

ENG101 – WORD CHOICE ASSIGNMENT: SUPERPREDATOR
(Incarceration & the Humanities - NEH)

Objective: Within the time frame of one two-hour class session, students will consider readings relating to the term/concept of “superpredators” with the goal of a) honing their reading skills, b) recognizing unhelpful vs. helpful language and c) engaging in a follow up discussion coupled–with a reflective writing prompt–to introduce and demonstrate the importance of word choice in writing, and the impact of language in coverage of mass incarceration.

Staging:

1. Students are briefed on the objective of the assignment. (5 min.)
2. Students will be randomly assigned one of the six readings below and asked to read their respective piece on their own and use the double-entry journal method for recording their notes on the reading. In addition to reading for content and format, students will be instructed to pay close attention to word choice and highlight any words that jump out–good or bad–for deeper examination. (20 min.)
3. Students will then work in small groups, based on the common readings, to discuss their findings and further analyze the reading and the impact of the respective author’s word choices. (20 min.)
4. Back in plenary, one student will report back on behalf of each group and their findings on their respective assigned reading. (20 min.)
5. As a part of their response, each group will ‘board’ the words they’ve highlighted from their respective readings. (Concurrent to groups reporting back.)
6. A group discussion will be led by the instructor to discuss the problematic words, lead a brainstorming for alternative language, and consideration, more broadly the importance of word choice both in our writing and in how we shape thinking in society through words. (15 min.)
7. Together, the group will watch the YouTube clip “The Superpredator Scare.” (10 min.)
8. To close the discussion we will wrap up with linking the readings and the clip to word choice to the continued practice of mass incarceration in the United States. (25 min.)
9. The final step will be for students to write a personal reflection on the assignment either at the end of class, if time permits, or as homework (using the prompt or from their own feelings), which they should upload to the class portal in Google Classroom for credit.

Prompt: How does our language and choice of words–written or spoken–impact the way society views individuals involved with the criminal justice system?
10. Extra credit will be available to any student who submits a short (+/- 500-word) essay comparing two or more of the readings and analyzing the importance of word choice, in general, and the word “superpredators” in particular.

Readings:

Caldwell, Ellen C. "Unpacking the Racially-Charged Term 'Superpredators.'" JSTOR Daily, 20 Feb. 2017, <https://daily.jstor.org/unpacking-the-racially-charged-term-superpredators/>

DiLulio, John. "The Coming Of The Super -- Predators." The Weekly Standard, 27 Nov. 1995, www.weeklystandard.com/john-j-dilulio-jr/the-coming-of-the-super-predators

Loggins, Ameer Hasan. "Erik Killmonger Is Not A 'Super-Villain,' He Is A Super-Victim Of Systemic Oppression - Blavity." Blavity News, www.blavity.com/eric-killmonger-is-not-a-super-villain-he-is-a-super-victim-of-systemic-oppression

Savali, Kirsten West. "For the Record: 'Superpredators' Is Absolutely a Racist Term." The Root, The Root, 13 Nov. 2017, www.theroot.com/for-the-record-superpredators-is-absolutely-a-racist-t-1790857020

Tamara M. Haegerich, Jessica M. Salerno, and Bette L. Bottoms, University of Illinois at Chicago. "Are the Effects of Juvenile Offender Stereotypes Maximized or Minimized by Jury Deliberation?" *Psychology, Public, Policy, and Law* 19 (2013): 81-498. Web.

Vitale, Alex S. "The New 'Superpredator' Myth." The New York Times, The New York Times, 23 Mar. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/03/23/opinion/superpredator-myth.html?smprod=nytcare-ipad&smid=nytcare-ipad-share

Additional resources to supplement and/or use for follow up discussion, as time allows:

- YouTube clip: The Superpredator Scare <https://youtu.be/YidALyBwat0> (10 min 45 sec clip)
- Massive Attack: Superpredators <https://youtu.be/FKtz5AZieWY> (5 min 14 sec audio-only music clip)
- Second Chance Kids (PBS): <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/they-were-sentenced-as-superpredators-who-were-they-really/> (short article plus 55 minute film)