

Student Name: _____ **Form:** _____



Representation Sample Answers

Writing Time: 100 minutes

Question and Answer Booklet

Conditions

- Students may bring pens, pencils and erasers into the assessment task.
- Students are not permitted to bring notes into this assessment task.
- Mobile phones, calculators and other electronic devices are prohibited.

1. What is a code?

A code is a series of signs that conveys meaning. Some examples of codes include written language, colour and body language. Media representations are constructed using codes. The signs that make up a code can have both denotative or connotative meanings. The denotative meaning of a sign is its most basic definition. Connotative meanings are those associations that a sign has for an audience.

2 marks

2. What is a convention?

A convention is a common way of organising a media text. For example, newspapers are constructed using a series of conventions. The front page of a newspaper usually has the masthead at the top of the page, beneath which is the headline of the most important story, often accompanied by a picture with a caption, the story arranged in columns and written in the style of hard news. All media texts have such conventions.

2 marks

3. What is a representation?

A representation is a constructed media text. Representations can take many forms—from newspaper articles and photographs, to characters in films and photographs of models on the cover of a magazine. Everything we see in the media is a representation of something. Representations can be of individual people (such as Barack Obama), ideas (such as justice or peace), events (such as the bombing of Pearl Harbor), social groups (such as teenagers or the elderly).

2 marks

4. Describe the possible connotations of the signs listed in the below table.

Sign	Connotations
Fox	<i>Sly and devious.</i>
Knife	<i>Depending on its context, it can represent murder or cooking.</i>
Lion	<i>Fierce, bravery, strength.</i>
Rose	<i>Romance, love, valentine's Day.</i>
Cigarette	<i>Health hazard, cool or rebellious.</i>
Gold	<i>Wealth, extravagance.</i>

3 marks

5. Explain why media representations are different to reality.

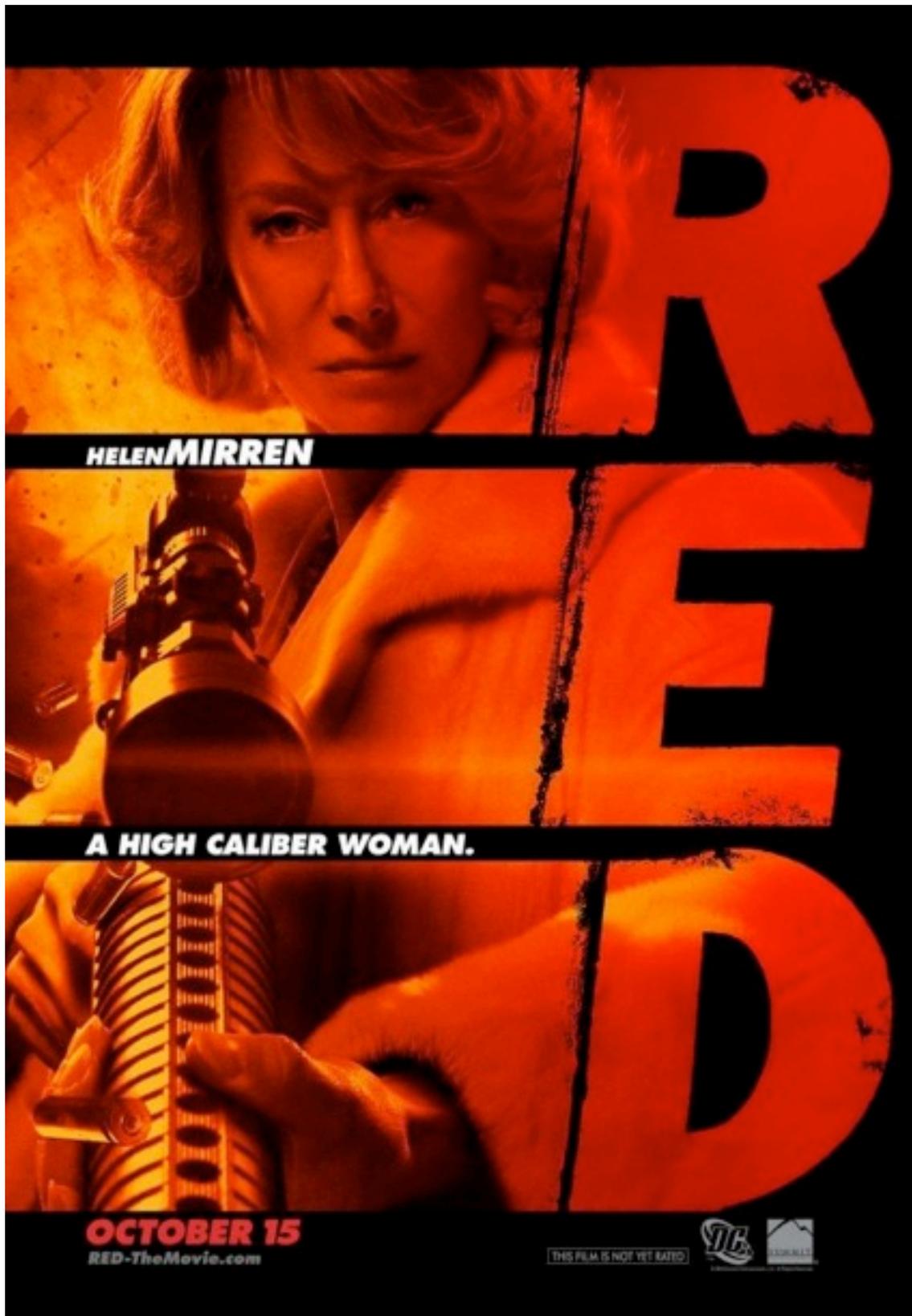
Everything we see and hear in the media has been constructed. When media texts are constructed, important decisions are made about how the subject - it might be a politician, a celebrity or the father in a family sitcom - will be represented. These representations are constructed using codes and conventions. What we see in the media, therefore, is not reality. It's a representation of reality. Even in more 'realistic' representations like television news and newspapers, journalists have to decide how the subject of their reports will be represented. What they end up with is not reality but a mediated version of reality.

4 marks

The Creature from the Black Lagoon, director Jack Arnold, 1954.



RED, director Robert Schwentke, 2010.

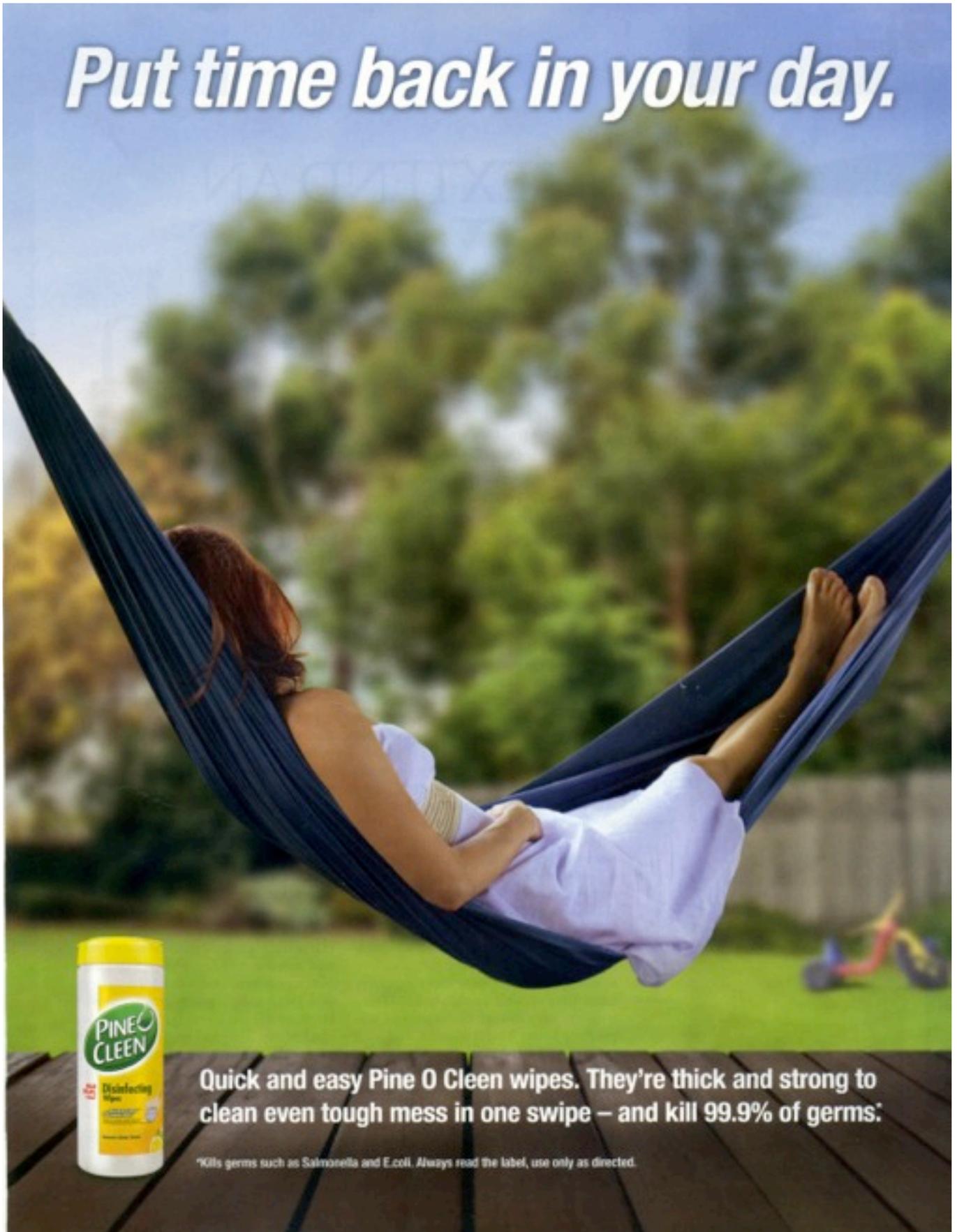


6. Compare how gender was represented differently in the movie posters shown on the previous two pages. Your response should make reference to appropriate codes and conventions.

There is a marked difference between the representation of gender in the posters for *The Creature of the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *Red* (2010). The poster for *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* reflects the value that women are helpless and incapable of defending themselves. In the middle of the poster there is an illustration of the Creature from the Black Lagoon. In his arms is a representation of the actress Julia Adams. Her facial expression is one of pure terror, lips parted in a scream. Her posture, too, reveals that she is a victim incapable of defending herself, the arms of the creature clamped around her. Her white bathing suit is particularly important, the colour white is often associated with innocence and purity and helps to represent her as helpless. The difference between representations of gender in this poster is significant. While Julia Adams has been illustrated as delicate and defenceless, the men in this poster are represented as strong and capable. There are two men illustrated in the top of the poster. Their body language contributes to their representation of strength. The dive in the foreground has a knife clenched in his fist and his arm raised in aggression. Whereas as Julia Adams is dressed in white, the diver is dressed in a black wetsuit with a SCUBA unit. This use of colour contributes to his representation of strength. There is another illustration of a male in the bottom right hand corner of the poster. He is hunched forward, wielding a gun. Guns are a sign of violence and aggression which contribute to the representation of men in this poster as composed and capable in the face of danger. His lips are closed and he has a look of resolute strength on his face. In comparison, Julia Adams is clutching his right arm, her body language conveying fear. Her facial expression, mouth slightly open in shock, also contributes to her lack of strength in this representation. Fifty six years elapsed between the creation of the poster for *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and the poster for *Red*. During this period of time, attitudes towards women changed significantly in American society. There is now significantly more gender equality in American society—in terms of education and employment opportunities—which has led to a significant shift in the way that women are represented in media texts. The poster for *Red* is a good example of this. The poster features the tagline 'A HIGH CALIBRE WOMAN'. The words 'high calibre' carry a number of connotations—while it can refer to the ability or distinction of a person, it is also used to describe the diameter of a shell or bullet. High calibre bullets are particularly deadly. This tagline, therefore, contributes to this representation of a strong female character by relying on the connotations that the phrase carries. She is not only a person of distinction but also deadly. Colour also plays an important role in the construction of this representation. The image is washed in a red and yellow light and there is an explosion over her shoulder. This creates the impression that the character is dangerous and capable of enduring dangerous situations. There is a grim look of determination on her face and she looks directly towards the camera. Another sign in this representation that is important is the sniper rifle that she is holding. More than just a gun—which is usually a sign of violence and aggression—the sniper rifle has the added connotations of being deadly, professional and precise. This is a weapon only used by elite, highly trained soldiers during warfare. The assurance with which she's holding the weapon means that the audience ascribes these qualities to the character as well.



Put time back in your day.



Quick and easy Pine O Clean wipes. They're thick and strong to clean even tough mess in one swipe – and kill 99.9% of germs.*

*Kills germs such as Salmonella and E.coli. Always read the label, use only as directed.

7. Describe how gender is represented in the two advertisements on the previous page. Your response should make reference to appropriate codes.

Both the advertisements for Guess and Pine O Cleen are representations of gender. In the advertisement for Guess, there is a woman standing slightly behind a man, holding onto him as they both stare directly towards the camera. Women are often represented holding onto men or objects for support. The woman in this representation also appears to be naked. The Pine O Cleen advertisement is another representation of gender. This is a representation of a mother, the caption for the advertisement reads, "Put time back in your day." In the foreground, there is an image of a woman resting in a hammock. The picture has quite narrow depth of field and in the background, which is slightly blurred, there is a child's toy. The inclusion of this object suggests that she is a mother who needs rest after cleaning up after her children.

4 marks

8. Describe a gender stereotype commonly used in television advertisements.

One stereotype often used in television advertisements is the dopey dad or boyfriend. Men in television advertisements, particularly for cleaning products, are often represented as clueless and irresponsible, particularly when it comes to housework.

2 marks

9. Describe one advertisement you studied this year that featured the stereotype identified in the previous question.

One advertisement that features the stereotype of the dopey boyfriend is the Libra Invisibles commercial. The commercial opens with a full shot of a man sitting on a couch. There is a cut to an over-the-shoulder shot as he picks up a Libra invisible pad, then to a midshot as he opens it, eyes looking up mischevously. In the next shot, he is standing in front of a mirror making exaggerated ninja moves with the pads stuck to his forearms. There is a series of jump cuts as he makes silly noises, jumps on the couch and has mock battles with his pet dog. The ad ends with a shot of his girlfriend and her parents walking into the room. A reverse shot of the man shows him stopping suddenly. "And you've got my Libra Invisible Pads," she says dryly. The use of acting and editing in this commercial contributes to the representation of his man as a stereotypical dopey boyfriend.

4 marks

10. What does the documentary *Miss Representation* suggest about the way women are represented in the mass media?

Miss Representation is a documentary that explores the damaging and limited representation of women in the mass media.

When the news media represents women in power, there is often a focus on their appearance. The documentary cites the example of Sarah Palin who was often sexualised by the news media. Female leaders, like Hilary Clinton, are often represented as 'bitches' and are more likely to be described as emotional and irrational compared to similar representations of men. The media focuses more on appearance than their policies and opinions. If there is ever a conflict between two women in the media, it is often portrayed as a 'cat fight'. As Katie Couric explains, the discourse surrounding female journalists focuses on their appearance.

The documentary also looks at the representation of women in film and television. In dramas, women are far less likely to be the protagonist and the majority of films revolve around a male lead. Miss Representation reveals that only 16% of protagonists in film are women. Even 'chick flicks', which are supposed to be about women, usually revolve around men as women try to find a man, get married and get pregnant. When women are represented in positions of power, they are often represented as the 'bitchy boss' who has sacrificed family and children for a position of power. In many cases, women are reduced to highly sexualised body props for male viewers. Even in films like Elektra and Catwomen, which appear to be about powerful women, these characters are highly sexualised and represented in a very aggressive way. In Miss Representation, Jennifer Pozner argues that reality television is one of the worst offenders when it comes to the representation of women. She argues that the whole format seems to be a "cultural backlash" against the women's movement. In these type of programs, women are often represented as bitchy, manipulative and natural enemies.

Another problem with the representation of women in the media is that most of the women represented are of child bearing age. There are very few representations of older women.

Miss Representation argues that the representation of women in the media is damaging for a number of reasons including a lack of female leaders, the poor representation of female politicians and the over sexualisation of women in film and television.

8 marks

11. Give three examples of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl trope.

- a. Claire Colburn (Kirsten Dunst) in Elizabethtown.
- b. Em Lewin (Kirsten Stewart) in Adventureland.
- c. Sam (Natalie Portman) in Garden State.

3 marks

12. Describe the Manic Pixie Dream Girl stereotype.

The term Manic Pixie Dream Girl was coined by Nathan Rabin in his review of Cameron Crow's Elizabethtown. He describes the Manic Pixie Dream Girl as a character that exists only in the "fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors". Manic Pixie Dream Girls are incomplete characters who don't seem to have a life of their own. Their sole purpose in the narrative is to help the male protagonist learn more about themselves and their purpose in life. One of the best examples of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl is Sam (Natalie Portman) from Garden State, a quirky compulsive liar who helps the main character, played by Zac Braff, overcome his depression and embrace life.

4 marks

13. What are some of the problems with the Manic Pixie Dream Girl stereotype?

The Manic Pixie Dream Girl stereotype is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it assumes that female characters exist solely for the inspiration of the male leads, ignoring the fact that women are musicians, artists and writers as well. It also reduces women to two-dimensional stereotypes. In her video on the Manic Pixie Dream Girl, Anita Sarkeesian urges writers to stop using women as muses and start writing them as real people. Another reason that the stereotype is problematic is because it might cause people to dismiss genuinely interesting and eccentric characters on the basis that they might be a Manic Pixie Dream Girl.

4 marks