

Introduction:

The purpose of this assignment is to help participants understand their own cultural rules and biases, as well as conduct research and critically analyze media that will help shape their responses to cultural biases.

Participants will engage with the musical *Hamilton*. The show details the life of Alexander Hamilton but also provides an avenue for viewers to critically self-reflect on current American cultural practices. This activity will challenge participants to critically analyze a piece of popular culture, conduct research, and understand new aspects of American culture.

Summary of *Hamilton*:

Hamilton is a musical about the life of American Founding Father Alexander Hamilton. The show, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, was inspired by the 2004 biography *Alexander Hamilton* by historian Ron Chernow. It focuses on how individuals such as Aaron Burr, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson affected the trajectory of Hamilton's life. The play is especially well known for casting non-white actors to play these historical figures and using modern musical styles, such as hip-hop, pop, and soul to tell Hamilton's story.

Facilitator Notes:

Participants can view *Hamilton* on their own before the activity takes place, or it can be screened in-class. A rendition of *Hamilton* is available on Disney+. Simply listening to the soundtrack also works for this particular assignment. The full soundtrack is available on YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music. Facilitators should encourage participants to look up the [lyrics](#) to the songs they decide to analyze.

Participants should also read the following before beginning the assignment:

- [Why Hamilton Matters by Tara Helfman](#)
- [How Hamilton Uses History by Joanne Freeman](#)
- [Norton Field Guide: Rhetorical Situations](#)

Facilitators can also choose to use the following resource from Colorado State University, which provides a framework for performing rhetorical analysis:

- ["Doing a Rhetorical Analysis of a Text – Kiefer" from Writing @ CSU](#)

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Develop awareness of their own cultural rules and biases.
2. Conduct research and critically analyze media that will help shape their response to cultural biases.

Time:

1 hour.

Group Size:

Entire Group.

Materials:

Access to the Hamilton musical or soundtrack, Hamilton Worksheet (in [Downloads](#)).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:**Cultural Self-Awareness**

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Other Skills:

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion; Emotional Resilience.

Activity Instructions:

1. Facilitators can choose to either screen Hamilton in class, ask participants to view it beforehand, or simply have participants listen to the soundtrack. After viewing or listening, participants should choose one song from the musical to rhetorically analyze using the Hamilton Worksheet (in [Downloads](#)).
2. Once all participants have completed the worksheet, the facilitator should ask for volunteers to share their analyses and then debrief using the following questions:
 - What did you originally believe the musical Hamilton was about? After your viewing and conducting research what new conclusions have you come to?
 - What is your own understanding of American culture? What are the pros and cons of American culture?
 - What cultural biases of American culture did you have before viewing Hamilton? Have any of these changed and if so, how and why?
 - As an American, what does this play mean to you? If you are not American, how did you engage with this play?
 - What did you find the play saying about contemporary society?