Introduction for Faculty Colleagues

GST110: The Global Citizen is a first-year-level course required of all students. Individual instructors address the following themes: The importance of individual responsibility; The relationship of humans to the natural world; Globalization and tribalization as powerful world forces; The impact of imperialism and colonialism; The nature of culture; and The plights of disempowered groups. In order to reach those themes, instructors from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives.

This section of GST110 examines the themes through the lens of stories of race and class. Students examine the effects of social class on individuals and societies with respect to a variety of issues, and, at the same time, gain the ability to determine how the presentation of race and class issues through a variety of forms of media affects understanding.

This assignment is given relatively early in the semester. Because these are first-year students, we begin with comparatively familiar culture. For this assignment, we, in class, watch Gosford Park, a murder mystery set in early 20th Century England (think Downtown Abbey with a dead guy). The movie depicts a strict class system with upstairs aristocracy and downstairs servants. Each student is assigned to a “viewing group” that will take notes on a particular aspect of the characters and their social class. These notes are compiled in a GoogleDoc, one per viewing group that all students can draw on to write.

This is a modification of an assignment I have used in the class in the past, in which the notes are used to create one paper per group about the class markers they noticed. This modification is intended to have the students not only identify the class markers, but apply this knowledge to the larger task of looking at potential actions. It is my intention that students will bring the letters to class, and they will become the basis for a discussion of social affordances of class.
The Assignment I Distribute to Students

Note to Faculty Colleagues
The assignment has several components involving groups. The first handout distributed to students will provide an overview of the project and an assignment description for all possible groups. The second handout will detail the individual student’s assignment.

GST 110 – The Global Citizen
Social Class Markers through Film
(Description for All Assignments)

Purpose
As we have read and discussed this semester, actions and items that represent social class are used to categorize people. These categories impact not only individuals’ abilities to act within a society, but also their opinions of themselves. This paper is a chance for you to analyze the social status of characters in a movie with strong class elements and to use this analysis to predict characters’ actions.

Learning Goals
• Identify social class markers based in physical culture depicted in media

OR

• Identify social class markers based in actions of characters depicted in media

AND

• Use social class markers to take the perspective of a fictional character in making decisions of how to act in an individual situation

Process
Part 1, Identification
General directions: Your task is to look for social cues in Gosford Park. Your group is assigned to the following area. You may want to use some of what you learned from your reading in Class Matters to inform your analyses. You’ll put an edited version of your notes in a Google Doc I will create for you. The title of the GDoc will indicate the group to which you are assigned.

Upstairs Group
Costumes and Props: Make notes about the costumes that the characters from upstairs are wearing. Do the same for the props that they are using. What are they? How do the characters themselves react to them? How do the other characters react to the costumes? What do the costumes tell you about the class of the people wearing them? Why?

Actions: Make notes about the manners and mannerisms of the characters. Take down specific examples and note both how the other characters react to these examples and what those actions do for the plot.

Downstairs Group
Costumes and Props: Make notes about the costumes that the characters from downstairs are wearing. Do the same for the props that they are using. What are they? How do the characters themselves react to them? How do the other characters react to the costumes? What do the costumes tell you about the class of the people wearing them? Why?

Actions: Make notes about the manners and mannerisms of the characters. Take down specific examples and note both how the other characters react to these examples and what those actions do for the plot.

Part 2, Application

Costumes and Props Groups
The King of England is visiting Gosford Park prior to the events of the movie. Write a one-page letter from a character living in the group you analyzed (upstairs or downstairs), addressed to a person of the same social class, but who has never visited Gosford, stating how you are preparing for the visit with respect to what you will wear and how you will interact with objects around you. Your letter must mention either clothes or objects specifically in the context of your character’s description of their feelings about the upcoming visit.

Actions Groups
The King of England is visiting Gosford Park prior to the events of the movie. Write a one-page letter from a character living in the group you analyzed (upstairs or downstairs), addressed to a person of the same social class who has never visited Gosford, stating how you are preparing for the visit with respect to what you will do while the King is there. Your letter must mention specific actions in the context of your character’s description of their feelings about the upcoming visit.

Assessment
Your letter will be evaluated on how well you identify important elements of class markers, how accurately those are described in the letter, and how effectively you are able to use those descriptions to communicate the social situation of your character.
Social Class Markers through Film  
(Sample Student Handout)

Purpose
As we have read and discussed this semester, actions and items that represent social class are used to categorize people. These categories impact not only individuals’ abilities to act within a society, but also their opinions of themselves. This paper is a chance for you to analyze the social status of characters in a movie with strong class elements and to use this analysis to predict characters’ actions.

Learning Goals
- Identify social class markers based in physical culture depicted in media
- Use social class markers to take the perspective of a fictional character in making decisions of how to act in an individual situation

Process

Part 1, Identification
General directions: Your task is to look for social cues in Gosford Park. Your group is assigned to the following area. You may want to use some of what you learned from your reading in Class Matters to inform your analyses. You’ll put an edited version of your notes in a Google Doc I will create for you.

Upstairs Group
Costumes and Props: Make notes about the costumes that the characters from upstairs are wearing. Do the same for the props that they are using. What are they? How do the characters themselves react to them? How do the other characters react to the costumes? What do the costumes tell you about the class of the people wearing them? Why? Put your notes in the GoogleDoc, and put your initials in parentheses after your contributions (AS).

Part 2, Application

Costumes and Props Groups
The King of England is visiting Gosford Park prior to the events of the movie. Write a one-page letter from a character living in the group you analyzed (upstairs or downstairs), addressed to a person of the same social class, but who has never visited Gosford, stating how you are preparing for the visit with respect to what you will wear and how you will interact with objects around you. Your letter must mention either clothes or objects specifically in the context of your character’s description of their feelings about the upcoming visit. Bring 7 copies to class.

Assessment
Your letter will be evaluated on how well you identify important elements of class markers, how accurately those are described in the letter, and how effectively you use those descriptions to communicate the social situation of your character.