ENGL 1301W: Introduction to Multicultural American Literature

Sara Berrey

Syllabus, Assignments, and Reading Schedule

Course Description:

This class will engage questions of national literature as expressed, developed, and critiqued in a multicultural arena. The readings for this class cannot hope to be representative of the emerging multicultural canon; nonetheless, we will cover a variety of different ethnicities represented in American authors and the themes of their literature. We will move chronologically through the twentieth century with a brief unit on the nineteenth century and a post-midterm focus of contemporary fiction. The work required for this class will center your attention on developing reading and writing skills, especially useful for the English studies discipline. This class will be challenging not only in its required workload (reading, presenting, writing) but in the issues of identity, representation, culture, politics, and art that such content dictates that we discuss.

Course Objectives:

- explore our national cultures as represented in literature
- situate literature historically, culturally, and aesthetically
- learn the basics of literary analysis: aspects of narrative, style, genre, etc.
- develop writing skills especially as appropriate for the English studies discipline
- nurture a curiosity for reading and interpretation

Required Texts


**Assignments:**

**Readings:**

You are responsible for all the readings on the syllabus; this is a literature class. You should complete each reading before class. I advise you to read ahead.

**Pensées:**

Pensée is French for thought. A pensée is a one-page paper characterized by one dominant thought. You will use your pensée to deeply explore some aspect of the week’s text. Ideally, this small aspect will lead you to a meaningful insight about the text. Thus, you should focus on depth of analysis in details and comment only briefly on the work as a whole and insofar as your details apply. You are responsible for five pensées. The first pensée is for practice; it will not count toward your grade yet I will respond to it as I would any other. It is due on Monday, September 13th on S. Alice Callahan’s Wynema. The following four pensées that you write will be due at the start of class and their subject must correspond with the book read for that Monday. You may choose when you complete your four graded pensées. They must be typed. You cannot write a pensée on the same day that you complete your presentation.

**Mid-Term Portfolio:**

Your Mid-Term Portfolio consists of a 7- to 8-page paper, as well as pre-writing work and drafts that have been scheduled into the make-up of this Writing-Intensive class.

For your Mid-Term Portfolio the following items must be included (see reading schedule for due dates):

• Topic Proposal: including your Topic, Framing Question, and Possible Thesis
• Outline: an outline of your paper
• Conference Notes: notes from our group conferences about your Outline
• First Draft: this must be typed and your full 7 pages.
• Peer Workgroup Handout: to be completed in-class
• Final Draft: this is your polished 7 page draft.
Choose a text from the beginning of the semester up to Mid-Term (including *Citizen 13660*). You have two choices for the type of paper you will write, described below. Your two paper choices include:

- **Literary Analysis, a careful and close reading:** This paper is thesis-oriented. A thesis is a statement that is debatable, non-obvious, and of appropriate scope (for your page requirement). Your paper should implicitly ask a central question and provide possible answers to it. You should engage the text and its aspects (such as theme, form, character, etc.) as evidence. You may use class discussions and response papers to generate ideas, but you must create original arguments.

- **Critical Summary, a focused academic critique:** This paper requires research. Choose one literary text and choose a scholarly article that analyzes this text. Formulate a thesis that responds to and presents a critique of the scholar’s ideas. You should present the main points of the scholar’s argument and challenge some aspect of the argument by offering alternative readings or the text, seeing possible gaps in the scholar’s ideas, or whatever else you can imagine. Consider this an intellectual debate rather than an adversarial one.

**Presentations: groups of 3 or 4 giving 30-minute presentations**

Working in a group, you be responsible for leading class for 30 minutes. Your group will invent an interpretation of the text you have chosen and then lead a question and answer discussion. You are required to meet with your entire group for 1 hour outside of class to prepare for your presentation.

Your group is responsible for turning in four items:

1. A *Record* of work done in your 1-hour group meeting. This may be handwritten and in the form of notes.
2. An *Interpretation* written in outline form including a thesis (a statement that is debatable, non-obvious, and of appropriate scope) and at least three supporting points. This must be typed.
3. A list of 4 *Questions*: 2 related to your interpretation; 2 unrelated to your interpretation. This must be typed and can be included on your Interpretation document.
4. A *Participation Statement* with one overarching paragraph explaining your group dynamic and short paragraphs corresponding to each of your group members explaining how each person contributed. This must be typed.

**Recitation:**

You are responsible for memorizing a poem to recite during my office hours. I will handout poetry supplements to help you choose a text. You must recite at least 14 lines. You may choose one poem or a combination of poems to equal this task. If you choose a poem longer than...
than 14 lines, you need only be perfect on 14 of those lines to get full credit. You may bring your own poetry if it relates to our class. If you choose this route please be prepared to offer a sentence or two, informally and in person, explaining why you chose your poem. Please bring your poem to your recitation.

Tests:

Quizzes:

There may be a total of 5 quizzes. If we complete all of the quizzes, the lowest one will not count toward your grade. The quizzes will focus on reading comprehension as well as literary terminology and methods of analysis discussed in class. The quizzes are not scheduled beforehand.

Final Exam:

The Final Exam will be on Monday, December 19, from 6:20 to 8:20 pm. It will be comprehensive but will focus on the last half of the class. There will be some definition, identification and explanation, and essay questions.

Grading:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pensées</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>(50 each for the four that are graded)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term Portfolio</td>
<td>250</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recitation</td>
<td>50</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>(25 each for the four that are graded)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
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<td>Attendance is not part of your grade. You are expected to be in class. You may miss one class without penalty. For every class that you miss after that, you will lose 3 percentage points off your course grade; this amounts to approximately a third letter grade (dropping a plus, straight letter, or minus) every week of absence. In accordance with CLA policy, missing three weeks of class result in failure and you will be advised to withdraw. Medical or family emergencies must be accompanied with a doctor’s note upon return to class. Tardiness or unpreparedness may constitute an absence. Generally two tardy days equal one day absent.</td>
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Late Work: I will not accept late work.

Reading Schedule:

M, Sept 12  Introduction to “Multicultural,” “American,” “Literature”
SPELLBOUND film viewing in class

M, Sept 19  S. Alice Callahan Wynema
Luther Standing Bear “What the Indian means to America”

first pensée due

M, Sept 26  Sui Sin Far “From Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian”

M, Oct 3  James Weldon Johnson Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man
W.E.B. DuBois from The Souls of Black Folk: “Forethought,” “Chapter 1”

M, Oct 10  Gertrude Stein Paris France  Gertrude Stein “Composition as Explanation”

M, Oct 17  Richard Wright 12 Million Black Voices Richard Wright “Blueprint for Negro Writing”

M, Oct 24  Miné Okubo Citizen 13660

by Fri 10/28 at 5pm: paper topic proposals due over email:

M, Oct 31  N. Scott Momaday The Way to Rainy Mountain
Leslie Marmon Silka “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective”

outlines due in class: (bring 1 copy for instructor)
meet for group conferences this week

M, Nov 7  Sandra Cisneros House on Mango Street

Gloria Anzaldoua from Borderlands/La Frontera (“La conciencia de la mestiza / Toward a New Consciousness”

first draft due in class: (bring 2 copies for peer workgroup)
M, Nov 14  Lan Samantha Chang *Hunger*

Eric Liu “Notes of a Native Speaker”

**Mid-Term paper due in class: (bring in a folder with the portfolio of your work)**

M, Nov 21  Toni Morrison *Beloved*

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. from *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*

M, Nov 28  class canceled for Thanksgiving and in lieu of conferences

M, Dec 5  Nuruddin Farah *Gifts*

Ng Ugi Wa Thiongo’o from *Decolonizing the Mind*

M, Dec 12  Jhumpa Lahiri *Interpreter of Maladies*