

Global Revision

Final Objectives

In leading up to our discussion of James Baldwin's essay "The American Negro and the American Dream" during the first week of the semester, we explored a variety of supplementary materials centered on issues of race, gender, and identity in the American experience. We began with selections from the comic strip "Boondocks," which crafts visual devices to forward its argument on the institutional effects of the American educational system on African-American children. Then we read the essay "Group Minds," which implements a persuasive strategy to forward its argument on the problematic invisibility of group-dominated thinking and influence in Western societies. Finally, we looked at the poem "Phenomenal Woman" and listened to the song "No Mirrors in Nana's House," both of which optimize figurative language to deepen the reader's experience of the inner tension between world-perception and self-perception in the lives of black American women. All of these pieces serve as contextual materials with which to approach the Baldwin essay, an analytical, highly figurative, argumentative, and political essay.

This global revision is based on your first draft written the first week of the semester, in which your task was the following: "Based on your reading of Baldwin and one of the supplementary materials (McGruder, Lessing, Angelou, Sweet Honey in the Rock), construct a hypothesis that re-conceptualizes race and identity in the American experience. Use specific details from your two sources to support your thesis."

You may recall feeling lost, confused, and frustrated as you approached this first assignment. By now, however, you have developed strengths in the areas of analyzing visual, figurative, argumentative, and contextual materials, in addition to working with themes on popular culture, literature, politics, and ethics. Moreover, if you revisit the course objectives on our syllabus, you will see more clearly how in this class you have been encouraged "to question habitual ways of thinking, to move beyond obvious responses, and to develop your own strategies of posing questions about the reading, writing, and thinking you do." This final assignment measures your intellectual development as a writer over the course of the semester.

Writing as Revision

All semester we have been asking you to perform "global revisions" when you move from first draft to second or third drafts. A class on writing must be about revising, "stepping outside your writing, to see what it might represent (not just what it says), and to make changes." You have all succeeded in these efforts to varying degrees. One barrier to this success, however, is that during the semester there's little time between when you write the draft and when you revise. Recall from the syllabus that a "writer learns most by returning to his or her work to see what it does and doesn't do, by taking time with a project and seeing where it might lead." With your final project, there is considerable distance between when you wrote your first draft (the first week of classes) and when you're revising that draft (the final weeks of classes).

Note that global revision doesn't necessarily mean fully abandoning your first attempts. Yes, you've come a long way since that first week, but that first piece of writing is still indicative of your identity as a thinker—that identity simply hadn't materialized in your writing yet. Thus, you will succeed most in this assignment if when you revisit that first piece of writing you meditate on your initial creation of that piece and then *revise* to fully articulate that initial impulse. The final product will *look* substantially different from your initial draft, but it won't necessarily have an entirely new identity.

Grading Criteria

As always, refer to the grading rubric (available on WebCT). Generally, you will be graded on the strength, development, and organization of your ideas, the finesse of your style, and the quality of your revision. In particular, you will be evaluated on your ability to thoughtfully and creatively *re-vision* your original work and produce a substantially more sophisticated piece of analytical writing based on the skills you've developed over the course of the semester.