

9.00 - INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY

Fall 2002

Assignment One - What can Psychology tell us?

We would hope that learning about Psychology would provide some insight into otherwise puzzling aspects human behavior or mental life. Why did he do that? How could she think that? The first writing assignment is intended to get you to think about puzzles in the context of psychology.

Step 1: Pick a literary puzzle.

This can come from a book, a play, a movie, etc. It does not need to be A Deep Problem from a Great Work of Literature. It does need to be a problem that might have a psychological component to it. For example, Is Hamlet mad? (a classic) or Does Lilo (from Disney's "Lilo and Stitch") have a personality disorder? (definitely not a classic but just as good for the present purpose) or In Minority Report, is the motivation of Tom Cruise's character plausible?

Step 2: Do a bit of reading.

Find something in the Gleitman text that seems to bear on this puzzle. There are 4 page references in the index to Hamlet and whole chapters on Psychopathology (18) and Motivation (3). Read some of Gleitman with the goal of finding something that you can tie to your particular choice from step 1. You are also welcome to read elsewhere (There are whole books on Hamlet and Psychology.) but it is not required for this assignment.

Step 3: Write a interesting and readable four-page paper.

Four pages means about 1250 words for our purposes. The needs to have the following components (organization is up to you).

- a. Tell us about the puzzle. This will require you to say something about your literary source. There is no guarantee that your TA will have seen the movie or read the book so summarize the relevant parts of the story and tell us what puzzle needs to be solved.
- b. Sketch a path to a solution. You can propose a specific solution if you like (Lilo has a clear case of "Alien Mutant Attraction Disorder") or you can say what knowledge might lead to a solution. (If we had a complete map of Hamlet's genome, we would know if he was insane...or would we?).
- c. Include at least one concrete reference to Gleitman. Try to make this substantive and not merely dutiful. That is, try to avoid something as lame as saying "Tom Cruise's motivation in Minority Report is not thirst - a motivation that is discussed on pages 77-79 of Gleitman. You can do better than that.

The goals of this paper are to get you to begin incorporate ideas and facts from Psychology into your thinking about the broader world and to give us a chance to assess your writing strengths and weaknesses. Your goal should be an entertaining, psychologically astute paper.

1 To complete this task, you must deliver your paper to Your TA.