

This is Prompt 1 for English 230, "Contemporary Media and Fiction" (Fall 2021), at the University of Victoria. It is also available [online](#).

Responses to the prompt should be submitted via the course Brightspace. Thanks!

Prompt 1

Written on Monday, September 13th

The first two weeks (Sept. 8 - 17) of this course focus on defining media. The third week (Sept. 21 - 24) is about methods for studying what media do in fiction. This prompt asks you to begin practicing those methods.

The prompt's primary aim is for you to consider the "comprehension" and "apprehension" of media in fiction. You're welcome to respond to the prompt in **one** of three ways.

The Three Options

Option 1, "Mood and Main Content": This option appeals primarily to studies of feeling and storytelling. Write two detailed paragraphs (totaling about 500 words, plus up to three image, audio, or video files) that describe the *mood* and *main content* of Kittaka's *Secrets Agent*, YHCHI's *THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT*, or Hopkinson's "Message in a Bottle." Your two paragraphs should give your audience a palpable sense of how the work's feel or vibe intersects with its story. After these two paragraphs, please include a one- or two-sentence critical observation you would make about the work you selected based on your description of its mood and main content.

Option 2, "Modes and Modules": This option appeals mostly to studies of artistic media. Write two detailed paragraphs (totaling about 500 words, plus up to three image, audio, or video files) that describe the *modes* and *modules* of Kittaka's *Secrets Agent*, YHCHI's *THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT*, or Hopkinson's "Message in a Bottle." Your two paragraphs should give your audience a clear picture of how the work's various parts address or engage your senses. After these two paragraphs, please include a one- or two-sentence critical observation you would make about the work you selected based on your description of its modes and modules.

Option 3, "Materials and Moment": This option appeals mostly to studies of media history and culture. Write two detailed paragraphs (totaling about 500 words, plus up to three image, audio, or video files) that describe the *materials* and *moment* of Kittaka's *Secrets Agent*, YHCHI's *THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT*, or Hopkinson's "Message in a Bottle." Your two paragraphs should give your audience a clear sense of how the physical substance of the work corresponds with the context of when, where, by whom, and for whom it was made. After these two paragraphs, please include a one- or two-sentence critical observation you would make about the work you selected based on your description of its materials and moment.

Tips for Writing

- This response is not an essay. Think of it as an exercise in developing an idea or argument.
- Pick only one work (*Secrets*, *MOOD*, or "Message"), focus on it, and read / watch / play it multiple times. Take notes and document your experience as you go.
- Stick to thorough and detailed descriptions in your first two paragraphs. You don't need to analyze, review, or evaluate the work. Just describe, describe, describe. Imagine communicating with someone who is unfamiliar with the work. Which details would you share to help them picture it?
- Feel free to include alongside your writing up to *three* image, audio, and/or video files that convey your experience of the work and/or provide evidence of the work's content. Here, you might consider screen capture techniques and/or reaction videos as two (among many) possibilities. If you've never used screen capture techniques, then feel free to email me for assistance. (This goes for any technical stuff in the course, btw.)
- If you do include audio, image, or video files in your response, then be sure to reference them in your writing. Try, for example: "See the attached file, which is . . ." or "The example below is a . . ." Avoid dropping media files into a response without introducing them.
- Option 3: "Materials and Moment" is the only response that should require additional (internet) research, mostly because you'll be contextualizing the work. Are you curious about short free games (like *Secrets Agent*) made with Construct 2, animations (like *MOOD*) made with Flash, or short sci-fi (like "Message") published by PM Press? Then try a few web searches to learn about that community and include in your writing some links to relevant online materials. If you'd like some search tips for specific inquiries, then email me. I'm happy to point you to places.
- Writing the observation at the end may be the toughest part of this response. A compelling critical observation typically acknowledges a common interpretation of a work, communicates another (different or new) interpretation, and then says why and for whom that new or different interpretation matters. Consider this logic, which you're welcome to replicate, test, or revise for the sake of practice: "While some people may say that 'Work X' is 'Interpretation A', it is also 'Interpretation B'. This aspect of 'Work X' matters to 'Community Y' because 'Reason C.'" Here is an example: "While some people may say that *THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT* is the sort of work that appeals only to critics, it is also having some fun with critics at their expense. This aspect of *MOOD* matters for media artists because it plays with assumptions that art should always be 'deep' or mean something."
- The language of "mood," "main content," "modes," "modules," "materials," and "moment" in the three options above will be further explained during lecture on Tuesday, September 21st. If you'd like to get started now, then I've provided some guiding questions at the bottom of this document.

Assessment

I will assess your response to Prompt 1 based on the following criteria:

- Engagement with the prompt (25%): how well and to what degree the response follows the prompt
- Thoroughness of detail (25%): the degree to which the response describes the work (*Secrets*, *MOOD*, or "Message") through the selection of details and evidence
- Quality of description (25%): not just the quantity of detail and evidence (see above), but the degree to which the descriptions are informative or demonstrative, especially for people who may be unfamiliar with the work (*Secrets*, *MOOD*, or "Message")
- Potential of critical observation (25%): the degree to which the observation could spark an engaging or compelling line of inquiry (an idea or argument) about the work that follows from its description

You will receive a mark for each criterion, which will be tallied (.25 x 4) to result in your mark for Prompt 1. I will send feedback to you via Brightspace. I will use [UVic's grading system](#) for assessment, according to this rubric: "exceeds and raises expectations" (A+), "exceeds expectations" (A, A-), "exceeds some expectations" (B+), "meets expectations" (B, B-), "meets some expectations" (C+, C), "meets few expectations" (D), and "no submission." You will have an opportunity to revise your response to Prompt 1, 2, or 3 by Friday, December 3rd. This revision can only improve your mark.

What to Submit

You may submit your response to Prompt 1 via Brightspace as a PDF, DOCX, RTF, or HTML file containing 450 - 600 words and an MLA-style Works Cited page, which should list any works you reference, even if you reference only one work (*Secrets*, *MOOD*, or "Message"). The Works Cited page is *not* included in the word count. If you have questions about how to cite a particular work, then don't hesitate to email me. Here are citations for the three works at hand (change the access dates, if you wish):

- Hopkinson, Nalo. "Message in a Bottle." *Report from Planet Midnight*, PM Press, 2012, 1-26.
- Kittaka, Marina. *Secrets Agent*. Itch.io, 2014, <https://even-kei.itch.io/secrets-agent>. Accessed 24 September 2021.
- Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries. *THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT*, 2007, https://www.yhchang.com/THE_MOOD_OF_THE_MOMENT_V.html. Accessed 24 September 2021.

If you decide to include media files alongside your writing, then feel free to attach (or upload) them as separate JPG (image), PNG (image), TIFF (image), MP3 (audio), WAV (audio), MP4 (video), MOV (video), or PDF (document) files in Brightspace. Alternatively, you may import them into your PDF, DOCX, RTF, or HTML document and display them there. This way, you need to submit only one document.

When to Submit It

Please submit your response via Brightspace by Friday, September 24th at 10:30am.

Mood

The mood of a work is about being in the world and engaging fiction. What's the work's vibe or feel?

Here are some ways to think about mood (it's probably best to focus on just one or two of them):

- Describe the work as an encounter. What or whom are you encountering? Does it feel close or distant?
- Describe the work as an atmosphere. What's the "weather" of the work?
- Describe the work's tone. Is it serious? Playful? Vague? Direct? Presumptuous? Subtle?
- Describe the work as a feeling. Any goosebumps? What emotions or experiences do you associate with it? What was felt instantly? What took some time?

Descriptions of mood prompt considerations of *distance, immediacy, intimacy, and familiarity*.

Main Content

The main content of a fiction is about its story.

Here are some ways to think about the main content (it's probably best to focus on just one or two of them):

- Characters: humans, robots, nonhuman animals, mythical creatures, and even environments or parts of the environment.
- Setting: time, place, and location of the story.
- Plot: major events and what unfolds in the story; typically understood through exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement or resolution.
- Theme: core ideas, threads, and even morals or lessons.
- Conflict: between characters, events, groups, and/or environments. Conflict is the tension upon which the story relies.
- Point of view: first-, second-, or third-person, including the camera or narrator, where perspective may be omniscient or limited.

What is interesting about the work's treatment of each or any of these? What's familiar or predictable?

Descriptions of the main content prompt considerations of *shared interpretation*, or which aspects of the work and its plot put people on the same page.

Modes

The modes of a fiction are about how it addresses or engages people's senses.

Here are some ways to think about the modes (sometimes it's best to focus on just one or two modes):

- Which of the five senses (hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, and touching) are engaged? Which are engaged more than others?
- How is it WOVEN? Consider Written (including reading), Oral (what's said and heard), Visual (colour, layout, and images), Electronic (how the work transmits media, and whether it's only electronic), and Nonverbal (gesture, audio, and movement) communication in the work. (Thanks to Georgia Tech's Writing and Communication Program for this approach and the acronym, WOVEN.)
- Are you perceiving with the work or against it? Maybe somewhere in between? What's the flow or rhythm like?
- Are you in control of when the work starts and stops, or how you navigate it? Do you want to be?

Descriptions of mode prompt considerations of how we *attend* to fiction.

Modules

The modules of a work are about its parts, composition, and arrangement.

Here are some ways to think about modules:

- Is the work available as a collection of files? If so, describe them. Consider a website, for instance. It may have HTML, CSS, and media files.
- Describe the component parts of the work, even if they are not available as separate files. Consider podcasts, for instance. Their components may include dialogue (DX), sound effects (SFX), background sound (BG), and music (MX). Or, consider comics. Their components may include panels, gutters, tiers, and speech bubbles. (We'll talk more about comics and podcasts later in the term.)
- Describe how "seamless" the composition appears to be, or where and when you notice the seams that knit together the work's components. What feels polished? Rough? When is it rough on purpose?

Descriptions of modules prompt considerations of the *relationships between parts and whole*.

Materials

The materials are about the work as matter and physical substance: as an agent that turns this into that.

Here are some ways to think about materials (it's probably best to focus on just a few):

- Presence: Can you touch or handle it?
- Texture: Is it smooth or rough?
- Ephemera: What about it disappears, or what's ghostly or mutable about it?
- Visibility: Which materials can you see? Not see?
- Audibility: Does it make a sound? Which materials can you hear?
- Packaging: Is it packaged? If so, describe the packaging.
- Storage: Where or how is it stored? Can you handle or see the storage media?
- Age: How has the work aged? How might it rot, decay, or degrade?
- Transformation: How does it turn this into that? What is "this," and what is "that"?

Descriptions of materials prompt considerations of the work as *stuff*.

Moment

Moment is about the work's context: when, where, for whom, and by whom it was made.

Here are some ways to think about a moment (it's probably best to focus on just one or two of them):

- Identify who was (or is) involved in the work. Consider who got credit and for what.
- Identify when it was made and circulated. Consider what other kinds of work were popular at that time.
- Describe what was happening when it was made and circulated. Consider important historical, cultural, and artistic events as well as what the authors / artists were doing at or around the time.
- Describe where the work was made and circulated. Consider its network, geographic location, and "scene." In some cases, the network may be quite literal: a radio or tv network, for instance. In others, it may be social, including communities of authors, artists, editors, critics, or fans.
- Describe its reception over time. Compare its reception now with its reception then. Also consider reception across different venues or groups of people. What are some common comments or feelings about it? Which communities have unique comments or feelings about it?
- Describe what it remediates. Consider previous media, technologies, and formats that it absorbed or rendered more accessible. Also consider "skeuomorphs," or objects with functions (such as wastebaskets) that become ornamental features (like "trash" icons) in the work.

Descriptions of the moment prompt considerations of *shared situations*, or which aspects of a work put people in the same space and/or time.