

English Composition: Defining Monstrosity

Course Description

This course helps students learn about college-level composition and research through an exploration of monsters and monstrosity that emphasizes non-fictional sources. The course begins with discussion of claims and thesis statements as students articulate their preliminary ideas about what monstrosity is. In addition to written claims, assignments require claims in other modes and media, such as a political cartoon that uses images of monsters or a blog entry that conveys a position about media violence to an online audience. While students build a repertoire of rhetorical strategies, they also consider the cultural significance of monstrosity in terms of human identity, particularly gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. As students consider monsters in different cultural contexts, they focus on distinguishing fact from fiction and considering how fiction and fact transform one another. Finally, students return to the definitions of monstrosity articulated at the semester's beginning in order to develop a well-informed essay about monstrosity and its meanings.

Required Texts

- Blake, Brandy Ball and L. Andrew Cooper, eds. *Monsters*. Fountainhead Press, 2012.
- A rhetorical handbook of the instructor's choosing
- The film *Monster* (2003), either screened by the instructor or viewed independently

Assignments

Instructors may choose to have students select and revise completed shorter and longer assignments for a portfolio at the end of the semester.

- *Political cartoon* (*Monsters*, p. 10, Compose)
- *Editorial or blog* (*Monsters*, pp. 241–243)
- *Photo essay* (*Monsters*, pp. 233–234)
- *Definition essay* (*Monsters*, pp. 231–232)
- *Shorter assignments* (from *Monsters*, listed in readings and assignments, below)

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

All page numbers refer to *Monsters*

Unit 1: Introduction to Argument

Week 1: MAKING AND SHARING CLAIMS

Reading: "Introduction: Haunting Boundaries"

Assignments: p. 10, Invent and Collaborate

Week 2: CLAIMS IN DIFFERENT MODES AND MEDIA

Assignment: p. 10, Compose

Week 3: DEVELOPING CLAIMS AND THESIS STATEMENTS

Reading: "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)"

Assignment: p. 34, Explore

Major Assignment: Revise political cartoon from week 2

Week 4: ARGUMENT AND COUNTER-ARGUMENT

Reading: "George Romero's Zombie Films"

Assignment: p. 62, Compose

Unit 2: Studying Psychology and Human Development

Week 5: ARGUMENTS ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Reading: "Excerpts from *The Uncanny*"

Assignment: p. 192, Collaborate

Week 6: TYPES OF EVIDENCE

Reading: "Excerpts from *Killing Monsters*"

Assignments: p. 229, Explore and p. 230, Invent

Unit 3: Studying Gender and Sexuality

Week 7: RESEARCH AND COLLABORATION

Reading: "*Frankenstein: A Feminist Critique of Science*"

Assignments: p. 52, Explore and p. 53, Collaborate

Major Assignment: Major Assignment #5, editorial or blog (pp. 241–243)

Week 8: HANDLING DIFFICULT SOURCES

Reading: "Parasites and Perverts"

Assignments: p. 139, Explore and p. 140, Collaborate

Week 9: HANDLING CONTROVERSY

Reading: "Excerpt from *Gothic Realities*"

Assignment: p. 153, Invent

Major Assignment: Major Assignment #2, photo essay (pp. 233–234)

Unit 4: Studying Race and Ethnicity

Week 10: ANALYZING PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Reading: "Civilized Vampires Versus Savage Werewolves"

Assignments: p. 171, Explore and p. 172, Collaborate

Week 11: CONSIDERING CONTEXT

Reading: "The Horrors of Race and American History"

Assignment: pp. 177–178, Collaborate

Unit 5: Negotiating the "Real"

Week 12: DISTINGUISHING FACT FROM FICTION

Readings: "Serial Killers" and "Movie Psychos and Slashers"

Assignments: p. 209, Collaborate and p. 218, Compose

Week 13: COMPARING NON-FICTION AND FICTION

Film: *Monster* (2003)

Assignment: p. 209, Compose

Week 14: BROADER CONCLUSIONS

Reading: Filmography

Assignment: Discuss the diversity of this list: why so many fictional monsters, and what is the significance of monsters being so prevalent across entertainment media?

Week 15: WORKSHOPS: final assignment or portfolio

Major Assignment: Major Assignment #1, definition essay (pp. 231–232)