

First-Year Composition Section Themes Fall Semester 2021

American Pop Culture

We will be exploring “popular culture” in America, asking questions like: What is “pop culture”? How does it differ from other forms or aspects of culture? We will also engage a number of elements that constitute this theme, such as music, film, literature, and advertising, investigating how pop culture has evolved over time and some of the ways that these aspects influence our perceptions, ideas, choices, and lives.

Deconstructing Disney

We will focus on the work and influence of the Walt Disney Co. on U.S. and world cultures while developing our writing and communication skills. For generations, Disney has been an American icon. We will begin the semester by analyzing the ways in which individual Disney films construct value messages within particular historical contexts before examining the larger impact of the Disney Company as a corporation and a force of cultural export. Topics may include the line between homage and appropriation, the politics of representation, the influence of media on childhood, the impact of the Disney Corporation on copyright law, the globalization of American culture, and more.

Facing the Unknown

We will explore the unknown, and the ways in which it manifests itself in our lives, in three aspects: fear of difference and the “other,” especially in regards to human interaction and diversity; fear of change, especially in regards to new technology and how it affects our lives; and fear of the supernatural, and what mythology tries to teach us.

From Tricksters to Truth

We will focus on some of the many ways that artifice has shaped our world, particularly with respect to politics, commerce, and popular culture. An emphasis on developing critical thinking skills, media literacy, and an awareness of common cognitive blind spots will guide our efforts to become less vulnerable to deception and manipulation.

Global Indigenous Knowledge

We will (remotely) travel the world to pursue the role and contributions of Indigenous knowledge in the contemporary world. Discover the Indigenous communities of the Ojibwe, Aboriginal peoples in Australia, Maori of New Zealand, and Indigenous peoples in Peru to learn about the preservation of language and culture, and effects of tourism on traditional ways of living. We will draw from a variety of intercultural lenses and perspectives to guide our epistemological thinking about local and global issues.

Inspired by Nature

The natural world is a source of inspiration and fascination for many of us. We will evaluate writings that celebrate nature and raise questions about our roles as environmental advocates and stewards. We will also explore the aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical issues that often characterize writing about the natural world.

Lies We Tell Ourselves

We will break our classroom discussions and writing assignments down into six sections, each centered around a "lie" that we tell ourselves. Every lie presents a roadblock to our ability to think for ourselves and grow into intelligent, opinionated, independent-thinking adults with ideals and stances of our very own. What exactly are these lies that get in our way? How do we overcome our roadblocks or deal with our blind spots once we know they're there? What the heck does this have to do with the "important parts of Juniata's FYC course?" And who am I to call you a liar? There are many ways we can engage with all of these questions. Maybe, over the course of the semester, we can figure out which ways you need to go to find your answers.

Medical Mysteries

We will be detectives, solving medical mysteries across history and the recent past—in solving these cases, we will examine not only medicine and science but also ethics and social justice, while considering the political and social effects of science and medicine.

Stepping Up

American history is filled with examples of young adults (such as yourselves) stepping up to meet and surmount challenges. Why did they choose to get involved, how did they respond, and how do we evaluate their successes and failures? We will examine their involvement in the modern Civil Rights Movement and the Iraq War and then look at the discrimination directed at those who hold minority identities in areas such as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.

The Average American Myth

What constitutes an "average" American? Does such a person exist? Is "average" a norm or a myth? How are the demographics of our country changing, and what are the challenges that change brings? As a country, do we embrace change or do we fear it? We'll explore this topic through our reading, writing, and classroom conversations.

The Peculiar "I"

We will use writing to explore and question ourselves and our communities. How do we craft our own selves, voices, and perspectives on the page? Further, how do we confront the voices and perspectives of others? We will work to develop your own written voice through ongoing activities that immerse us into style, tone, craft, and sound.

Writing Through the Enchanting World of Hayao Miya

Would you like a short ride through enchanted forests, moving and flying castles, magic bathhouses for spirits, and war-torn cities of both old and modern times? If your answer is a heartfelt "YES!", please follow Totoro to board the FYC bus! We'll improve our writing and critical thinking skills by analyzing, reading, and writing about selected animated movies of Hayao Miyazaki, one of the founders of Japan's Studio Ghibli. For a deeper understanding and discussion of domestically and internationally popular Miyazaki movies such as *Mononoke Hime* (1997), *Spirited Away* (2001), *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), *The Wind Rises* (2013), we'll look at them through cultural, historical, visual and social lenses. Topics may include but are not limited to: human and nature relationship, feminism and representation of girlhood, WW-II, ethics of technology, coming of age, ecocriticism, and more.