermined by mandatory text, helps students consider personal

responsibility. How does paying attention to the text reflect on the company? Does this affect our consumer culture? If so, how?

Historical Background of the Medium, Including Cultural Context

Understanding the history of television helps students grasp the ways in which advertisements' messages have changed over the years. Picking advertisements for products with a long advertising history allows students to compare messages for the exact same product. Also, historicizing the media helps students to distance themselves from the personal nature of the television set that joins them in their living room each day and night (Godfarb 46). Examining how the visuals have changed reveals how image-saturated our culture is. Advertisers keep up with the latest in technology to make their product seem newer, better than the competition. This phenomenon affects product packaging as well, which, in turn, requires new advertising if the previously created advertisement shows the old packaging. Holidays call for repurposing products as well. Asking students why customizing products for holiday sale will help them reflect on our consumer culture. Many people realize what holidays are coming up by the products they see advertised or by what is available in stores. Examining whether or not advertising or products control us mentally in this way serves for interesting discussion.

CONCLUSION AND CLOSING THOUGHTS

Comparing the two activities, students rated the Bebe®/Browning activity higher in terms of their free-written responses and in their composition objective ratings. Although I surely missed some variables which affected the outcome of the lesson, the positive feedback from the Bebe®/Browning activity makes me more confident with that

lesson. I believe the major factor in the students' responses was that I gave students explicit instructions on which individual elements to look for in the Bebe®/Browning activity, whereas in activity one I expected students to interpret the movie as a text without giving them guidance. Despite what I assumed about the students' media savvy, I found that their willingness and/or ability to articulate that knowledge fizzled when called upon in the classroom setting. I found that I had to provide students a vocabulary with which to deconstruct and interpret the visuals before they were able to comfortably reveal their literacy.

In retrospect, several unanticipated factors may have affected the students' responses. Most obviously, not all the students read the DeMott essay I assigned them for homework before the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity. Were I to go back and repeat this activity, I would put the students in their peer review groups and have them discuss the DeMott essay, giving students a chance to at least glance over the essay before showing the *Die Hard* film clip. Also, I would go over the composition objectives with my students to make sure students better understood the intended meaning of the objectives before asking them to assess the activities' perceived helpfulness. I would also specifically ask students to define analysis and then somehow, through questionnaire or free-write, ask them to address how the analyses of the two texts were similar or different.

In future research, I'd like to examine more activities over an extended period of time, perhaps with a group of volunteer students for an entire academic year, or conduct research within an 1101 or 1102 class with a media literacy theme. I would then bestow

more class time on media literacy teaching tactics and closely examine which lessons reliably create contact zones and discussion of consumer culture.

I found that students were able to relate the visual analysis to the textual analysis quite easily with the Bebe®/Browning activity, while there seemed to be a mental disconnect between the two analyses with the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity. Without any prompting, students understood how the Bebe®/Browning activity was meant to help them with the textual analysis of the poem, and expressed their analytical triumphs in their free-written responses. In these free-written responses, students had a chance to reflect on each text, which is not an objective, but is listed as an outcome for Composition 1101. In this light, both the *Die Hard*/DeMott and the Bebe®/Browning activities were successful.

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APPENDIX A: MOTIVES FOR WRITING FRAMEWORK FOR VISUAL ANALYSIS

- *Subject:* Who or what is in the image? If more than one person, animal, or object appear, what is their relationship to one another?
- *Number:* How many figures or objects appear in the image
- *Placement:* How are the figures or objects arranged? What appears in the foreground? What appears in the background? What is the most prominent in the image? What is of secondary or tertiary importance?
- *Pose:* Do figures appear naturally, or do they seem posed? If posed, what does the pose suggest about the purpose of the image?
- *Gaze:* If there are people or animals in the picture, where are they looking? If they are looking toward the viewer, what does the expression in their eyes convey to you? If they are looking at someone or something else, what does this reveal?
- *Mouth:* Are figures smiling or unsmiling? If smiling, do the smiles seem genuine or forced? Does the smiling mouth correspond to the gaze? Why are these figures smiling? If unsmiling, do the figures seem serious, thoughtful, or unhappy?
- *Clothing:* How are the people in the image dressed? What does their clothing indicate about them? If a person appears partially undressed or nude, what does this indicate? Does the lack of clothing make this figure seem natural, artistic, silly, or seductive?
- *Color:* If the image is in color, what does the color communicate? Do some colors seem warm or cold – and others neutral? Does color emphasize any specific parts of the image? If the image is in black and white, how do these colors – as well as

shades of gray – influence what you see? Are some images more effective in color and others more effective in black and white?

- *Light:* How is the image illuminated? Are all parts of the image equally bright, or does lighting draw your eye in a specific direction? Is the light subtle or harsh? Where is it coming from?
- *Size:* How large is the image? If you are analyzing an image reprinted in a book, newspaper, or magazine, are you seeing the image in its original size, or has the image been reduced or enlarged? How would the image change if its size were changed (for example, if a magazine advertisement were used to fill a large billboard)?
- *Context:* Where and when did the image originally appear? How would this context affect the choice of subject and the way the subject is treated? How does the image appear when studied outside its original context?
- *Association:* Does the image seem similar in any way to other images you have seen? If so, do you think the image maker was influenced directly by work done by someone else? Or are you making a comparison on your own that could help readers understand the work in question?

(Miller 306-307)

APPENDIX B: FORMS AND TALLIED RESPONSES

Objectives Rating

This activity (_____)

gave me practice with/ helped me meet the following composition objectives:

0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Not sure	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot

___ use language to explore and analyze contemporary multicultural, global, and international questions
___ engage in the collaborative, social aspects of writing, and use writing as a tool for learning
___ gather, summarize, synthesize, and explain information from various sources
___ reflect on what contributed to your writing process and evaluate your own work
___ produce coherent, organized, readable prose for a variety of rhetorical situations
___ engage in writing as a process, including various invention heuristics (brainstorming, for example)
___ demonstrate how to use writing aids, such as handbooks, dictionaries, online aids, and tutors
___ use grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences
___ critique your own and others' work in written and oral formats
___ gather evidence, consider audience, draft, revise, edit, and proofread

Responses from the *Die Hard*/DeMott activity

Objective: Respondents' Ratings:

	Not sure	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot
engage in writing as a process, including various invention heuristics	0	2	2	5	5
gather evidence, consider audience, draft, revise, edit, and proofread	2	2	4	4	2
engage in the collaborative, social aspects of writing, and use writing as a tool for learning	0	1	4	8	0
use language to explore and analyze contemporary multicultural, global, and international questions	2	2	4	6	0
demonstrate how to use writing aids, such as handbooks, dictionaries, online aids, and tutors	2	8	1	3	0
gather, summarize, synthesize, and explain information from various sources	0	0	6	5	2
use grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences	3	4	4	2	1
critique your own and others' work in written and oral formats	3	1	6	1	3
produce coherent, organized, readable prose for a variety of rhetorical situations	2	2	2	6	2
reflect on what contributed to your writing process and evaluate your own work	1	1	3	4	3

Responses from the Bebe®/Browning Activity

Objective: Respondents' Ratings:

	Not sure	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot
engage in writing as a process, including various invention heuristics	1	0	1	6	5
gather evidence, consider audience, draft, revise, edit, and proofread	0	1	3	4	5
engage in the collaborative, social aspects of writing, and use writing as a tool for learning	0	1	1	2	9
use language to explore and analyze contemporary multicultural, global, and international questions	1	0	4	2	6
demonstrate how to use writing aids, such as handbooks, dictionaries, online aids, and tutors	0	2	4	4	3
gather, summarize, synthesize, and explain information from various sources	0	1	3	3	6
use grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences	2	4	1	2	4
critique your own and others' work in written and oral formats	1	3	1	4	4
produce coherent, organized, readable prose for a variety of rhetorical situations	0	0	5	6	2
reflect on what contributed to your writing process and evaluate your own work	2	0	3	5	3

APPENDIX C: CLASSROOM TOOLS

Image used in the Bebe®/Browning activity

Browning's "Porphyria's Lover"

THE rain set early in to-night,
  The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
  And did its worst to vex the lake:
  I listen'd with heart fit to break. *5*
When glided in Porphyria; straight
  She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneel'd and made the cheerless grate
  Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
  Which done, she rose, and from her form *10*
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
  And laid her soil'd gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
  And, last, she sat down by my side
  And call'd me. When no voice replied, *15*
She put my arm about her waist,
  And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
  And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
  And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair, *20*
Murmuring how she loved me—she
  Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
  From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
  And give herself to me for ever. *25*
But passion sometimes would prevail,
  Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
  For love of her, and all in vain:
  So, she was come through wind and rain. *30*
Be sure I look'd up at her eyes

Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipp'd me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do. *35*
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around, *40*
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laugh'd the blue eyes without a stain. *45*
And I untighten'd next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blush'd bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propp'd her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore *50*
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorn'd at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gain'd instead! *55*
Porphyria's love: she guess'd not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirr'd,
And yet God has not said a word! *60*