

Diana George ■ John Trimbur

READING CULTURE

Contexts for Critical Reading and Writing

SIXTH EDITION



Reading Culture

CONTEXTS FOR CRITICAL READING AND WRITING

Sixth Edition

Diana George
Virginia Tech University

John Trimbur
Worcester Polytechnic Institute



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Cover Designer/Manager: Nancy Danahy
Cover Photo: Amadeo Sandoval's Living Room, Rio Lucio, New Mexico, June 1985. Photograph by Alex Harris.
Photo Researcher: Photosearch, Inc.
Manufacturing Manager: Mary Fischer
Printer and Binder: Quebecor World
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color Corps.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Reading culture: contexts for critical reading and writing/[edited by] Diana George,
John Trimbur.— 6th ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-321-39169-1 (pbk.)

1. College readers. 2. English language—Rhetoric—Problems, exercises, etc.
3. Critical thinking—Problems, exercises, etc. 4. Academic writing—Problems, exercises, etc. I. George, Diana, 1948– II. Trimbur, John.

PE1417.R38 2007

808'.0427—dc22

2005025817

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Please visit our website at www.ablongman.com/george

ISBN 0-321-39169-1

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Preface

Every edition of *Reading Culture* has opened with these words from Raymond Williams: “Culture is ordinary; that is where we must start.” We start, then, with the world that surrounds us and the experience of everyday life. In *Reading Culture*, we ask students to look at culture as a way of life that organizes social experience and shapes the identities of individuals and groups. We will be using the term *culture* in this textbook to talk about how people make sense of their worlds and about the values, beliefs, and practices in which they invest their energies and allegiances. We want to provide students with reading and writing assignments so they can understand how their familiar ways of life fit into the diverse, mass-mediated, multicultural realities of contemporary America.

Reading Culture assumes that students are already immersed in a wealth of cultural information and that their experiences of everyday life can usefully be brought to attention as material for reflection and deliberation. The reading and writing assignments in *Reading Culture* are designed to promote a critical distancing so that students can begin to observe and evaluate as well as participate in contemporary America. To this end, *Reading Culture* asks students to read in two ways. First we ask students to read carefully and critically the range of writing about culture we have assembled here. We ask them to identify the purposes and assumptions writers bring to the study of culture and the rhetorical patterns they use to enact their aims. Second, we ask students to read the social world around them, to identify the patterns of meaning in the commonplace, and to put into words the familiar experiences of everyday life that often go without saying.

Reading Culture is organized into ten chapters. The first chapter, “Reading the News,” introduces students to the study of culture by looking at the American news media. The chapter includes critical strategies for reading the news on television, in print, and over the Internet, as well as a sequence of reading and writing activities about reporting war.

The chapters that form the main part of *Reading Culture*, as in past editions, are arranged under several broad topics. “Generations” and “Schooling” explore the personal experience of growing up and going to school. “Images,” “Style,” and “Public Space” emphasize the visual dimension of culture—in the popular media, in design and packaging, and in the way public space is planned, legislated, and used. The next three chapters, “Storytelling,” “Work,” and “History,” investigate narratives Americans tell themselves, the experience of the workplace, and the meaning of the past in the contemporary United States. The final chapter, “Living in a Postcolonial World,” examines the movement of people, cultures, and languages in an era of globalization.

In the third edition of *Reading Culture*, we included two new features—Visual Culture and Fieldwork—that are now standard in the textbook. In each chapter, a Visual Culture section presents strategies for analyzing and interpreting films, photographs, television shows, ads, public health messages, page design, signs in public places, and other forms of visual communication. In addition, most chapters include a Fieldwork section that provides ways of studying culture through interviews, participant observation, questionnaires, oral histories, and other forms of on-site research.

The fourth edition introduced Mining the Archives, Perspectives, and instructions on Reading the Web; with the fifth edition, we began to include a Classic Reading in the study of culture. These selections offer students a perspective on how the issues raised in each chapter have been written about in the past by men and women whose thinking we still return to—writers and thinkers such as James Agee, Roland Barthes, Margaret Mead, and W. E. B. Du Bois. All of these features have been carried over into the sixth edition. Many have been revised to accommodate new readings and assignments.

Reading Culture is designed to be used flexibly and creatively. Instructors may wish to ask students to work on the chapters in *Reading Culture* as they are arranged, but this is only one possible order.

The *Reading Culture* Companion Website, located at www.ablongman.com/george, and the Instructor's Manual (available to qualified adopters of the book) also provide a wealth of resources for instructors wishing to extend their students' investigations on any of the chapter topics or individual readings.

New to the Sixth Edition

This sixth edition includes new and expanded features to help students investigate contemporary and past cultures. These additions come in large part from discussions we've had with writing teachers who have used previous editions of *Reading Culture*.

- **Wired Culture.** Wired Culture focuses on digital media and how such new means of communication as blogs, instant messaging, cell phones, iPods, and video games are changing the way people work and play. Each chapter now includes a reading about digital culture to investigate the immediacy, interactivity, and connectivity of new media, the increasingly blurry distinction between the virtual and the real, and the use of electronic communication in outsourcing jobs and forming antiglobalization networks.
- **Film Clips.** To enable teachers and students to examine films in some detail, chapters include a Film Clips feature that provides concepts and tools of analysis—from discussion of such film genres as documentaries, westerns, and Bollywood movies to storyboarding, set design, costumes, and screenplays to the Hollywood star system.
- **Guide to Visual Analysis.** The Guide to Visual Analysis (pages 7–12) provides a brief introduction to the kinds of questions students and teachers can ask of all sorts of visual communication. It also offers a comprehensive list of the concepts and tools of analysis *Reading Culture* includes for the study of visual culture.
- **New Readings.** The readings in *Reading Culture* draw on a variety of resources, including popular press features, academic scholarship, and news reports. In this Sixth Edition, we've included over 50 new readings from a wide array of voices such as Edward Tufte, Andrew Sullivan, Katha Pollitt, Martin Espada, Peggy Noonan, Studs Terkel, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Jamaica Kincaid. Also new to this edition are a graphic novel, Marjane Satrapi's "The Veil" from *Persepolis*, and Joe Sacco's graphic report "Complacency Kills."

The sixth edition of *Reading Culture* offers opportunities extending across chapters to work with visual communication, literacy events, and microethnography. The

work you do with this text will, however, depend on your needs and your students' interests. We think that with this edition, *Reading Culture* has become a more flexible resource for teaching writing and critical reading and for asking students to write about, and in the culture of, contemporary America.

Acknowledgments

We want to thank a number of people for their insight and advice. Lynn Huddon and Katharine Glynn provided the editorial support for this edition. We appreciate as well the careful readings we received by reviewers of this book: Karen Auvinen, *Front Range Community College*; Jennifer Brezina, *College of the Canyons*; Shahara Drew, *Tufts University*; Kristin Girard, *Georgia Institute of Technology*; Ruth Hoberman, *Eastern Illinois University*; Shari Horner, *Shippensburg University*; Megan Knight, *University of Iowa*; Beverly J. Reed, *Stephen F. Austin State University*; John Schilb, *Indiana University*; Robert C. Spirko, *University of Tennessee*.

We want to thank the teachers who have used the first five editions of *Reading Culture*. The feedback, suggestions, and insights they have offered us over the years have enabled us to see the book in new ways and to plan the sixth edition with their ideas in mind. We thank our students at Michigan Technological University and Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Clare Trimbur, Lucia Trimbur, and Catherine Trimbur for the best confirmation of our intentions we could possibly receive: they recognized themselves and their peers in this project and let us know that the cultural resources we are seeking to tap are vitally important to students in contemporary America.

We dedicate this book to the late Jim Berlin, whose work challenged a generation of teachers and students to turn their attention to the small things of everyday life—those ways of living and communicating that constitute a culture.

Diana George

John Trimbur

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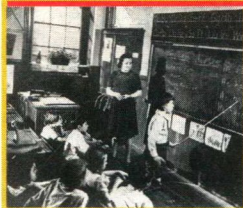
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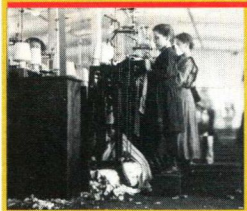
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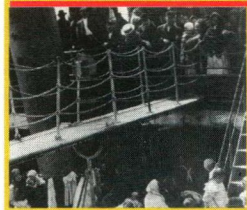
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