

Oxford English Dictionary Assignment

Purpose: To explore a word in its historical, etymological, and cultural contexts and to demonstrate how its meaning affects the way that you read and critically interpret a particular text as a whole

Length: 500 words, or about two pages

Due: Thursday 2/26

We often come across a word whose meaning has evolved significantly since the time a writer was originally employing it. Or we see words that have different meanings in their histories when compared to current use. For example, in our class, we've come across these words, used in different ways by different writers:

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|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| • blood | • gang | • culture |
| • gangster | • gangsta | • race |
| • thug | • loyalty | • respect |
| • soldier | • community | • compassion |
| • masculinity | • outsider | • urban |
| • femininity | • revolution | • suburban |
| • majesty | • lyric | • ethnic |
| • justice | • hip-hop | • neighborhood |
| • dance | • equality | • justice |

For this assignment you will find a word that's related to your Contextual Analysis Project, look it up in the *OED* and construct a short 1-2 page argument, demonstrating how its meaning may affect the way that you read and critically interpret a particular text as a whole.

Choose a word from the above list, or one that interests you, or one that you might be able to use in your Contextual Analysis. In your argument, include:

- **A linguistic etymology:** where does the word come from? (Or, as the *OED* puts it, "information on the process of derivation -- whether a word came into English through borrowing or was formed from elements already existing in English.")
- **A review** of the historical senses in which the word has been used in English
- **A judicious selection** of representative quotes and dates
- **A summary** of the word's contemporary usage
- **A brief discussion** of how exploring the word will help you critically interpret your topic's texts and contexts

<http://oed.com/about/guide/main.html>
