

## Background and Introduction:

The purpose of this assignment is to help participants understand their own cultural rules and biases, as well as conduct research and critically analyze media that will help shape their responses to cultural biases.

Participants will engage with the musical *Hamilton*. The show details the life of Alexander Hamilton but also provides an avenue for viewers to critically self-reflect on current American cultural practices. This activity will challenge students to critically analyze a piece of popular culture, conduct research, and understand new aspects of American culture.

As a result of this assignment, individuals will engage with Self-Awareness frameworks from the [AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE rubric](#). An individual proficient in self-awareness frameworks articulates insights into their own cultural rules and biases (e.g. seeking complexity; becoming aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules; and understanding how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

## Summary of *Hamilton*:

*Hamilton* is a musical about the life of American Founding Father Alexander Hamilton. The show, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, was inspired by the 2004 biography *Alexander Hamilton* by historian Ron Chernow. It focuses on how individuals such as Aaron Burr, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson affected the trajectory of Hamilton's life. The play is especially well known for casting non-white actors to play these historical figures and using modern musical styles, such as hip-hop, pop, and soul to tell Hamilton's story.

## Materials and Preparation:

Access to the *Hamilton* musical or soundtrack, Hamilton Worksheet (see Downloads).

*Note:* Participants can view *Hamilton* on their own before the activity takes place, or it can be screened in-class. A rendition of *Hamilton* is available on Disney+. Simply listening to the soundtrack also works for this particular assignment. The full soundtrack is available on YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music. Facilitators should encourage participants to look up the [lyrics](#) to the songs they decide to analyze.

Participants should also read the following before beginning the assignment:

- [Why Hamilton Matters by Tara Helfman](#)
- [How Hamilton Uses History by Joanne Freeman](#)
- [Norton Field Guide: Rhetorical Situations](#)

Facilitators can also choose to use the following resource from Colorado State University, which provides a framework for performing rhetorical analysis:

- ["Doing a Rhetorical Analysis of a Text – Kiefer" from Writing @ CSU](#)

## Activity Instructions:

Facilitators can choose to either screen *Hamilton* in class, ask participants to view it beforehand, or simply have participants listen to the soundtrack. After viewing or listening, participants should choose one song from the musical to rhetorically analyze using the Hamilton Worksheet (see Downloads).

Once all participants have completed the worksheet, the facilitator should ask for volunteers to share their analyses and then debrief using the following questions:

- What did you originally believe the musical *Hamilton* was about? After your viewing and conducting research what new conclusions have you come to?
- What is your own understanding of American culture? What are the pros and cons of American culture?
- What cultural biases of American culture did you have before viewing *Hamilton*? Have any of these changed and if so, how and why?
- As an American, what does this play mean to you? If you are not American, how did you engage with this play?
- What did you find the play saying about contemporary society?

**Analysis of one song/scene from *Hamilton*:**

1. Brief summary of the song, where song is in play, structure of the song, important quotes from song, etc.

2. Primary source that inspired that song: Find a diary entry, newspaper entry, historical document that would have inspired or been relevant to the song. Discuss the historical time period of the song.

3. Compare and contrast the historical influence of the song to any current historical moments.

**Rhetorical situation of the song/scene you have chosen:**

You will need to conduct some basic research to answer some of these questions.

**Reader** [Who is the target audience]

**Evaluation**

**Author** [Author of the play]

**Limitations**

**Motivation**

**Conclusions:**

In summary, what does *Hamilton* say about contemporary society? What does the song you analyzed say and how does it fit into the larger narrative of *Hamilton*?