

Dear Students,

Below is a sample semiotic analysis of the 84 Lumber Super Bowl advertisements titled, “The Journey.” Many of you contributed insightful observations about the ad in class and in the essay question on your exam. The purpose here is to bring these observations together into a cohesive analysis and reinforce the format of a semiotic analysis.

1. **Media Text:** 84 Lumber Super Bowl advertisements titled “The Journey.”
2. **Theoretical Perspective(s):** Race/Ethnicity/Nationality (Chapter 8), Sex & Gender (Chapter 9), and Political Economy (Chapter 5).
3. **Method(s) of Analysis:** Narrative and Semiotic Analysis.

Semiotic Analysis of “The Journey” (84 Lumber Super Bowl LI (51) Advertisement)

Getting Ready

Mother and daughter wake up and prepare for their journey. Mother looks at old photos in a shoebox.

- It is indicated through MUSIC (object) and CONVERSATION (action) that MOTHER (character) and DAUGHTER (character) are Mexican.
- The SHOEBOX (object) contains family PHOTOGRAPHS (object). These PHOTOGRAPHS represent the family that MOTHER and DAUGHTER are leaving behind.

Saying Goodbye

Mother and daughter go outside and say goodbye to grandfather.

- GRANDFATHER (character) GIVES (action) GRANDDAUGHTER a piece of CANDY (object) in a RED WRAPPER (object).
- GRANDFATHER’S FACE (object) is old and careworn and his features appear distinctly Mexican. His VOICE (object) is a solemn whisper that bids farewell to his DAUGHTER and GRANDDAUGHTER.
- The YARD (setting) where GRANDFATHER sits is dilapidated and strewn with DISCARDED OBJECTS (object), and a GOAT (object) indicating poverty, agrarian life, and the developing world.

Coyote

Out on the street, mother gives money to a man and they climb into the back of a pickup truck where other people are already sitting.

- MOTHER GIVES (action) MONEY (object) to a MAN (character) and they CLIMB (action) into the back of his PICKUP TRUCK (object). This indicates that the man is a coyote (a person who transports undocumented immigrants). The money and the truck are the main indicators that the man is a coyote.

- TRADITIONAL FOOD (object) COOKING (action) in the foreground is another signifier for Mexico.

In the Truck

Mother and daughter are huddled with other people in the back of the truck. An old woman is holding a pig and the daughter smiles at her.

- Like GRANDFATHER and his GOAT, the OLD WOMAN (character) with the PIG (object) signifies the old world they are leaving.

On Foot Part I

The sun is setting as mother and daughter climb out of the truck and start their journey on foot. Daughter sees a piece of white cloth stuck on barbed wire.

- The SETTING (action) SUN (object) may indicate an additional farewell to the nation and to their people.
- The WHITE CLOTH (object) stuck to the BARBED WIRE (object) will become part of the flag that the daughter puts together.

On Foot Part II

Mother and daughter run to escape from the rain. Daughter snatches a blue scrap of cloth from a fraying tarp.

- RAINING (action), RAIN (object), or any inclement weather indicates the difficulty of the journey.
- The BLUE CLOTH (object) PULLED (action) from the TARP (object) will become part of the flag that the daughter puts together.

On Foot Part III

A farmer is working in a dusty field. The daughter eats the piece of candy that her grandfather gave her at the beginning of the journey. She holds the red wrapper up to the sky. Red/White/Green pennants flutter above in the wind.

- A FARMER (character) wearing a SOMBRERO (object) and WORKING (action) in a DUSTY FIELD (setting) is another representation of agrarian living, economic underdevelopment, and Mexico.
- The CANDY WRAPPER represents GRANDFATHER, but also will become part of the flag that the daughter puts together.
- The red, white, and green PENNANTS (object) represent Mexico.

On Foot Part IV

Mother buys food from an old woman.

- STEAM (object) RISES (action) out of a big POT (object) as an OLD WOMAN (character) LADELS (action) FOOD (object) from a large POT (object) and then HANDS (action) MOTHER a BAG OF FOOD (object). The food and how it's prepared are indications of Mexican culture.
- DONKEYS (object) PULL (action) a WAGON (object) in the background. Another representation of agrarian living, economic underdevelopment, and Mexico.

On Foot Part V (montage)

Mother and daughter walk on train tracks, climb onto a moving cargo train, walk down an ally, paddle down a river, walk through a canyon, condemned buildings, city streets and an open field. All along the way, the daughter is gathering pieces that she will assemble into the American flag. At various points, a wild dog is following them.

- The WILD DOG (object) represents the danger of the journey.

Sunset

Campfire

Mother and daughter are sitting in front of a campfire with a large cactus in the background.

- The CACTUS (object) signifies the desert, the wilderness, and Mexico.
- The CAMPFIRE (object) potentially represents hardship and/or resourcefulness.

Sunrise

Trucks drive down a dusty road and arrive at a worksite.

Desert

Mother and daughter are walking in the desert with other travelers. Mother sees that daughter is thirsty, so she asks another traveler for water. The traveler offers his water and the daughter drinks.

Worksite

A construction worker drinks from a bottle of water. Construction workers are building the doors.

- The CONSTRUCTION WORKER (character) DRINKING (action) the WATER (object) also appears to be Mexican. The WATER represents a basic human need and forges a symbolic connection between the DAUGHTER and the CONSTRUCTION WORKER which foregrounds race, ethnicity, nationality, and, perhaps most of all, immigration status.

Desert

Daughter sleeps on mother's lap in the shade of a small tree.

Worksite

Construction workers are building the doors.

Desert

Daughter pulls a strip of red cloth off the needles of a cactus. She is beginning to assemble the flag.

Worksite

The men are beginning to assemble the doors in the wall.

- The CONSTRUCTION (action) of the DOORS (object) is symbolically connected to the CONSTRUCTION of the FLAG (object). Once again, the DAUGHTER'S actions are compared to those of the CONSTRUCTION WORKERS'. This time, however, the DOORS and the FLAG are symbolically connected, indicating that there's something inherently or distinctively American about immigration and "border crossing."

The Wall

Mother and daughter arrive at the wall. Lens flare arcs over the wall. The wall looms over them and appears to be an impossible barrier. Daughter sees that mother is heartbroken. She reaches into her backpack and pulls out the American flag that she was secretly making all throughout the journey and hands it to mother. They embrace. Mother looks up and sees a ray of light around a bend in the wall.

- LENS FLARE (object) foreshadows the "heavenly light" that will emerge from the opened DOORS.
- The WALL (object) LOOMS (action) over MOTHER and DAUGHTER as an impossible barrier or dead end.

Truck

A truck with tools and lumber in the back drives away from the worksite.

The Doors

Mother and daughter run around the bend and see two massive doors built into the wall with light streaming down between them. Mother and daughter look at each other with surprise and excitement. They approach the doors and walk through them. The sun shines brightly through the massive doorway as mother and daughter disappear into the light.

- The DOORS and the LIGHT streaming through them signifies the gates of heaven and thus presents America as a sort of paradise.

Truck

A pickup truck drives away with lumber and tools in the back. Words appear onscreen: "The will to succeed is always welcome here."

84 Lumber Logo appears on the screen.

End.