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EDUB 3528 – A40

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Assignment 1

Part 1

My pedagogical tool asks students to consider the paratext of the book (and the codes utilized by each piece of paratext) they are studying during an independent novel study in an English Language Arts (grade 10) class by redesigning the cover (front, back, and spine; dust jacket flaps optional) of their text. Though paratext is often ignored in the close reading of a novel, Manitoba Education (1998) notes, “it is essential that [students] learn to read ... texts skillfully, sensitively, and critically” (p. 19). The importance of reading the main text of a novel is inarguable, but failing to consider the paratext overlooks the essence of the novel as a piece of media that has been deliberately constructed by individuals and, in many cases (with specific regard to paratext), constructed by individuals other than the author of the main text.

By tasking students with creating a new cover for the book they are reading, they are prompted to “create original texts ... to communicate ideas and enhance understanding of forms and techniques,” while also, by explaining the choices made in creating the cover, being prompted to “explain how various techniques and elements ... are used in oral, print [including books], and other media texts to create particular effects” (Manitoba Education, 1998, p. 25). These are just some of the many specific elements of the curriculum document this learning tool connects to.

Part 2

Paratext, including font choices, cover art, and dedications, all contribute to the constructedness of the text. Even though, from a young age, many of us are told, “don’t judge a book by its cover,” doing so literally and with totality ignores the way publishers attempt to imbue codes of media literacy into a given text. By making these codes explicit, “media educators work with young people to help them denaturalize the world around them, primarily by ‘deconstructing’ the media” (Hoechsmann, 2012, p. 63). Though not all instances of paratext appear on a book’s covers and spine, I feel this activity offers students the opportunity to continue activating their emerging understanding of media literacy in a simple and creative way.

A further strength of this learning tool lies in the way it encourages students to engage with codes of media literacy, a topic they might be intimidated by, through a medium they are familiar and comfortable with. For Hoeschsmann (2012), “to conceive of media literacy as only a form of technical training oriented towards job markets is to woefully understate the critical and civic concerns that have long informed the field” (p. 13). By taking up themes of media literacy through the examination of a medium students are unintimidated by, they can begin, or continue, to acquire a deeper understanding of the ways in which becoming media literate is not only something attainable to them, but a competency they can find relevance in across a variety of contexts, including books, music, and social media.



Don't Judge a Book by its Cover

Important terms/definitions

Paratext refers to everything outside the “main text” of a book (Genette, 1997, as cited in Peikola & Bös, 2020, p. 12). Para-text shapes the meaning of a book, but it is often ignored in a close reading. Many, but not all, examples of para-text appear right on a book’s cover. Some examples of para-text include:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| + Book title and author’s name | + Publisher information |
| + Font | + Images |
| + Dedication | + Acknowledgements and introduction |
| + Awards and recognition | + ISBN and barcode |

“The **codes** used in media texts refer to all those signs, including music or sound in a horror movie or pictures in a car advertisement, that are used to tell a story or portray an event” (Hochsmann, 2012, p. 77-78).

Assignment

Using what you know and have learned about media literacy **codes** and **paratext**, design a new cover (front, back, and spine; dustjacket flaps are optional) for the book you are reading in your independent novel study.

Your cover should include AT LEAST five pieces of paratext, but can certainly include more. Each piece of paratext should utilize at least one media literacy code.

After you have created your new cover, explain (in either written, audio, or video format), the five pieces of paratext included in your creation (if you have included more than five, select any five) and describe how the codes of media literacy apply to each piece (some pieces of paratext might utilize more than one code, but you should address at least five different codes in your explanations).

There is no minimum/maximum word count for this assignment, but a good range to aim for is 75-150 written words, or about 30-60 seconds of talking, for **EACH** piece of paratext (about 500 words/4 minutes total).

Each of your five pieces of para-text will be evaluated on the following criteria for a total of 45 marks (3 criterion x 3 marks for each x 5 pieces of para-text):

- The visual presentation of each piece of paratext.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the individual piece of paratext.
- Relates codes of media literacy to the piece of paratext.

Please include a list of the sources you use for this assignment with your submission.

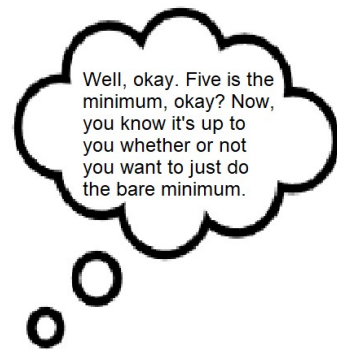


Image source: *Office Space* (1999)

References

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