

Imagination Challenge Essay Prompts

High, Lanzbom, Nericcio, Sneider & Richards, Inc.

We begin with a snapshot of an intellectual theft: the particulars of this cinematic writing prompt borrow ideas from the intellectual imagination of Gore Vidal (and one can easily pilfer ideas from shoddier sources). Vidal, in one of his countless essays, looks into the murky past of that scary word (for students) “essay” and finds another word not usually associated with the term. That word is “attempt.” Where all too often one imagines an essay as a finished product, Vidal argues that the emphasis for a writer in confronting the challenge of the essay should be less product and more process, less clear conclusions, than messy, delicious and invigorating questions.



You see, most people think of an essay as a finished product--a dull, lifeless, inert textual body with a static introduction, an "A-B-C" body, and a clear, let's-tie-up-all-the-pieces conclusion. You will not write this kind of essay for our Sinematic Bodies class. That's right, I am asking with no little nostalgia to return to the origins of the essay. Your only task is to make a sincere *attempt* to produce a set of ordered reflections, a group of carefully arranged tasty words which respond in some way to the novels, films, short critical treatments and lectures you have worked through and will continue to work through in the coming weeks.

Are you writing for Bill Nericcio and his cohort of talented literatiGTAs? In a way, of course you are. But in order to do well on this assignment, you must forget about your peculiar, if affable, intellectual guides. The only people who really count are the readers you write for: the audience for your paper--in short, YOUR READER. Who is *she*? What is *he* like? Well, regardless of his or her various genitalic configuration, he and she are a lot like you. When it comes to reading, they are impatient and easily bored. They like specific details; they love direct, succinct quotes woven carefully into the fabric of an essay. If you are going to write about an image, they want to see a reproduction of that image. They hate misspellings and passive verbs. They like tangy language which is fresh and not filled with stupid, tired phrases. Like you, they resent having their time wasted.

Regardless of which prompt grabs your eye, there is a Research component to this exercise--you should consult, cite and interweave material from at least two (2) outside published scholarly sources that relate explicitly to the particular thesis your essay unfolds-- acceptable research materials include: scholarly books and essays in academic journals--cite these sources using the MLA Bibliography stylesheet. Please DO NOT merely quote from a local newspaper or unedited online 'zine you find through GOOGLE on the Internet. (NOTE: I WOULD PREFER YOU NOT USE ONLINE RESEARCH RESOURCES NOR ENCYCLOPEDIAS; I ACTUALLY WANT YOU TO CAREFULLY AND WITH PLEASURE USE THE LIBRARY—walk through the corridors of books and get lost even!). Some good starting places for published scholarly approaches to the materials in this class are the Modern Language Association Bibliography and the ProQuest Research Library, available online through Love Library:

<http://infodome.sdsu.edu/research/databases/databases.shtml>.**

Please throw yourself into the pleasure of writing this paper! Take chances and don't hold back--the best A+ essays will probably be efforts where the student, that's right YOU, adapts, warps, refracts, and/or re-imagines the questions provided. You should use no less than 5 and no more than 8 pages

(double-spaced typed, carefully proofread, with a dynamic, suggestive title) to complete your task. No cover sheet or folder-cover is necessary and late papers will NOT be accepted. The completed essay is due November 12th @12noon in the special box in front of my office, AH4117--no late papers accepted; no emailed papers accepted.

Here are your prompts--you are welcome to adapt them as you see fit, especially if it means you producing a work of art that will blow your reader out of the water with excitement, enthusiasm, and ecstasy.

ROLL YOUR OWN ESSAY

Use any two or three texts we have worked on (films, novels, short stories, essays, graphic narrative) and develop a critical thesis of your own design. Please write out a proposal for this thesis and email it to your GTA NO LATER THAN Friday October 29, 2004

SINNING PSYCHES

Contrast the 'theory' or the 'philosophy' or the 'dynamics' of "sin" and "cinema" as they unfold in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* and Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust*.

MAD MEN and a WOMAN

Todd Hackett, John the Savage, Norma Desmond and Thomas (the photographer in Blow-Up): what a foursome! Write a psychological 'autopsy' on these four characters. How is their psychology a function of their relationship with the visual arts—painting, television, film and photography? Use specific examples NOT DISCUSSED in class to support your findings.

SEXY BEASTS

Is human sexuality a practice that relieves psychological pressures or is the sex act indeed THE act that creates the possibility of psychological monstrosities. Explore this idea in a comparative analysis of (two or three of the following): the writing of Aldous Huxley, the cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni, the playwriting of Oliver Mayer and the graphic narrative of Art Spiegelman.

MOVIE MONSTERS

Cinema: dark, safe wombs of sorts; the first thing most people think of with regard to the movies? ESCAPE. Yet this semester we will learn that the movies, far from being a sanctuary, can also function as monstrous prisons, subjecting their denizens to pain and worse. Explore these notions in a comparative essay on Tino Villanueva, Denise Chavez and Billy Wilder.

SADISM, MASOCHISM AND SADO-MASOCHISM

Sexual pleasure through the administration of pain? Sadism, named after the infamous Marquis de Sade. Sexual pleasure through the experience of pain? Masochism, named after the singularly deranged Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. In the hands of filmmaker Michael Powell and novelist Aldous Huxley however, we are introduced to studies wherein sadomasochistic characters--odd, disturbing and compelling fusions of Sade and von Masoch--rule the screen and book page. John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* might come in handy for this essay.

ART AND THE SELF

Self-referentiality is the credo of postmodern literature and cinema. Yet different artists inject autobiographical references into their work for different reasons. Explore eruptions of the autobiographical in four of the works we have addressed this term.

**ProQuest is good for lazy researchers in that it archives full text versions of published scholarly articles, saving you the bother of finding out if Love Library carries the journals cited in the MLA Bibliography--heck, even some of my articles are indexed on [ProQuest](#). However, there is no substitute, even in this the high age of cyber fetishization, there is NO substitute for physically prowling the library stacks for salient critical artifacts.