

## Using Rhetorical Analysis to Support Students in Finding a Language to Discuss Race and Cultural Appropriation

By Pamela Albanese

This three part in-class activity provides a range of techniques to support students in finding a language to discuss race and cultural appropriation. We use Dana Schutz's controversial painting of Emmett Till to confront the question of whether a white artist, such as Schutz, has the right to portray black suffering in her work. When I taught this example in a previous semester, as a large group discussion, students were reticent to express a position on the painting, as some students struggled to find the right language to discuss race. As a result, I restructured the activity by arranging students in small groups, each responsible for presenting on the rhetorical strategies of a carefully curated collection of articles that argue for or against the painting's right to be exhibited. I share a collaborative Google document with columns for students to summarize the main argument of their assigned essay, to assess the rhetorical effectiveness of the essay, and to copy and paste 2-3 direct quotations that exemplify the essay's rhetorical strategies. After students complete this worksheet, each group presents their essay as I project the accompanying collaborative document. Since students have already written down their ideas, often incorporating the language of the discourse surrounding cultural appropriation and free speech within an art world context, they confidently verbalize their ideas. After each group presents, I open up the discussion to the entire group, asking a broader question that models how a prompt for the formal writing projects they are currently working on can be adapted for a specific topic: How/to what extent does your artistic subject create a thought-provoking response to an issue? / "To what extent does Schutz's painting make a thought-provoking critique of the issue of racial violence in America?" This act of supported rhetorical critique empowers students to articulate their position on the issue, as the discussion becomes lively and animated.

Below, I've linked to three Google documents generated by the activity:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rL7-ELraTn\\_gyE9w1T4Y8IBSzQwyDUqASswtuQz7g5g/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rL7-ELraTn_gyE9w1T4Y8IBSzQwyDUqASswtuQz7g5g/edit?usp=sharing)  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Uvx8RN6tRTAgGanuvoaxi-C4Jxd2tTo761RS1aY7WKE/edit?usp=sharing>  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lL1y-pCRajl44edYZVxfWOMRI8D0NeXOnGjMBzAirK4/edit?usp=sharing>

