

## **Project One -- Genealogy of Texts**

1600 - 2000 Words

### **Due Dates**

Draft One (2-3 pages plus outline) – Tuesday, July 1<sup>st</sup>

Draft Two (complete draft) – Wednesday, July 2<sup>nd</sup>

Draft Three (complete revised draft) – Thursday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>

**Final Draft – Monday, July 7th**

We've tentatively established that creativity is not a product of solitary inspiration, but instead, it depends on the influences of the things/ideas that have come before it. Drawing on our past experiences, we take the old, "copy and transform" pieces of what we have learned, and combine those pieces in a new way; in doing so, we create something new. This idea in mind, I'm asking you to consider two things concerning creativity: 1) creativity is dependent on the things that have come before it, and 2) the primary action of creativity is the combination of materials in a new way. In class, you've done well to see how this idea works with material inventions and social media, but remember: this is a writing course. The idea behind this assignment is to help you apply this model of creativity to writing/composition to give you a way of understanding the nature of writing itself. You will be doing this by constructing a genealogy--tracing a lineage, if you will--looking across multiple texts to see how one particular element shows up across different compositions, or explaining how multiple textual influences have come together to produce a particular text.

The word "genealogy" is traditionally used to refer to people's ancestry. You look backward in time through research to see who your ancestors were, where they came from, and what they accomplished with their lives. The task at hand is similar in that you will be looking through history in an attempt to understand how texts and writing practices are interrelated. Since all compositions carry traces of their antecedents, this assignment is also an exercise in history. In carrying out this process, I hope that you gain an understanding of how all compositions are new combinations, permutations, ensembles, and arrangements of pre-existing materials.

In order to complete this assignment, I think there are primarily two approaches you can take when looking across texts. The first approach would involve tracing a particular "semiotic unit" across three different texts. "Semiotic unit" might look scary at first, but it is basically anything that carries meaning - a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, a picture, a set of gestures, a melody, a chorus, and so on. Narrowing down to this unit, you would want to find different texts in which it occurs, seeing how it is employed differently in each of these contexts. How has it been transformed? How do these different occurrences represent new configurations of this unit? Does it mean something different in different texts/context? What factors contribute to it being different? These are just some questions to think about, but if you take this approach, I'm asking you to provide a narrative of where a semiotic unit has appeared across history and how it is transformed over time.

The second approach would involve selecting a text and tracing its intertextual roots, meaning you would explain to me the multiple influences that have come together to create whatever text you choose. Carrying out this Genealogy metaphor, you might consider this a way of coding a text's DNA, trying to provide the fullest picture of a text's ancestry. Again, you might consider how each element has been transformed to suit the purposes of the new text and how meaning(s) is/are changed in the new context. By carrying out this exercise, I'm asking to you provide an interpretation of a text or multiple texts, making an argument for how they are interrelated.