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Professor Parker

English 113

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My Reflective Essay

When I heard that Hope College's offered a course about Disney for the English 113 general education requirement, I was immediately intrigued. I, like most children, have grown up watching Disney princess movies over and over again until my parents finally had to tell me I couldn't watch the same movie twice a day. Throughout high school, writing was one of my strong points in school. I thought my writing was above average and thought I knew almost everything I needed to understand about the writing process. After just a few times in the "The Wonderful World of Disney?" course, I quickly realized I had a lot of room to improve my knowledge about the writing process and my writing itself. Throughout this course, I have learned to think critically which in turn has helped me improve the quality of my writing.

Gregory Fraser and Chad Davidson's *Analyze Anything: A Guide to Critical Reading and Writing* was the foundation in which we built our knowledge of writing upon. Their book explained that although we all interpret signs around us everyday, we must continue to improve those skills and develop our awareness and understanding of the world around us to reach our full potential as writers. The first step in writing a strong essay is of course the first draft. My peer's comments on my first draft helped me immensely in writing a successful final draft. From there, Dr. Parker's comments, suggestions and questions on my final draft helped me to learn from my mistakes for future essays. The process of using strategies to help in the construction of persuasive theoretical claims, such as the MEAL plan, is something that I have learned is so

important. This plan consists of main assertion, evidence, analysis, and lastly a link back to your argument. In my first essay, which can be found under the “Essays” tab in my e-portfolio, it is clear that my knowledge of the MEAL plan was not fully developed yet. My topic sentences did not include the affect on American culture and the analysis of my evidence was not strong. But continued practice using this model helped me develop my essays and critically think throughout each paragraph. My improvement in creating a strong essay can be found in essays 2 and 3, where it is evident that I think critically about the research I analyzed and reviewed. My critical thinking and writing is more developed in my first drafts rather than just my final draft. Reading *Analyze Anything* was a crucial stepping-stone to becoming an even better writer than before and overall made the process of writing an essay much easier.

Semiotics, which is the “study of signs,” is a lesson we learned early on in the semester that aided me in my analytical thinking and persuasive writing. Learning to read signs takes practice and commitment and this course gave me that opportunity. Each essay was governed by one driving theoretical question, followed by an in depth analysis of the multiple meanings of the sign under analysis. We had to incorporate assumptions about the sign while including evidence from the text (the movie and two peer-reviewed sources). According to our syllabus, our sign must “cover/incorporate one facet or function of race, gender, class, sexuality or religion and how the representation of it (race, gender, class, sexuality, or religion) serves as a way to shape, interrogate, or undermine contemporary American cultural beliefs in the movie(s) under your investigation.” This requirement opened my mind up about digging deeper into the meaning of my chosen sign for each essay. It is clear that I was hesitant to fully question the sign I chose in my first essay, but as time went on, I became more confident in doing this. Essays 2 and 3 serve as an example as to how I have grown as a writer, due to the complexity of my analysis of each

sign and how it relates to American cultural beliefs.

English 113 stood out among my other general education requirements and pushed me out of my comfort zone due to the required assignments and events that I normally would not pursue. I really appreciated that this class challenged my thinking, writing, and outside activity and involvement. In my e-portfolio, under the “Public Lecture” tab, you will find photos from a “Visiting Writers Series.” This event is something that I wouldn’t normally attend but ended up really enjoying. The event consisted of two authors reading from their own text and giving a background of why they wrote what they did. The infographic assignment, which is also included in my e-portfolio, is something that I was never familiar with doing before this course. It was an interesting way to communicate what I wrote about in my third essay. Describing my essay through a visual was something that I struggled with at first but quickly learned how to accomplish.

Overall, looking back at the beginning of the semester to now, I have seen great improvement in writing critical thinking and writing. Although this process required trial-and-error, I feel that I have succeeded in fulfilling the stated goals of this course, especially in becoming an analytical, skeptical, and conscious consumer of images and ideas. I have learned skills that I will be able to utilize in the future, and already have applied in other some of my other classes.