Welcome to Week 3

- Please watch the online video (1 minute, 1 second).

What Will We Learn?

Over the past two weeks, you have learned how to do a basic analysis of literary and scientific texts; you have also learned how scientists and artists create knowledge. You turned your attention to an overview of the scientific and artistic history of HIV/AIDS. Now, all that knowledge will come together as you begin to think about how to analyze representations of HIV/AIDS.

Our course will be organized a bit more differently than you might expect from this point on. We will look at the kinds of ways that thinking about HIV/AIDS has been shaped. This week, which we have entitled "Words Matter," will look at how language—both scientific and artistic—shapes our ideas about HIV/AIDS. Week Four, which we have entitled "Images Matter," will look at how scientific and artistic images shape our understanding of the pandemic. In Week Five, "People Matter," you will be invited to view HIV/AIDS through the personal experiences of scientists and artists.

Rather than provide you with a catalogue of representational history, we will provide you with models for how to approach these very disparate ways of representing HIV/AIDS.

So let's turn our attention to words: how does word choice influence our thinking about HIV/AIDS? Why do words matter when looking at all kinds of writing about HIV/AIDS? What will you learn this week?

1. You will learn how to analyze a scientific representation of HIV/AIDS.
2. You will learn how to analyze a literary representation of HIV/AIDS.
3. You will learn how to compare word choice in literary and scientific representations of HIV/AIDS.
4. You will learn how to analyze word choice about HIV/AIDS through watching a cultural artifact discussion about a filmed excerpt from Tony Kushner's *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*.
3.1 CDC: Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

What Will We Learn?

In this section, you will read and analyze the first scientific article dealing with what is now known as HIV/AIDS. In this article, published on 5 June 1981, in Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), the authors describe five young men in Los Angeles who were diagnosed with an unusual disease - Pneumocystis pneumonia. After reading the article, please watch the video and complete the accompanying exercise.

As you read the article, you should notice that it doesn't conform to the typical structure of scientific papers that we discussed earlier. This difference in structure largely reflects the general purpose of MMWR. This journal, published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tends to present observational accounts of new or emerging public health issues. The articles in this journal do not typically present experimental research and, as a result, do not include information on methods and results.

You also certainly will notice that the authors include a lot of medical terminology. Don't worry about these words. Rather, concentrate on some of the following questions:

- What major problem do the authors raise?
- What commonalities between the individuals are noted?
- What differences between the individuals are noted?
- Why might it be useful to publish this information?
- What are the next steps?

➢ Please read the assigned article.

➢ Please watch the online video (3 minutes, 1 seconds).
MMWR: June 5, 1981

Dave addresses the question of, “why words matter?” in his analysis of the article, “Pneumocystis Pneumonia- Los Angeles”, published on June 5, 1981 in Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). It was the first article ever published about HIV/AIDS. He focuses on two main topics: the medical terminology and the search for commonalities.

The structure of the article is a little different from the normal rigidity of scientific articles. MMWR articles have this tendency. They are usually short, descriptive reports. But it still follows the same general outline we learned about scientific articles previously in this course.

Dave points out the authors’ particularly interesting focus on finding commonalities. They discuss the histories and habits of the five patients, looking for something they all have in common. In the editorial note, the authors also begin to address the “so what?” of this piece. They are beginning to make some associations about this peculiar disease, but are still trying to get a better answer for the bigger question.

➢ Please complete the online exercise.

3.2 “The Way We Live Now”: Short Story by Susan Sontag

What Will We Learn?

Now that you have had a chance to learn from Dave how to analyze a scientific paper, it’s time to think about how to analyze a literary representation of HIV/AIDS. In this section, you will learn to analyze a literary representation of HIV/AIDS.

More specifically, you will read an excerpt from Susan Sontag’s 1986 short story, "The Way We Live Now," one of the first literary representations of HIV/AIDS. You will learn to recognize important things like structure, style, what is focused on and repeated, word choice, and imagery. These will help you think more generally about the "so what": how does Sontag creates an image of New York City in the early days of HIV/AIDS?
The purpose of this next video and its accompanying exercise is to give you practice reading through a short literary excerpt and seeing what it's like to do some basic interpretation.

As you watch the video and do the accompanying exercise, remember the aspects of literary criticism we've discussed before: **symbol, style, structure, and "so what?"**.

- **Symbol**: Remember to look for things that are repeated as images, and that can have a larger significance beyond their literal use as part of the plot.
- **Style**: Remember to ask yourself: what is your sense of *how* things are being said in the story, by the narrator and/or the characters? What sense of voice and personality do you get from different characters—and why might that be important?
- **Structure**: What is the design of the plot? What is the framework of the story like?
- **"So what"?** Think about what it means to come to a conclusion about a work beyond the plot. Understanding *what* happens in a work is good: but then, *so what?* Why has it been important to encounter this work? What can it teach us or make us think about beyond its plot points?

The excerpt you will be working from is taken from a short story by Susan Sontag entitled "The Way We Live Now." It was published on November 24, 1986 in *The New Yorker* and is one of the earliest representations of HIV/AIDS. The plot of the story is actually quite simple: a group of many, many friends are discussing their concerns over an unnamed friend with an unnamed illness. The story takes us through a chain of conversations in which they express fear for him, fear for each other, and fear for themselves. They jockey for position at his bedside, relay stories to each other of his demeanor and symptoms, and end the story worrying that his death may be approaching.

Feel free to locate the story on your own and read it in its entirety, though you need not read the entire story to do this exercise.

- Please read the assigned excerpt.
- Please watch the online video (4 minutes, 31 seconds).
Reading from “The Way We Live Now”


The course of this story is recounted in one continuous thread of conversation about a never-named, mysteriously sick friend. This conversation circulates through an entire community of people. It also ultimately becomes not just about the friend, but also a way of seeing how people are reacting to HIV/AIDS.

The kind of information they share, the kind of emotions they express, and how they cope or don’t cope with the looming specter of a mysterious illness affecting not just their friend, but potentially all of them, speaks to the sense of unknowingness and fear present in that time.

➢ Please complete the online quiz.

3.3 Commonalities: MMWR and “The Way We Live Now”

What Will We Learn?

In this section, you will learn to identify important similarities between the choice of language in the scientific and literary works about HIV/AIDS. You will be invited to think about the following: what sense of the experience of HIV/AIDS is created in both of these pieces through word choice? How is the experience of scientists and patients aligned? How do these experiences complement each other? Why does it matter to think about how word choice evolves over time.

➢ Please contribute to the online Word Cloud.

➢ Please watch the online video (5 minute, 31 seconds).
Commonalities

Ann and Dave discuss what struck them about the two pieces they just covered in terms of their language use. They also explore what it means to put those two pieces in conversation with each other.

Dave notes an overall sense of unknowing and fear coming from both pieces. It seems as if both the authors of the MMWR piece and the characters in “The Way We Live Now” are grasping at straws.

Ann also points out the common theme of transmission in both pieces. The characters in the Sontag piece play a sort of telephone game in the way they talk about their sick friend. This serves as a metaphor for transmission. Whereas the MMWR piece talks more clinically about the potential factors in disease transmission.

Naming and not-naming plays another important role in both pieces. The unnamed speaker is mentioned as he or him about 400 times in the Sontag piece. The friends are named about 300 times. This emphasizes the overwhelming outreach and impact the disease had. The scientific article does not name the patients for anonymity’s sake. Salient details that are given about the patients become their defining features.

These are just a few commonalities in these two seemingly disparate pieces.

➢ Please contribute to the online Discussion Board.

3.4 Cultural Artifact #3: “Angels in America”

What Will We Learn?

In this section, you will watch a short video of a scene from Angels in America: Millennium Approaches. You will then watch a cultural artifact discussion where we discuss with students why the discussion of language about HIV/AIDS and those who have it in this piece is significant.

➢ Please contribute to the online Word Cloud.

➢ Please watch the online video (13 minute, 28 seconds).
Cultural Artifact Discussion

Dave and Ann invite two Davidson College students, Caitlin and Charlotte, to partake in a discussion about this week’s cultural artifact. The cultural artifact is an excerpt from Tony Kushner’s “Angels in America”. In this excerpt, Roy Cohn is being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS and has an extended conversation with his doctor about his condition.

- Please contribute to the online Discussion Board.
- Please complete the Self Assessment
- Please watch the online video.

Please complete the end of the week survey.