AMS 311, Popular Culture and American Childhood (Instructor: Rebecca Onion, [rebeccaonion@gmail.com](mailto:rebeccaonion@gmail.com))

**Assignment Sheet: Final Paper Proposal (11.11.11)**

For this assignment, **due to me via email by 5 pm on Monday, November 21**, I want you to show me that you’ve done some preliminary research for your final paper, and I want you to articulate your thinking behind that research.



The formula for an academic research paper is somewhat like a recipe. You’re always going to have the following:

**Primary Sources:** The Main Object(s) Of Your Inquiry. Usually selected first in the process, though occasionally you’ll start with a theme, and then decide which primary sources to pick that could help you explore that theme.

Selecting primary sources is, in and of itself, a form of analysis, especially when you’re going to compare one to another. For that reason, this selection may shift as you move through the process of research. For example, you’ll occasionally decide that you’re going to write about one primary source, then go on to identify secondary sources, and realize that you need to add another primary source in order to make sense of the themes that you see surfacing through your research.

**Secondary Sources**: The other people, usually academics, who help you figure out what’s important about the primary sources. As we’ve been discussing all semester, these secondary sources might address the primary sources directly, or they might provide you more information about the historical period that produced the primary sources, or they might talk about the genre that the primary sources came from, or they could address the themes that the primary sources suggest.

**Argument**: This is where you hold the primary source(s) up against each other, and up against the secondary sources, and determine what’s interesting about it all. This is also where you should relate your sources to the course themes. What does your research tell us about the way that childhood cultures have changed over the years, how gender norms affect childhood culture, the phenomenon of adult nostalgia for childhood, the changing landscape of childhood, the idea of “innocence”?



With all of this in mind, **here’s what your paper proposal should look like**. It should be at least a page long (250 words), but don’t worry if you go over the word limit.

**First Paragraph:** Primary Sources. List your primary sources as citations in Chicago style. Then explain your rationale in picking the sources that you picked. If you’re comparing two different things, like the movies “The Wizard” and “War Games,” say why: “I picked these two movies because they’re both about gaming, and they both came out in the 1980s; moreover, I’m interested in the differences I might find between a movie about gaming-as-competition, and a movie about hacking and illicit activity.” Note the sources’ availability (“These movies are both available on Hulu” or “One of these movies is unavailable streaming; I will get it at I Love Video”). Identifying availability early saves you from having to change your paper topic at the last minute.

**Second Paragraph:** Secondary Sources. List your secondary sources as citations in Chicago style. Then explain why you picked the ones you picked. (Example: “I’ll look at Jenkins’ essay on video games and freedom of movement because I’m hoping to use his idea about games and male bonding to make sense of ‘War Games’’ depiction of male friendship.”) Again, note availability; this will force you to investigate whether or not you need to recall or borrow books in order to have them in your hot little hands in time.

**Third Paragraph**: Research Questions. Moving forward in your research, what questions will you ask as you do your reading and writing? These can take the form of hypotheses (“I think I will find that ‘War Games’ glorifies hacker culture, while ‘The Wizard’ exemplifies adult anxiety about kids’ growing addiction to computers”) or more open-ended (“In my research, I’ll be looking for differences between depictions of adult authority in the two movies”).

In all three of these sections, feel free to express uncertainty and point out places where you’re unsure of your approach or your sources. Uncertainties are what the paper conferences are intended to address. Just give me as much information as you can about your uncertainty (“I don’t know how to find secondary sources that talk about gaming and the 1980s” or “I want to use fan responses to these movies in my argument, but I’m not sure if that’s appropriate for a paper of this length”) and I will try to help.