The Lunch Date  A short film produced by Adam Davidson (1989)

“The Lunch Date” is a study of perceptions that won the 1991 Oscar for Best Short Film. It offers an opportunity to discuss fear and difference, race, social class and status, and the power of unexamined privilege.

Themes:

Diversity and Difference  Giving and Receiving  Justice and Equality
Knowledge and Uncertainty  Love and Compassion  Money and Wealth
Poverty and Need  Power and Privilege  Race, Ethnicity and Culture
Serving and Volunteering

PART A: Analysis of “The Lunch Date”

Answer the following questions on lined paper.

1. What is the purpose of the music in the restaurant?

2. What is the significance of the title?

3. What is your first impression of the woman as she walks through the train station?

4. How do you think the woman would describe the other people at the train station?

5. How would you describe the woman’s interaction with the man who bumps into her and causes her purse to fall to the ground? What is her reaction?

6. What do you make of the moment when the woman goes to buy the salad, is told it will cost $3, and she says, “I’m not sure that I have that much”?

7. Why does the woman start eating the salad that the man is eating in the booth?

8. Does the woman’s interaction with the man in the booth ever change? If so, when and why?

9. What does the woman think has happened to her bags when she comes back to the booth?
   Why does she think this?
   What does the woman do after realizing her error?

10. How do you think the woman feels upon making the second train?

11. Summing up:
   a) What assumption does the woman make about the man in the booth?
      Why does she make that assumption?
      What actions does the woman take based on her assumptions?

   b) What assumptions does the man eating the salad make about the woman?
      What are his actions based on those assumptions?
PART B: Main points and notes:

The older white woman has an aversion to black men. While we only guess why, the film demonstrates how one experience with a person from a particular group (bumping into the man on her way to catch a train) influences how she interacts with the homeless man. Her assumptions influence how she acts or interacts with another person who is different. In this case, the characters/people are racially different.

This short film demonstrates how the experiences we have had, the things we have learned, how background can influence how we relate to others.

Did you notice how people had the opportunity to say something but did not? The man behind the counter looks on as the woman sits down with the man eating his salad. The counter man could have said, “Ma’am, that’s not your seat.” Maybe the man thinks it is not polite or in his place to say anything. The woman assumes her seat and food have been taken. She does not remember she has shopping bags in one of her seats. She could have asked, “Excuse me, I believe this is my seat” or the man eating the salad could have said, “Ma’am, you are mistaken.”

One point is this: we miss out on getting a better understanding about each other when we do not dialogue or talk to each other. Operating from our own perceptions makes for a funny scenario in the film, but in real life, it can have some less-comical consequences.

PART C: Journal Responses (ENG2D)

Select any two journal prompts. Write 7-10 sentences for each.

a) Does how we perceive other people say something about who we are? Is there someone you know of who judges/perceives people in a way that is indicative or telling of their personality?

b) Who do you identify with in the film and why?

c) Write about a time when you misjudged or perceived someone incorrectly. What happened? What were the consequences? Should we try to change or challenge our perceptions of people? How can we change or challenge our perceptions?

PART C: Creative Extension (ENG2D6)

Select one of the themes from the list on page 1.

Find a poem, song, short story, short video, e.g. YouTube, or advertisement that conveys your chosen theme. Write a short paragraph (7-10 sentences) that describes how the text piece that you have selected conveys this theme.