**Subject area/course**: English/Language Arts

**Grade level/band**: 10

**Task source**: Inquiry by Design in collaboration with Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE); Authors: Dennie Palmer Wolf and John McMillan

**Constructing the Self**

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**

**A. Task overview:** In this task, students will read, analyze, and write about a selection from Susan Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight* in which she makes the argument that texts teach us how to see and think about ourselves and others. Students will analyze a popular text to explore the idea that texts shape our views about how young people should think, look, or behave. During this analysis, students consider the methods by which a text can shape an audience’s ideas or beliefs. Students will convey their own perspective about the message texts send to young people about how they should think, look, and behave through either an essay or mixed-­‐media presentation.

**B. Aligned standards:**

**1. Primary Common Core State Standards**

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RL.9-­‐10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RL.9-­‐10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text. CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RL.11-­‐12.6 Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.9-­‐10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**2. Secondary Common Core State Standards**

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RL.9-­‐10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RI.11-­‐12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RI.11-­‐12.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in

which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute

to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.9-­‐10.2a Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.9-­‐10.2b Develop the topic with well-­‐chosen, relevant, and

sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information, and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.9-­‐10.2c Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.9-­‐10.2d Use precise language and domain-­‐specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.9-­‐10.2e Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing. CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.9-­‐10.2f Provide a concluding statement or section that follows

from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

**3. Critical abilities**

Analysis of Information: Integrate and synthesize multiple sources of information (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to address a question, make informed decisions, understand a process, phenomenon, or concept, and solve problems while evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Communication in Many Forms: Use oral and written communication skills to learn, evaluate, and express ideas for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, and rewriting while considering the audience.

**C. Time/schedule requirements:**

This task will take four class days and five additional days out of class.

**D. Materials/resources:**

• Excerpt from Susan Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight* (email Katie Wilczak at [kwilczak@stanford.edu](mailto:kwilczak@stanford.edu) if you require access to the text)

• Supplemental readings on media and identity (optional, see list at end of this document)

• A selection of visual images with different perspectives on a common topic (e.g., an anti-­‐smoking public service announcement and an ad for cigarettes; or a Live United poster of a young person and an ad that suggests the wilder side of adolescence)

• Popular culture texts selected by students with the help and approval of the teacher

**E. Prior knowledge:**

• Experience with advertising, media, and popular books, movies, or television shows

• Knowledge about the use of texts, media, and images in past history (e.g., propaganda, advertising) and today

**F. Connection to curriculum:**

• Can be connected to a unit on the power of language and rhetoric

• Can be connected to a unit on media literacy

• Can be connected to a unit on cultural imagery, cultural criticism, feminism, or other critical lens to evaluate texts

• Can be connected to a unit on the portrayal of childhood and youth across time and/or cultures

**G. Teacher instructions:**

**Part 1: Study advertisements to establish a context for the tasks**

Introduce students to the concept of cultural imagery: texts, including visual images, that communicate basic values or concepts that the authors or creators want an audience to absorb and believe.

To help students grasp this concept, have students locate ads where they see young people their age being portrayed. They should look for ads that represent them both positively and negatively. Place students in pairs or trios and give them time to share their ads with one another. Next, ask them to select two ads—one that represents young people positively and another that portrays them negatively—and give them 5-­‐7 minutes to study the ads and to discuss and make notes in response to the following prompts:

1) Describe what you see in the ads (the explicit message).

2) What do you think the ad is trying to communicate to young audiences (the implicit message)?

3) How do the text and the image(s) communicate these messages? What choices did the advertisers make in order to get their messages across?

Afterwards, reconvene the class and conduct a whole group discussion about the ads and their answers to the questions. Record the students’ ideas on wall charts for later use

**Part 2: Text Comprehension: Understanding arguments in visual and written texts**

Ask students to read the excerpt from Susan Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight*. At the end of the selection, Bordo makes the claim that “cultural imagery” is “teaching us how to see.” After the reading, ask students to write a 400-­‐500 word response in which they do the following things:

1) Re-­‐state Bordo’s claim in their own words

2) Explain the evidence she uses to make this claim

3) Reflect on what they think of her claim

Note: Because Bordo’s text focuses primarily on the influence of media on women, you may also wish to engage students in reading and discussing additional texts that are more

gender-­‐neutral or that specifically engage the influence of media on boys and men. See “Supplemental Readings on Media and Identity”, below, for several suggested texts; be sure to screen any potential texts for appropriateness for your students.

**Part 3: Create a “text pool”**

Susan Bordo is one of many people who argue that texts—including ad campaigns, movies, stories, and musical lyrics—shape how people think they should think, look, and behave. For example, Bordo writes in *Unbearable Weight* about how images influence the way people see and feel about their own and other people’s bodies.

Brainstorm with the class a list of specific popular texts (e.g., current songs, television

series, ads, etc.) that send messages about how young people should think, look, or behave. Work with the class to: 1) sort the list into categories by topics, and 2) annotate each item

in the list with details about the messages it sends.

**Part 4: Textual Analysis**

Help students to select a popular text they know well (e.g., film, album, novel, etc.) that sends powerful messages about how young people should think, look, or behave. Explain that they will be writing about it so that they should select a text that they:

• Know well and have thought about

• Have seen other people react to or discuss

• Think is worth investigating

The selection of an appropriate popular text is crucial for completing this task well. Provide advice and make sure you approve of the text prior to students’ final selection of their text. Ask students to make notes on their selected popular text that answer the following questions (being sure to cite lines and examples from the text that illustrate their answers):

1. *Text*: What is the text?

2. *Topic*: What is the topic that the text is teaching readers/viewers about? (Focus on one topic only.)

3. *Cultural imagery*:

a. Describe what you read/see in the text (the explicit message).

b. What message is the text trying to communicate to young audiences (the implicit message)?

c. How does the text communicate these messages? What choices or strategies were used to convey these messages?

**Part 5: Exploring multimedia presentation options**

Work with students to explore options for multimedia presentations of their analysis work. Models for this work might include the following:

• A Powerpoint presentation that juxtaposes text with images. A more complex

variation on this is a “slides with narration” option like the “One in 8 Million” series in *The New York Times*. These can be viewed at:

[http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/nyregion/1-­‐](http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/nyregion/1-)in-­‐8-­‐million/index.html

See in particular:

o Joseph Cotton: The Grandfather

o Tika Chapagai: The Newcomer

o Buster English: The Green Thumb

• A set of images, including photographs students take of environmental print in their own neighborhoods, that enrich the written portion of the portrait (e.g., the slides, a collage of photos to illustrate the essay, etc.). For an example of this kind of text, see sections of “Analyzing Print Ads” at:

<http://teachingmedialiteracy.pbworks.com/AnalyzingPrintAds>

Remind students that they are looking for examples of texts that they can use as models for their own multimedia presentation. During these investigations, encourage students to pay careful attention to:

• The interplay or relationship between images and text

• How other elements shape the experience of a multimedia text, including:

o A speaker’s volume and intonation

o The use of background noise and sound effects

o The choice of images

o Number and pacing of images

**Part 6: Presenting the textual analysis**

To complete their textual analysis, each student should select ONE of the following choices below as a way to communicate their analysis of the popular text in Part 2 above.

**CHOICE A:** Write a 400-­‐500 word essay in which they communicate their own perspective about the message texts send to young people about how they should

think, look, and behave, using the popular text selected in Part 2 as a specific case study.

***OR***

**CHOICE B:** Craft a compelling mixed-­‐media text (e.g., a multimedia slide presentation accompanied by narration or audio) in which they communicate their own perspective about the message texts send to young people about how they should think, look, and behave, using the popular text selected in Part 2 as a specific case study. Incorporate a set of images that enrich or complement the written/oral text portion of the presentation.

**H. Student support:**

• Students should be given ample opportunities to discuss the questions for Parts 1-­‐3 in small groups and/or as a whole class prior to working on their analytic essay on Bordo in Part 3.

• For English learners, you may want to provide a glossary of vocabulary words used in the Bordo article to facilitate comprehension.

• For students who have trouble with writing extended responses, you may want to provide an outline with sentence stems at the beginning of each paragraph to help them generate their responses. You may want to provide opportunities in class for students to receive peer feedback or to participate in writers' workshops prior to submitting the final analytic essay on Bordo.

• Parts 4-­‐5 have already been scaffolded to support student completion of the task.

Again, provide opportunities in class for students to receive peer feedback or to participate in writers' workshops prior to submitting the final essay.

• When introducing the analytic essay and the final cultural criticism assignment, present a student-­‐friendly version of the scoring rubric by pulling out the "Proficient" level descriptors to clearly communicate expectations for a high quality response. Have students put the rubric language into their own words.

**I. Extensions or variations:**

As a culmination to the cultural criticism essay, you and students may want to publish or

present it in any number of formats:

• As an e-­‐zine with each student's cultural criticism essay

• At a multi-­‐media school exhibition with other students as their audience, in which students display the subject of their cultural criticism and present their critique through performance (poetry, spoken word, song, dance, video)

**J. Scoring:**

Student work can be scored using the English/Language Arts Textual Analysis Rubric, Grade

10.

**Supplemental Readings on Media and Identity**

Specific to male/masculine identity:

• Askmen.com Article: “The New Masculinity”

[http://www.askmen.com/entertainment/austin\_500/510\_the-­‐](http://www.askmen.com/entertainment/austin_500/510_the-)new-­‐masculinity.html

• Book: *Media and Male Identity: The Making and Remaking of Men*

[http://www.amazon.com/Media-­‐](http://www.amazon.com/Media-)Male-­‐Identity-­‐Making-­‐Remaking/dp/023000167X

• Seed Magazine Article: “The Media Assault on Male Body Image”

<http://seedmagazine.com/content/article/the_media_assault_on_male_body_image/>

• Center for Media Literacy Article: “How do Media Images of Men Affect Our Lives?”

[http://www.medialit.org/reading-­‐](http://www.medialit.org/reading-)room/how-­‐do-­‐media-­‐images-­‐men-­‐affect-­‐our-­‐lives

• MediaSmarts Website: Body Image – Boys (also contains several research citations)

[http://mediasmarts.ca/body-­‐](http://mediasmarts.ca/body-)image/body-­‐image-­‐boys

• NBC News Article: “Guys have body issues, too” [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/15160230/ns/health-­‐](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/15160230/ns/health-)mens\_health/t/guys-­‐have-­‐body-­‐issues-­‐ too/

• Research Brief from The Sex Information and Education Council of Canada: “The Idealized Male Body: The Effect of Media Images on Men and Boys” [http://sexualityandu.ca/uploads/files/CTR\_BodyImageAndMales\_JULYAUGUST2013-­‐](http://sexualityandu.ca/uploads/files/CTR_BodyImageAndMales_JULYAUGUST2013-) ENG.pdf

General:

• Psychology Today Article: “Media’s Externalization of Kids’ Self-­‐Identity” [http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-­‐](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-)power-­‐prime/201210/media-­‐s-­‐externalization-­‐ kids-­‐self-­‐identity

• Extract from book, *Media, Gender, and Identity: an Introduction* (Contains some gender-­‐

related sections)

<http://www.theoryhead.com/gender/extract.htm>

• Blog for Applied Social Psychology Course: “Media’s Influence on Social Norms and Identity Development of Youth” (not a peer-­‐reviewed publication; more useful for its research citations) [http://www.personal.psu.edu/bfr3/blogs/applied\_social\_psychology/2011/11/medias-­‐](http://www.personal.psu.edu/bfr3/blogs/applied_social_psychology/2011/11/medias-) influence-­‐on-­‐social-­‐norms-­‐and-­‐identity-­‐development-­‐of-­‐youth.html