

## ENGLISH EXTENSION 2

### Proposal for Major Work: The use of Cold War themes in the superhero stories of Marvel comic books from the 1960's.

---

For my English Extension 2 major work, I propose to write a critical response investigating and analysing the use of Cold War themes in the superhero stories of Marvel comic books from the 1960's. My purpose for undertaking this study is to learn more about the origins of these superheroes in order to help me understand the reasons for their popularity. As a by-product of this, my project gives me the opportunity to educate others interested in such a topic, however this is only of minor concern. Hence the purpose of my work is mainly to allow me to research a topic of my own interest. In terms of audience, I wish for my project to be viewed by anyone interested in the impact of the Cold War era on American popular culture, and I will hopefully appeal to people with backgrounds in fields such as history, psychology, and social analysis.

In my major work, I also wish to explore how context has affected these superhero stories. Previous studies have shown me how the Cold War era led to a movement towards new ways of thinking about literature, and that many texts began displaying ideas which were influenced by these ways of thinking, which include postmodernism. Hence my project will also explore the impact of the move to postmodernist literary theory during the Cold War era on Marvel's superhero comics.

The syllabus requires the major work to have links to topics which have been studied in the English Advanced and Extension 1 Preliminary and HSC courses. My project will be an extension of what was learnt in the Preliminary English Advanced module, Representations of War, and the HSC Extension 1 module B: Texts and Ways of Thinking: After the Bomb. It will extend the knowledge learnt in both modules by applying the knowledge learnt about the characteristics of wartime texts into a genre of text not studied in these modules.

The main Cold War themes I wish to emphasise in my major work include America's fear of the advancement of communism, a theme which is often played with by Marvel in the plot lines of their comics, as well as Marvel's constant allusion to the developments in space exploration (including the space race), weaponry (the arms race), and psychology which occurred during this time. Marvel's inclusion of such themes in their comics is what then allows for a postmodernist interpretation of the texts, as it can be seen as an attempt to blur the lines between reality and fiction, a feature which is common in many postmodern texts. By showing these themes, I hope to emphasise the change in superhero comic books which occurred due to Marvel's inclusion of these themes.

The style of critical response I have chosen to use to convey my ideas is an essay style response. Although other forms of critical writing such as fictocritical or magazine style responses would be suitable for the topic, I have chosen this style as I have more experience in writing in this form. Also, it is a more appropriate style for my audience, for whom writing in the essay style is commonplace. Hence my response will follow all the conventional structures of essay writing, thus allowing my ideas to flow in a logical order.

My composition process started off with broad research into the topic (i.e. research into superhero storylines, postmodern theory, and the Cold War) and determining the links between them, both through further reading and using my own judgement. From this foundation, many stages of drafting and editing must take place. I intend to work on the task in small 500 to 1000 word blocks at least once a week, which should allow me sufficient time for its completion. Additional research must also be undertaken throughout the project, especially in locating appropriate examples to use to illustrate the ideas I am trying to convey through my project (e.g. specific comic books).

The majority of the research material I have gathered so far are either magazine or journal articles.

One of the better magazine articles I have come across is an article from *Time-Australia* by James Poniewozik titled 'Superhero Nation'. I accessed this article via the 'Infocus' collection from the State Library of New South Wales. The article explores how the comic superhero has changed over time, and reflects upon their popularity due to the context of when they were set. Thus this article has been very useful for my research as it summarises many aspects of my topic. However the best resource I have come across thus far is an article from *The Journal of Popular Culture* titled 'With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility: Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics', written by Robert Genter. This article is an extremely detailed resource, and covers most of the aspects of my topic. Hence I have found it extremely useful in helping me understand my topic to a greater degree, as well as finding specific comic books which outline the ideas I am trying to convey.

My future investigation of texts will now mainly focus on locating explicit examples of the ideas of my topic in comic books themselves. This has been the most difficult part of my research thus far, as the internet and my local library do not have a wide enough range of comics available for easy access. However, I have been informed of the extensive comic book collection held in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library at the University of Sydney, which I plan to visit in the near future. Research will also continue into the topic itself, and hopefully I will be able to locate even more useable material.

In the end, I envisage my major work to be a well researched critical analysis, which details as many aspects of my topic as possible within the confines of the criteria set by the Board of Studies, while still addressing the criteria for purpose and audience which I have set for myself.