

A Sociological Analysis of The Blind Side Writing Assignment

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Abstract

The Blind Side is the story of Michael Oher, who came from a disadvantaged childhood and is now a professional football player. We are reading this book because it illustrates many of the sociological concepts we learn during the semester including, social promotion, racial inequality, culture shock, among others. You will write a sociological analysis of The Blind Side.

Details

Subject Areas: Introduction to Sociology/Social Problems

Resource Types: Assignment

Class Levels: College 100

Class Sizes: Any

Learning Goals and Assessments

LEARNING GOALS

Goal 1: This reading and writing assignment is designed for students to apply the concepts they have learned over the course of the semester to a nonfiction book.

Goal 2: This activity allows students to delve more deeply into a specific concept through reading and writing.

ASSESSMENTS

Writing assignment and test questions.

Resource Files

DOCX

TECHNIQUE: A Sociological Analysis of *The Blind Side* Writing Assignment

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COURSES: Introduction to Sociology (in-person or online)

TEACHING/LEARNING GOAL:

- Goal 1: This reading and writing assignment is designed for students to apply the concepts they have learned over the course of the semester to a nonfiction book.
- Goal 2: This activity allows students to delve more deeply into a specific concept through reading and writing.

TEACHING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will demonstrate how well they understand selected course topics through applying selected topics to a nonfiction book.
- Students will describe stratification along the lines of race, social class, and gender and how they intersect one another
- Students will distinguish between the importance of socialization in the nurturing of talent

ANTICIPATED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

As a result of this reading and writing assignment, students will be able to

- Demonstrate how well they understand selected course topics through applying selected topics to a nonfiction book.
- Explain how race, social class, and gender intersect with one another by responding to a writing prompt about *The Blind Side*.
- Analyze popular culture sociologically.
- Distinguish between nature and nurture by explaining the role of socialization in the development of talent.

REFERENCES:

Previous scholars have found success using nontraditional texts, including novels. I use the novel in addition to the traditional text.

Castellano, Urula, Joseph DeAngelis, and Marisol Clark-Ibáñez. 2008. "Cultivating a Sociological Perspective Using Nontraditional Texts." *Teaching Sociology* 36(3):240-253.
Hartman, Cheryl J. 2005. "Enriching Sociology 100: Using the Novel *Things Fall Apart*." *Teaching Sociology* 33(3):317-322.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Lewis, Michael. 2007. *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Additional references for potential in-class discussion questions:
<http://wildcatstudenttv.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/BLIND-SIDE.pdf>

ESTIMATED TIME:

In-person courses:

- 15-20 minutes to assign
- At least one 75-minute class period to discuss the book at the same time the writing assignment is due

PROCEDURE:

For the Instructor:

Assign the writing assignment during the first third of the semester so that students have ample time to do the reading and writing. Once assigned, remind students weekly to get started on the reading. Periodically refer to the book for examples during class to keep it on student's minds and get them thinking about how they can apply sociological concepts to the book.

For the Students:

I have attached the assignment guide as an appendix to this submission.

Note for Online Courses:

In the past I created group discussion forums about the book. Despite having a grade attached to participation in the discussion forum, I had poor participation. On several occasions, I had students assigned to groups where they were the only student participating. This did not work in my online courses, but it might be more successful in yours. Today, students just turn in the assignment without any discussion beyond my individual feedback.

INTERPRETATION:

Most students have some knowledge of football and many are familiar with Michael Oher's story through the feature film, *The Blind Side*. Many of my students, however, have not seen the film. Few have considered sports sociologically before, students make sociological connections beyond those I lay out for them in the question prompts. There are few complaints from students about reading a novel or the writing assignment.

POSSIBLE PITFALLS:

Students are apprehensive about reading an entire novel in a sociology course. I originally assigned the entire book, but after push back the first time I taught the book, I revised the assignment so that students can skip portions of the book. I encourage students read the whole book if time permits and several report doing so.

Each semester I revise the writing prompts slightly to discourage students from submitting a former student's paper as their own. Having clear writing prompts is helpful so that students do not just write a book report. They need a guide to help them make sociological connections.

The paper about the book is do near the end of the semester so that we have covered the material that is asked in the prompts by the time it is due. The due date might sneak up on students who

procrastinate or have other classes with big end-of-the-semester projects. Assign the project early and give students lots of reminders along the way.

Students could just watch the movie instead of reading the book. I require students to provide at least two direct quotes from the book to encourage them to read the book instead of watching the movie.

Students may focus on how Oher overcame diversity instead without making strong connections to how structure shaped Oher's life chances. Students have to be guided to think about how socialization, stereotypes, race, family and so on all shaped his life chances.

ASSESSMENT EXAMPLES:

Test questions:

- 1) Sports are thought of as the closest thing in America to pure meritocracy, the one avenue of ambition widely thought to be open to all. This perception
 - a) **is incorrect because without outside intervention, Michael Oher's talent would quite likely have been thrown away.**
 - b) is correct because everyone has an equal chance of playing sports.
 - c) is correct because if you have athletic talent then you will easily make it into professional sports.
 - d) all of the choices
- 2) Up until the time of Michael Oher's enrollment at Briarcrest, his educational background provides an example of _____ because despite missing a substantial number of school days, his teachers continued passing him along to the next grade.
 - a) **social promotion**
 - b) functional illiteracy
 - c) innumeracy
 - d) grade inflation
- 3) Michael Oher's fortune of being taken care of by the Tuohy's greatly increased his _____, which taught him how to fit into the world.
 - a) **social capital**
 - b) income
 - c) charisma
 - d) leadership skills
- 4) Michael Oher's situation when he enrolled at Briarcrest can be described as
 - a) an example of how our system does not adequately care for children whose families are unable or unwilling to care for them.
 - b) a result of the failures of his family, his public schooling, and social services.
 - c) an example of the importance of socialization to our development.
 - d) **all of the choices**

APPENDIX. A Sociological Analysis of *The Blind Side* Writing Assignment

Purpose

The Blind Side is the story of Michael Oher, who came from a disadvantaged childhood and is now a professional football player. We are reading this book because it illustrates many of the sociological concepts we learn during the semester including, social promotion, racial inequality, culture shock, among others. You will write a sociological analysis of *The Blind Side*.

Requirements

So what am I supposed to include in my analysis?

There are four questions listed below. You will select one and structure your essay around that question. Make sure you use examples from *The Blind Side* in your answer. You must include at least two direct quotes from *The Blind Side* in your written analysis. Make sure you specify at the top of your essay which question you are answering (this does not count towards your page or word count).

1. **Stereotypes:** What role did stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination play in Michael's life? How did his size, age, race, gender, social class, and so on shape how people reacted to him? Give at least one example. Did stereotyping shape his life chances? In what way? Give at least one example of how stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination negatively impacted his life chances. Be sure to explain what stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and life chances mean in your essay.
2. **Social Construction of Race:** On page 289, Lewis writes, "People teased Michael and called him a 'cracker' because he was brought into the home of a White family. Not only was it challenging for the White family to take in a Black boy, but also for a Black kid to live with a White family." What does this quote tell us about how race is socially constructed? What does it mean that race is socially constructed? What were the challenges that both Tuohys and Michael faced in their new multiracial family? How did the NCAA respond to this family arrangement?
3. **Social Construction of Family:** On page 146, Lewis writes, "Leigh Anne explained about fifty times that Michael's relationship to both Collins and Sean Junior was so much like that of a sibling that you'd never guess they hadn't grown up together... 'I love him as if I birthed him.'" How is family defined sociologically? How is family defined in *The Blind Side*? In other words, what counts as family? How does the relationship Michael has with the Tuohys challenge our society's notion of family?
4. **Socialization:** What is socialization? Without the socialization from the Tuohys and Briarcrest, would Michael have played college football or professional football? Why or why not? Michael dreamed of playing professional basketball, not football. What role did socialization play in him pursuing football over basketball?

How long does it have to be?

Your analysis will be 2-3 pages (600-900 words).

Is this a five-paragraph essay?

Make sure you use paragraphs to organize your writing. There is no expectation that this will be a five paragraph essay. Use the number of paragraphs that is appropriate.

Do I have to read the whole book?

No, you are not required to read the whole book. You are encouraged to read the whole book, but only required to read the following pages: 45-102, 131-230, and 247-329. I suggest getting started with the reading early in the semester. Do not wait until the reading is due to begin reading. If you opt to read the whole book, you could have the book read by the due date by reading at least 1-2 chapters every week.

Can I just watch the movie?

No. The movie is not exactly the same as the book. Some of the facts are changed in the movie. The movie is edited and shows a much smaller portion of Michael Oher's story. I suggest only watching the movie after completing the assignment, if at all. Anyone who has ever watched the movie version of a favorite book can tell you that the movie is nothing like, if not worse than, the book.

Can I listen to the book?

Yes, you can "read" the book by using an audio version of the book. Make sure that you can still cite any direct quotes using the audio version appropriately.

When is The Blind Side Reaction Paper due?

Your paper is due August 4, 2013 on Instructure Canvas. *In-person section: Please come to class prepared to discuss the book and your papers.*

Can I use dictionary.com, Wikipedia, or other comparable websites to define terms?

You are required to define your terms in most of the questions below. Anytime you are asked for a definition, you should use your textbook and other class materials. Do not just go to dictionary.com, Wikipedia, or comparable websites. The way we use terms in sociology is not necessarily the same way they are used in other dictionaries.

Do I need a reference pages?

Yes. You need to include an entry for *The Blind Side* and any other sources (including your textbook) that you use to answer your question in APA format. Your reference page does not count towards your word or page count.

Can I turn the paper in late.

No. Late papers are not accepted.

Grading Rubric

	Possible Points	Points Earned
Do you use course materials to define your terms?	10	
Do you use specific examples from <i>The Blind Side</i> to answer the question (including at least two direct quotes)?	10	
Do you fully answer your selected question?	30	
Total Earned		
<i>Possible Deductions:</i>		
More than two spelling or grammar errors per page	-5	
Paper is either too short or too long	-5	
Reference page or in-text citations do not follow APA format	-5	
Paper is not organized into paragraphs	-5	
Total Deductions		
Grand Total		

Background Information on Michael Oher

Below you will find links to two short videos on Michael Oher and *The Blind Side*. You are not required to watch the videos, but they will provide a bit more context to the book.

- <http://www.aoltv.com/2011/02/08/michael-ohr-blind-side-fact-vs-fiction-gma/>
- <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/BlindSide/blind-side-michael-ohr-story/story?id=9390739#.T5lZXbNYvY8>