

Short Assignment: Study of a Word

How do you know what you know? In “Bitch,” Beverly Gross thoroughly examines the use of a word that we often use without thinking about its history and implications, without thinking about the assumptions we’re making when we use it. **Using “Bitch” as inspiration (but not necessarily as exact example), write a 2-3 page paper that critically examines the “meaning” of a word (from any language) that relates to the issue you’re researching for MP 2—the assumptions behind it, the connotations, the way its meaning has changed over time.** In this assignment, you will also trace the history of how you came to know the meaning of the word. Did someone tell you? Did you pick up on this knowledge through media? Did you learn it in school? Did you come to know it through your own experience? Work backwards: when was the knowledge of this word most recently relevant to you? What did you use it for? Do you remember an earlier time you used it, and if so, did you use it differently? Remember, these are guiding questions for analysis, not a list of questions you must answer. If you run into trouble, consider using different forms of the word—like “adapt” instead of “adaptation.”

Note: If you’re writing about a word from a language that isn’t English and you think it makes sense to include sentences or longer sections that aren’t in English, feel free to do so! If you’re worried about making sure I understand any points you’re making, you can either include translations, or explain in your writer’s memo.

Goals:

- Think critically about our assumptions in preparation for writing MP 2 (Outcome 3).
- Examine the history, meanings, and nuances of a single word (Outcome 3, sort of; this kind of analysis is a large part of argument).
- Use the encyclopaedias and dictionaries (Outcome 2).
- Form a complex claim about the significance of the word you’ve chosen (Outcome 3).

You might consider addressing one or more of the following questions in your complex claim:

1. How does knowing the history of this particular word affect our understanding of it, and why is that understanding important?
2. Does the way the word is currently used accurately reflect its history? How/why?
3. How does the use of this word affect the users?
4. If your word isn’t in English, what is interesting or difficult about trying to explain its significance to someone who might not speak the language?
5. If your word *is* in English, what do you think might be interesting or difficult about trying to explain its significance to someone who might not speak English?
6. In what situations do you use this word?

These questions are suggestions; you don’t have to address them all.

In addition, include a 1-page writer’s memo.