

## CRITICAL THINKING TOOLS

### Surface Elements

What colors, words, phrases, or images are predominant, emphasized, or repeated in the text/image (i.e. the “top” level of material presented)? Consider scrutinizing the characteristics of the following elements:

#### Images

- What colors, styles, patterns, arrangements, people, places, and things are present?
- Which of these is the most obvious? Largest? Brightest? Most strategically placed?

#### Texts

- What ideas are defined and/or emphasized in the text?
- Are any words or phrases repeated?
- How would you summarize the thesis or main idea of the text?

### Subsurface Elements

- Who wrote or constructed the text? For whom is it intended?
- Why did the author choose that audience or reader?
- What viewpoints are valued in the text? How did the author contribute to its final result?

### Expectations

- What do the authors expect from the intended audience or reader?
- What expectations do the authors have about cultural or shared values, beliefs, goals, etc.?
- What expectations does the text or image evoke from the reader or audience?
- After reading this text, what should an audience expect from the author? From society?
- How might these expectations benefit or injure the author? Society?

### Stereotype and Cultural Myths

What stereotypes or cultural myths does the author invoke to persuade the audience or reader?

#### Stereotypes

- How might the stereotypes create preconceived and unexamined ideas for us about particular individuals and groups?
- How might these assumptions or ideas affect your interactions with someone who has been stereotyped?
- How can the stereotype benefit or injure the user as well as the person characterized?

#### Cultural Myths

- How do these words and images present a shared feeling, value, belief, or story among audiences and readers?
- What expectations about life, happiness, society, etc. are implied through the shared narrative?
- What are the basic values these narratives both work from and offer us?
- How might those narrative patterns benefit or harm certain members of society or certain goals of society?

## **Cultural Positions**

What roles do the people involved in the text play? Can you identify social positions, personal positions, and/or situational positions of the people present?

### **Social Positions**

Race, class, gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, body type, education, family, profession, religion, physical and/or mental capacity.

### **Personal Positions**

Daughter, son, sister, brother, friend, employee, coworker, mother, father, grandparent, church-goer, athlete, teacher, student, etc.

### **Situation Positions**

Alcoholic, blood donor, victim, addict, hero, superstar, etc.

- What behaviors or beliefs are elicited when any one position or role becomes more important or is called into action in order to deal with a particular situation?
- How do certain positions or roles work together to create an image or caricature of someone or of a situation?
- What problems arise when two or more roles come into conflict with one another?
- What values are implied by the depiction of these positions and their interaction in the text?

## **Alternate Terms and Choices**

- What other viewpoints, stereotypes, myths, or positions are not present in the text? Why are they invisible?
- What choices could have been used? Why weren't they?
- What possibilities (outcomes, conclusions, resolutions) are cut off by the choices made in the text?
- What do these choices say about the values/beliefs/opinions implied by the text?

## **Critical Leap**

- What codes (for example, race, class, gender) are represented/reinforced?
- What sets of key terms/alternate terms (such as love/hate, man/woman, black/white) are implied by the text?
- How does the author of the text use these terms? In what ways do they offer a framework in which we live, think, and feel?

## **Your Position**

- Do you accept, reject, or negotiate the codes, messages, value systems, beliefs, viewpoints, etc., implied by the text? Why? What aspects?
- What actions might result from an analysis of this text? What should be done about the actions and, as a result, this text? Why and how?