

Explanations One-To-Two-Pager

Find three cultural traits with which to illustrate three kinds of explanations:

Review the Middleton reading and associated notes from early in the course that discussed how aspects of cultures may be explained in terms of adaptation, in terms of meaning, or in terms of the system of which they are a part. Your task in this paper is to devise an explanation of each type for cultural traits from our recent readings. Specifically, find some cultural trait (a rule of behavior, a value, a belief, a meaning attributed to something, a customary practice, etc.) illustrated or discussed in either *West of Kabul, East of New York* or *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* for which you can suggest an explanation in terms of adaptation. Find another trait which you can explain in terms of meaning. Find a third which you can explain in terms of culture as a system. You may use the same trait for two or even all three examples of kinds of explanations, if you can suggest reasonable explanations of each type for that trait. I know that your knowledge of these cultures is limited, and that your explanations may not be correct. I ask only that they be reasonably plausible, and fit with the information available through the readings and perhaps class discussions.

Write a one-to-two page paper: Write up to two pages (double-spaced) that identify a trait that you propose to explain, and then suggest an explanation for it in terms of adaptation; then identify the same or another trait, and suggest an explanation for it in terms of meaning; then identify a third trait, and suggest an explanation for it in terms of system. Explain in enough detail to make your meaning clear. Make any arguments or cite any examples necessary to show that the explanation is at least reasonable and consistent with the information available. There is obviously not a lot of space for this, but a concise paragraph should be enough for each of the three explanations. Please indicate which explanation is meant to be of which type.

Please focus on cultural traits, rather than specific actions. That is, you are trying to explain beliefs, rules of behavior, etc. that are *shared by members of a given culture or subculture*. While these may be illustrated by individual events, what you are explaining are the shared ideas that lead members of the culture to behave in that way.

Indicate page numbers: Please indicate the page numbers of the scenes or passages that you have selected, so I know exactly what you are discussing. You do not need to provide lengthy quotations. A few words describing what is important should be enough.

What I will look for:

- Explanations that are of *cultural* traits (not individual actions, specifically personal beliefs, etc.), indicating a practical ability to use the concept of culture
- Understanding of the three types of explanation
- Explanations that clearly exemplify each of the three types
- Explanations that are reasonable (that make sense, fit with the available evidence, and are not excessively far-fetched)
- Understanding of the substance of the readings (getting the cultural traits and supporting information right)
- Insight into the cultures (putting things together, thinking beyond the superficial. Brilliance is not required, but getting the point and making connections helps.)
- Originality and creativity (not required, but they make everything else look better)

Due: The paper is due in class on Tuesday, April 24. (One week later than on the original syllabus.)

Computer version: You must also submit the paper as a computer file (Word, Wordperfect, Works, etc.) which you attach to an email message to me at

bruce.owen@sonoma.edu

Name the file in this format:

340-07s-explanations-SimpsonHomer.doc

Replace "SimpsonHomer" with your own name (d'oh), last name first. Your word processing program may use a different three-letter extension, like ".wpd" instead of ".doc". Following this format makes it much easier for me to keep track of papers.

Due: The computer version is due by midnight of Tuesday, April 24. (One week later than on the original syllabus.)

Good luck!