RESEARCHED ARGUMENT – CULMINATING SENIOR PORTFOLIO PROJECT

**The Visual Argument Assignment**

In today’s multimedia world, effective arguments rely increasingly on the power of images to persuade their audience. Think about the many different visually based arguments that you encounter everyday: a television commercial showing Michael Jordan sweating fluorescent Gatorade green; an editorial cartoon of Harry Potter, his lightning bolt scar replaced with a large dollar sign; the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, featuring tennis star Anna Kournikova posed in an off-the-shoulder blouse and a seductive smile. Each of these images presents an argument; each of these texts uses visual rhetoric as a means of persuasion. You will work toward creating your own powerful arguments, both about and through visual rhetoric. You’ve already analyzed comic strips and cartoons on a variety of subjects –George Bush, education, immigration, the War in Iraq – and looked at advertisements – from Got Milk spots to movie trailers for *The Matrix Reloaded*. As we continue to examine the ways in which images are used to persuade, you’ll create your own example of visual rhetoric: **THE VISUAL ARGUMENT.**

**DIRECTIONS:** Construct *an argument* based on your research topic in which **the visual is the dominant mode of discourse**. The images you use in your visual argument may be identical to the ones you will use in your researched argument paper, may be a subset of the ones you use in your research paper, or may be completely different from those that you use in your research paper -- as long as the topic is the same. Your argument may mirror the one you assert in your research paper, you may focus on the counter-arguments, or you may focus on a smaller portion of your overall argument. However, for this assignment, **you will create a visual argument incorporating no fewer than 8 images** which convey the elements of the Toulmin argument: claim, counter-claim, warrant, qualifiers, data (an exception to the number of images would be an op-ad, which may rely on fewer images). The formal structure of your argument should be one that is appropriate to your topic.

**FORMATS:** There are many forms that this **Visual Argument Assignment** might take: it might be organized in various ways: a **poster-collage,**; an **electronic or print photoessay**; it might be an **op-ad**; it might be a **web-page** or series of linked webpages; it might be self-timed **powerpoint slideshow, prezi** or **an i-movie**. However, you must minimize the words that your use – the fewer the better (and no more than 12, including any in the images you select). In addition to thinking about the general format, you should consider how words will be used in your visual argument: **as a frame** (so you would offer one introductory caption/paragraph that the photos themselves build from); as a **running side bar** (so that the photos and the words work in parallel); as a **caption** (so that each photo is tied in to the overall argument). What is key is that your form and your visual-verbal relationship be appropriate for your argument.

**DUE DATES:** You should have a first draft of your visual argument ready to peer review on **Wednesday, November 11**; we will hold a Gallery Walk/Exhibit in class, rather than a presentation, and your peers will evaluate the work you’ve done and offer suggestions. The revision is due **Tuesday November 17, 2015.** We will have a class **exhibit** of your arguments rather than "presentation," because **as a visual argument, it should be able to stand -- and argue -- on its own.**

**REFLECTION LETTER**: After completing your draft visual argument, you will write a **one-page letter** in which you reflect on your decisions in creating your text and on the assignment in general. The reflection letter should be approximately one page in length and should contain, at the end, a list of image sources for the images used in your project (in the proper MLA format).

Choose a topic of local, national, or international controversy, present both sides of the issue then offer a resolution or compromise. This paper must be 1000 words with a minimum of 5 resources.

**Instructions: You will be choosing a controversial issue in the news to follow for the next 4 weeks. You will select 4 sources or one source per week (see below) and respond in writing to the information and/or argument in each of these sources. At the end of 4 weeks, you will use one class period to synthesize these sources into a coherent essay.**   
  
**WHY?** In following one topic by studying and responding to a variety of sources, a number of things will happen:

* You will become well-versed in an issue by being exposed to multiple points of view, a variety of sources and perspectives;
* You will be able to use what you learned about this topic as evidence in an essay response on the AP exam or SAT, or simply impress your peers and elders with your extensive worldly knowledge;
* You will be able to analyze the rhetoric of professional writers and emulate their successes;
* You will have the opportunity to practice responding quickly and succinctly to something you've not seen before, simulating the AP exam scenario
* You will have the opportunity to take risks in your writing, trying new types of sentences and quote integration.

Finally, you will be able to synthesize multiple sources to argue for and/or against a claim (a-ha! The Synthesis Question!)

**HOW?** **First**, choose a topic of interest to you. You should choose a topic of current controversy, one that will be present in the news for approximately one month. For 4 weeks, you will follow the same topic.

**Examples of topics:** elections, Iraq, abortion rights, death penalty, gay rights, school sex-ed curricula, criminal trials, minority achievement in schools, dieting trends and fads, China's economic issues, global warming, music downloading, etc.

\*\*SUGGESTION: To search for sources, use **Google News and Images** instead of a local newspaper's website. You will see a variety of sources from around the world. Also consider using magazines, blogs, TV/radio transcripts, speeches, etc. You need not limit yourself to newspapers.  
  
**Next**, you'll need to find **4 sources** total over a period of 4 weeks. (Stay current; do not choose sources that were written more than 1 or 2 months ago.)

* *(for Week 1)* an unbiased **news** piece (usually appears in the "A" section, has many quotes from both sides of the issue and very short paragraphs)
* *(for Week 2 )* some sort of **graphic** (cartoon, photo, drawing, illustration, artwork, table, graph, statistics, etc.)
* *(for Weeks 3&4)* TWO (2) **opinion** pieces, columns, or editorials (usually appear in their own sections or at the back of the "A" section, sometimes with no author named, rarely have quotes, and bias is clear)

**The written component:\*\*** In all responses, I encourage you to take risks with your writing. Do things you don't usually do. Open creatively. Vary your syntax. Integrate your quotes in a unique way. Find your voice.  
  
For each week's source, you will turn in a response of approximately 300 words (a copy of the source must accompany your response). Requirements for each week are as follows:  
  
Week 1 (News): After reading and annotating the article, briefly summarize the issue as it is presented. Quote when necessary to explain the summary. Then, describe your initial reaction to the topic presented. How do you feel about it? What have you heard about it? What makes it controversial? Are you leaning one way or the other? Why? Why are you interested in it? Use this as an opportunity to write from the first person and use personal experience if appropriate.  
  
Week 2 (Graphic): For whatever graphic you choose, whether it is data or a drawing, you can analyze its "message." In 300 words, what is the graphic "arguing"? Analyze the following elements of the image: use of color, characterization, font, size of font and images, perspective, position of image, what is emphasized, etc. What does it say or report? How does it help your understanding of the issue? What is its occasion, audience, and purpose?  
  
Weeks 3&4 (Opinion pieces): After reading and annotating the article, analyze the rhetoric of the writer. Choose one or two strategies to analyze, quoting evidence. Purpose MUST be mentioned here. Then, respond personally to the issue by evaluating the writer's argument and use of rhetoric and don't forget to explain your own opinion!  
  
**Final Assessment (Synthesis question):** At the end of the 4 weeks, you will collect all 4 sources and use at least 3 of them in an essay to agree or disagree with a claim about the issue. I will ask you to prepare the claim and show it to me before writing. This will be done in class as a timed writing.

**Rationale:**

* advice from constituent organizations who teach college-level writing courses
* skills should be equivalent to skills expected to acquire within first year of college writing
* students should be going to college not with attitude of “I’m done” but with attitude of “I’m ready for college-level work”
* exam needs to reflect students’ ability to work w/secondary students writing in college is writing about reading; students are rarely asked to write only based on own experience
* students rarely perform traditional research paper/report (glorified book review/pastiche of sources) in college-level writing instead, argument/position desired; see what has already been written about this issue and enter into conversation with it

***One* model for the researched argument paper**

* contextualize the issue for a reader, not an examiner essays, not exam answers (can stand by itself beyond the prompt)
* suggest the direction your development of a position will take thesis statement (not as *syntactic* entity, but as *semantic* entity; i.e.: not “the sentence that comes at the end of the introduction and includes these components”)
* enter into a “conversation” with the reader, by bringing in perspectives from secondary sources plus anything you can contribute from your reading or experience students should not be limited to resources given, but should make connections between existing sources and own experience

**Handout One: Synthesis assignment prototype** (from College Board via David Jolliffe)

* official/approved – may be distributed and used in instruction
* later in the fall, to appear on AP Central from ETS and College Board: range of materials to help teachers develop synthesis assignments

**Sample prompt:**

**Directions**: The following prompt is based on the accompanying six sources.

This question requires you to integrate a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. *Refer to the sources to support your position; avoid mere paraphrase or summary. Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument.*

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect citations.

**Introduction**

Television has been influential in United States presidential elections since the 1960’s. But just what is this influence, and how has it affected who is elected? Has it made elections fairer and more accessible, or has it moved candidates from pursuing issues to pursuing image?

**N**

**Assignment**

**Read the following sources (including any introductory information) carefully. Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources for support, take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that television has had a positive impact on presidential elections.**

**Refer to the sources as Source A, Source B, etc.; titles are included for your convenience.**

**Source A (Campbell)**

**Source B (Hart and Triece)**

**Source C (Menand)**

**Source D (chart)**

**Source E (Ranney)**

**Source F (Koppel)**

**ote:** The section of the instructions enclosed in the box will likely not be available to the students until the actual prompt booklet is open.

\* \* \*

**Sample student approach (proposed by Jolliffe):**

To call the televised presidential discourses “debates” makes a mockery of the term. I am a member of the debate team, and these debates are unlike real debates; no one should watch them and take them seriously. ( working thesis)

Sources selected:

* F (Koppel’s commentary on how debates did not require serious or useful engagement between participants)
* B (argument that name “debate” should be changed to “candidate profile” to better reflect celebrity-interview style of current interaction between candidates and television audiences)
* D (chart demonstrating decreasing level of audience interest in debates between 1964 and 1996)

\* \* \*

**Alternative approaches (proposed by session participants):**

Televised presidential debates are a good idea that, while they had early promise, have gone haywire. **Source: A, ?, ?**

The skill of debating in and of itself is not a necessary qualification for president. (Begs the question: why do we insist that presidents be able to debate?) **Sources: A, C, ?**

Televisions may not affect elections, but may affect public policy once a president is already installed, and this may affect decisions people make when voting. **Sources: E, ?, ?**

Television has given the American people a pseudo-familiarity with our presidents’ personal lives, which begins to be more important than our familiarity with their policies or platforms. **Sources: B, ?, ?**

The nature of television sensationalizes “sexy” issues that may or may not be significant.

Since television debates focus on image, debates have been attracting an increasingly small demographic.

\* \* \*

**Sources:**

* effort to ensure that a balanced view is represented through the sources provided so that students may argue in any direction
* sources will not include any “throw-aways” – any source could be potentially useful
* if a student brings in own information but does not refer to at least 3 sources, essay cannot achieve upper-half grade
* pictorial sources will be of different sorts: graphs/charts, political cartoons, pictures
* sources will not be from a dubious provenance
* documents will range in eras and origins: may include pre-20th or pre-19th century and international sources
* students will not be expected to document sources provided from their own experience
* refutation of a source counts as use, provided it is cited
* number of sources (6) is meant to be challenging to read in given time – students will need to process quickly
* bibliographic citations appear at the top of each source for the benefit of student evaluation (e.g. year of publication, type of publication, etc.) and brief introductory comments at the top of each source indicate what *type* of source it is (periodical, online, television, etc.)
* students may be encouraged to refer to authors by name as provided, rather than by number
* citations to sources may be parenthetical

**Handout Two: Outline for Articles** (Eva Arce/Vicki Hebert)

To be handed out to students at beginning of year and referred to throughout.

1. Works Cited/Bibliography Entry (10 points)

Author’s Last Name, First Name. “Name of the Article.” Title of Magazine

date month year: pages.

Use MLA Works Cited form for any other type of source

1. Main Idea: Summarize article in one original sentence (10 points)
2. Quotations from the article: Highlight in copy
3. Quotation that is a fact (5 points)
4. Quotation that is an opinion (5 points)
5. Paraphrase:
6. Interesting direct quotation from the article:
7. Direct quotation from article: Highlight in copy
8. Tone: Author’s attitude or feeling toward his subject (10 points)
9. Tone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   1. Three words or phrases to support each identified tone
10. Tone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
    1. Three words or phrases to support each identified tone
11. Inference (10 points)
    1. Quotation from which something is implied but not stated
    2. Inference drawn
12. Vocabulary: Two words which need to be defined
    1. First word
       1. copy the whole sentence
       2. guess at its meaning from the context
       3. copy the dictionary definition including part of speech
       4. write an original sentence using the word appropriately
    2. Second word
       1. copy the whole sentence
       2. guess at its meaning from the context
       3. copy the dictionary definition including part of speech
       4. write an original sentence using the word appropriately

**Handout Three: Visual Literacy Worksheet** (Eva Arce)

**Using your visual document (e.g.: a work of art), complete the following outline on your own paper**.

**Note** first four elements must be completed for an analysis to have substance; however, a student may only be able to arrive at the conclusions demanded by these elements after having examined the aspects suggested by the other elements

1. **Works Cited/Bibliography Entry**

Use MLA Works Cited form for source identification

1. **Author’s purpose**

What is the author’s purpose in creating this piece?

1. **Theme**

What message does the artist want his audience to receive?

1. **Tone**

What is the artist’s attitude or feeling about this subject?

1. **Character(s)**

Describe the character’s physical traits:

Are there any exaggerations?

If exaggerations are evident, what was the author’s purpose?

What personality traits or feelings are perceived?

How does the artist portray these?

What are the characters doing? What does this behaviour say about them?

What are the reactions of other characters to the central character?

What purposes does the character serve in terms of the work as a whole?

1. **Setting**

Does the place and environment create mood? Explain.

1. **Conflict**

What’s the problem?

1. **Details**

Are items exaggerated (hyperboles)? For what purpose?

Is some imagery dominating? To what sense does this appeal?

Is some of the imagery repeated? For what purpose?

Is there a pattern to the images?

Are parallel lines evident? For what purpose?

1. **Allusion(s)**

Does something refer to an event or person in history?

What do you know about this historical person or situation?

Does something refer to an event or character in literature?

What do you know about this literary piece?

1. **Symbolism**

Do some of the concrete items represent abstract ideas? Explain.

What colours are used and what do these colours symbolize?

Is there a contrast of lightness and darkness? What does this mean?

1. **Irony**

Is something in the depicted situation ironic?

Does the audience know more than the character(s) about the situation?

1. **Style**

What type of visual is this?

Does its genre add to its meaning?

Why did the author choose to represent his message in this manner?

Purpose: to read past the obvious (i.e. to move beyond what is literally represented in the image) and make sense of it in terms of what it says to the audience (i.e. as a rhetorical artefact)

**Sample analysis: Jacques-Louis David’s “Mars Disarmed by Aprhodite and the 3 Graces”**

* **What do you see**?
  + literal: “A bunch of naked people lying around having a good time!”
* **Who are these people**?
  + Mars (god of war)
  + Aphrodite (goddess of love)
  + Cupid (son of these two)
  + three Graces (children of Aphrodite)
* **What other items are in the image**?
  + doves
  + sword (Mars is giving away)
  + spear (held at a distance)
  + shield and bow (held by Graces)
  + clouds (top of Olympus – dark at bottom and light at top)
* **Tone / Attitude of those in image?**
  + light, smiling, cushions comfortable, relaxing
* **Theme(s)**
  + trite: “love conquers all”; “make love, not war”
  + subtle: “it is possible to achieve victory through love / gentle persuasion instead of through force”; “men may seek to dominate, but women may find ways to bend them to their will”
* **Purpose**
  + to show a world of grace and beauty and its ability to soothe and dominate the world of force