

English 1A (Fall 2005)
Dr. Katherine D. Harris

ESSAY 1: YOUR CONSUMER LIFE

Writing Exercise 1

In-Class

Every choice you make about the decoration of your room (posters, curtains, sheets) and every choice you make about the decoration of yourself (hairstyle, shoes, earrings) is a sign, a signal you are sending to the world. Your shoes are a statement about your identity, and your CD collection is a message about your world view. The significance of these signs lies in their symbolism, not in the usefulness of the objects (you didn't just choose your shoes because they were practical). To decode them, you have to ask yourself what messages the signs send—what information they convey to other people.

Think of one object and write about the signals it sends. Your object can be anything, from clothing to food, a book to a political figure. What does your object say about modern American culture? What values and beliefs does it reflect? For example, ads that show women doing housework support the myth that a woman's place is only in the home, an expensive car may be a sign of a person's sense of his or her own importance, among other things.

You may choose one of the following "objects"—or come up with your own:

a raised fist	faded jeans
a Barbie doll	baggy jeans
long, decorated fingernails	a backpack
Marilyn Manson	a small purse
the American flag	blonde hair
Madonna	Kid Rock
a hairstyle	Lil' Kim's appearance
cigarette smoking	a turban
Michael Jackson	military fatigues
a Malcom X T-shirt	Bob Marley T-shirt