

Essays - Images

The images essay uses images from antiquity to talk about ideas important to ancient Roman culture.

The assignment: Write a 3- to 4-page essay that uses depictions of in the ancient Roman world to take a position on the representations of cultural ideas and beliefs.

On the website: Quick overview: The Images Essay (11:00)

What you need to do

● Get ready.

Review the requirements. Review the Requirements for All Papers. This page has important guidance and videos on formatting your document, structuring your essay, and using evidence.

Watch the video. The overview video linked above explains what I want you to cover in the essay and what I'm expecting in terms of arguments, evidence, and structure.

A resource you may find helpful is the Elephant Pamphlet, which gives step-by-step guidance on preparing for and writing a position paper.

● Choose your topic from one of the two prompts below.

Option A

Two pieces in a museum. How a culture sees abstract ideas (masculinity, virtue, old age, divinity, and so on) is often reflected in its artwork. What can two different works of art depicting the same idea, but from different times or places, tell us about how the cultures that produced them?

Compare the two works to explore what their creators/artists believed about the idea they were representing. What insight do these beliefs give us into the cultures the two artists came from?

Option B

The ancient Roman world on film. Every depiction of an historical event, whether in prose, poetry, painting, theater, or film, involves an artist using history to convey his or her own beliefs. What do the creators of these works want you to believe?

Compare the agenda of the filmmakers with the agenda of the authors of the primary source. How did these creators reshape this event for their own purposes? How do these similarities and differences show what this event means to the people who create art about it?

● Choose two works depicting the ancient Roman world to compare.

Option A

For the museum option, you need to choose two works of art from the ancient Roman world that (a) represent the same idea or concept but (b) come either from different periods or from different places in the ancient Roman world.

Choosing your subjects:

- Your two works of art must represent the same idea or concept. For example, you can choose two little girls, two warriors, two fertility goddesses, etc.
- Your works of art must be from the ancient Roman era (before 500 CE) and from either two different places or two different periods. The two pieces can be in any visual medium: sculpture, painting, relief, etc.
- You should experience the artwork face-to-face by attending a museum in person. Possible venues include: Metropolitan Museum's Egypt Collection; Metropolitan Museum's Greek and Roman Art Collection; Brooklyn Museum of Art's Ancient Egyptian Art Collection; and Fordham Museum of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Art. You are not limited to these venues or to New York.

● Find three aspects of your works that are strong examples of your topic.

Option A

For the museum option, choose three aspects of the works you can discuss for both pieces that seem to reflect how the artist felt about the subject and what the subject stood for.

- Some possibilities include facial expression, dress, use of technique or medium, stiffness/fluidity, apparent strength/weakness, idealism/realism, or any other elements offering some kind of insight into what the artist was trying to convey.
- For each aspect, relate your subjective impressions of how it manifests in the first piece; then how the second piece is similar or different and in what way.
- For example: say you've chosen two sculptures depicting different love goddesses, and one has a crafty expression while the other has an innocent expression. The contrast can be used to talk about how each artist might have thought about the goddesses' relationships with mortals; the nature of love; etc.

Option B

For the film option, you need to choose a film that is set in the ancient Roman world and that is based on ancient primary sources.

Choosing your subjects:

- First, choose and watch any feature-length film or two episodes of a TV series set in the ancient Roman world (3500 BCE to 500 CE).
- Then find the ancient primary source material it was based on and read it. For example, if you chose the movie *300*, which is about the Battle of Thermopylae, the primary source would be the main ancient account, Book 7 of *The Histories* by Herodotus.
- Your primary source(s) must come from the ancient Roman world (before 500 CE).
- Some suggestions for possible films or series and their corresponding sources are below.

Option B

For the film option, choose three moments or depictions from the film and find the corresponding events or depictions in the primary source.

- For each moment or depiction, describe and discuss how it appears in the film and how it is presented similarly or differently in the primary source material.
- For example:
 - In the movie *300*, Xerxes and the Persians are depicted in a heavy-handed manner; you could use this to discuss what tropes and visual and dialog cues the filmmakers were using to suggest how we should think of the Persians, and why the filmmakers might have turned the story this way.
 - Meanwhile, Herodotus's presentation of the Persians is very different, which you can use to discuss what Herodotus wanted us to think about the Persians and the role he saw them as playing in this war.
- **Please take note:** This essay is about the agenda of the primary source author as much as the filmmakers'. Do not use the source to "fact check" the film and list what it got "wrong". You must consider the primary source to be at least as skewed, manipulative, and agenda-driven as the film.

● Write a 3- to 4-page essay in which you take a position on the works you're studying.

You'll need an Introduction State what you believe these works show us about the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of the cultures involved and how they were perceived and used by others in a way that answers the question in the prompt you chose. (This is your thesis statement.)

... a Body Describe and discuss, one by one, each of the three aspects of the works you are studying. For each section, discuss what the evidence tells us about the ideas being represented.

... and a Conclusion. Tie your examples and assertions together and show how they support your overall thesis.

● Finalize your essay.

Citations are important. Make sure your evidence is cited and that you include a bibliography. For how to do citations and bibliographies, see the Research and Citation Center. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited.

Option A: For the museum option, instead of a bibliography, on a separate “Works Discussed” page after your essay, list the title of each work, artist, date created, place of origin, and the museum. Paste in photographs of the items from your visit or from the museum’s website. Footnotes/parenthetical cites are not needed for this assignment.

Option B: For the film option, instead of a bibliography, on a separate “Works Discussed” page after your essay, list the title of film, year, director, stars and studio. Then list the book or books you drew your written evidence from, using standard citation style. You will need to provide footnotes/parenthetical cites for the primary source(s) you used, but not for the film.

Optional draft. You may email me an optional draft two weeks before the final due date. It should include most of your paper (at least two-thirds of the final content, with sections to be written described in square brackets). I'll give feedback, but not a grade, to help you refine your final paper.

Double-check the requirements. Make sure your essay meets the Requirements for All Papers for formatting, structure, and evidence, as well as the specifications given above for what's expected for this assignment.

Once you're sure your essay meets the requirements, upload it as DOCX or PDF to Brightspace.

Commonly used films and their primary sources

Some possibilities for the film and sources option are listed on the Images Essay page on the course website. Links to most of these primary sources can be found on the ancient texts page.