

### Creating a Theory of Cultural Literacy

We have spent the last few weeks reading, writing, and talking about literacy, answering questions: What is it? Do we define it differently when the social context changes? For example, how does college student literacy differ from Eli's literacy in the Amish community? (Fishman) How does it change for the people of Trackton, North Carolina? (Brice Heath) What happens in our process of becoming video-literate? (Scholes) What does it mean to examine another culture's literacy (as Scheper-Hughes does in Ballybran, Ireland?)—by that I mean, what elements of a culture should one take into account when developing a theory of literacy? She suggests, for example, that by looking at what a culture deems "mad" or abnormal we can determine its core values or what it means to be a "normal" member of that culture.

**In this essay, you will develop a theory of literacy as it reflects its social context. You get to choose the social context or the "culture" to examine in order to apply your theory. I encourage you, as ever, to write about something that intrigues you—either because you already know a lot about it or you want to know more about it.** Will you examine what it means to be literate in the world of skateboarding, winemaking, or birdwatching? Belly-dancing, stargazing, or hip-hop? Science-fiction/fantasy-novel-reading? Marriage or parenting? A particular religious or ethnic group? Punk rock? (I remember your example punk-rock thesis statement). As long as you can come up with a theory of literacy within a social context that intrigues you, you'll be on your way to writing a paper for college that means something to you. This is where you have freedom of choice.

And here are the **requirements** (to wit, what I will be looking for when I evaluate your essay):

- **A clear, three-level thesis with an observation, opinion, and significance (as discussed during the first two weeks of class) somewhere in the beginning of your essay (usually within the first three paragraphs) that explains your theory of literacy, what the social context is, and why it matters—the "So what?"**
- **Concrete examples to support your thesis/theory:** These examples will come from your personal experience in and/or observations of the social context or culture (or sub-culture?) you describe.
- **Evidence that you are able to synthesize (bring together) your ideas with the ideas of others. This means that I would like you to call on the ideas of at least two of the four authors we have read for this unit – Fishman, Brice Heath, Scholes, or Scheper-Hughes.** You may quote them directly or paraphrase them, but I'd like to see you integrate them into your conversation about literacy. More than likely, their theories and examples will help you develop your own. It's important to let your reader see

the parallels, even if your social context is very different from theirs. Remember that analogies are helpful for readers of essays.

- **Evidence that you are beginning to develop a sense of style as a writer, a personality, a “voice” as some call it.** This is where you can play with language, sentence-length variation, word choice, etc.
- To do a thorough job on this assignment, your essay should be at least **4 or 5 pages, no more than 7. As always, MLA format remains essential.** Check your *Keys for Writers* for help.
- Please review **your *Evaluative Criteria* handout** as those elements of good writing we’ve been discussing for the past two weeks certainly apply here.

Have fun with this as you work hard, and let me know if you have any questions.

Rough Draft Due Date\_\_\_\_\_

Large Group Workshop\_\_\_\_\_

**Final Draft Due Date**\_\_\_\_\_