Sample Library Research Assignment

Paper Requirements:
- This is an analytical paper. An analytical paper must have a thesis that makes a claim about something being represented and support this thesis with connotative details.
- This paper must use at least 5 research sources in addition to the films we have been examining in class.
- This paper must be 8-10 pages in length.

Research Source Requirements:
Your 5 research sources can be taken from the following areas:
- Books
- Critical essays or journal articles found in print or through electronic library databases
- Newspaper articles from major newspapers (i.e. The New York Times, not The Hoosier Times or the IDS)

Tips & Advice:
- What sort of topics do people tend to write about for this assignment?

For this essay, you will examine two films that exemplify different approaches to an issue. The more focused and specific your thesis statement, the better the essay will be. Therefore, it’s better to have a thesis about “teenage rebel stereotypes” in the films Life as a House and Crazy/Beautiful than to have one about “teenagers in film.” The latter thesis is too broad, making it hard for you to provide much more than an overview in 8-10 pages.

- What do I look for when finding research sources?

The goal in a university research paper is not to find the most sources or utilize the first sources that sound remotely like your topic, but to find a
large number of sources and choose the ones that will best support your argument.

When you are writing a college-level essay, weak sources will reflect negatively on your argument. Internet sources (unless drawn from official government or university websites) are generally considered less credible than print sources, because anyone can publish on the Web. Similarly, popular newspapers and magazines (i.e. USA Today, People and Time) that write to a 6th-grade reading level may be a fair source for popular opinions about certain topics, but they are not well respected when it comes to critical analysis.

**When evaluating academic sources to use, look at the following:**

- *When was this published?* (The older the material, the more likely it’s out-of-date.)
- *Who was it published by?* (University presses are usually respectable, as are big publishing houses. A vanity press, where the author had to pay money to publish is not.)
- *Is this peer-reviewed?* (A peer-reviewed journal or book is one that has been read and approved by experts in the field of study.)

**What do I do if I can’t find sources on my topic?**

The goal of a university essay is to produce an original argument not put together a research report showing “What I Have Found out about Teenagers in Film.” If you want to write about the representation of teenage rebels in Life as a House or Crazy/Beautiful, and you find a book called Teenage Rebels in Life as House, that’s going to hurt your essay unless you can find a way to disagree with the book’s argument and use it to launch your own.

However, it is very unlikely that you will find a book or an article titled Teenage Rebels in Life as a House because it has most likely not been studied and written about. You will be able to find many popular sources of information (i.e. film reviews, actor/filmmaker interviews, etc.), but true academic analysis of a film can be rare.

Therefore, it is more likely that you will not find a source that matches your topic. If (or when) this happens, you need to find sources around
your topic that can be adapted to suit your argument.

For example, with the above topic, you could look for:

- Sources on the representation of teenage rebels/teenagers in film/motion pictures (not just Life as a House or Crazy/Beautiful)
- Sources on the representation of teenage rebels/teenagers in mass media or popular culture
- Sources on a particular film genre that typically utilizes teen rebels (i.e. horror, action, etc.)