

Women Writers Across Cultures

English 261 - Spring Semester 2017

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Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of “talking back,” that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice.

bell hooks – “Talking Back”

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is intended to broaden students’ knowledge of literary traditions and themes from a non-western and multicultural approach through the lens of women’s writing. Students will read numerous works by women and will explore the use of critical strategies in relation to those works. Writing assignments will stress critical analysis, including the incorporation of various critical strategies. Emphasis will be on the influence of geography, history, and social environments in shaping women’s writing. Course fulfills International/Intercultural Requirement.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course students should be able to:

- explain the challenges, problems, and complexities women face writing from different social and physical locations;
- explain the influence of geography, history, and social environments in shaping women’s writing;
- explain how gender intersects with race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality through an analysis of how these socially constructed categories shape the diversity of women’s experiences;
- identify common themes in women’s literature across cultures;
- ask thought-provoking questions and engage in productive dialog that leads to a deeper reflection and understanding of the works;
- interpret literary texts using critical strategies;
- explain how different critical theories affect interpretation and levels of meaning;
- locate, evaluate, and incorporate research from secondary sources into both class discussion and written work;
- formulate own perspectives about both meaning and structure in a work of literature, and support those perspectives with specifics from the text;
- write analytical, evaluative essays about literature that present interpretations supported with evidence from the works;
- produce documents that adhere to MLA writing conventions.

Required Texts

- Marjane Satrapi *The Complete Persepolis*
- Cristina Garcia *Dreaming in Cuban*
- Julie Otsuka *The BUDDHA in the ATTIC*
- Shani Mootoo *Cereus Blooms at Night*
- Jennifer Clement *Prayers for the Stolen*
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *Purple Hibiscus*
- Handouts (see syllabus)

Grade Percentages

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| • Peer reviews | 10% |
| • Informative presentation | 10% |
| • Essay one | 10% |
| • Essay two | 15% |
| • Essay three | 20% |
| • Final Essay | 25% |
| • Class participation, including quizzes, homework assignments, and anything else assigned | 10% |

EXPLANATION OF ASSIGNMENT AND GRADES

Informative Presentation (10%): Throughout the syllabus, I have designated days for presentations. The objective of each presentation is to 1) enlighten the audience about the geographical, historical, and cultural context of the novel and 2) give background information about the author so that the audience can better understand the significance of their work. (This presentation is not to be a literary analysis of the novel.)

Requirements: Typed report (3-4 pages in length)
PowerPoint visual
Clear verbal presentation (use notes and practice beforehand)
8-10 minutes in length

Requirements: identify setting (time, place, and culture/country); politics/history of country novel set in (if applicable); author report

Grading: Your grade will reflect how well you introduce the novel and cover the main social and political aspects within a historical and social framework, how thoroughly you present background information on the author, and the overall quality of your presentation (verbal and visual). (*A good way to proceed is to think of yourself as a "teacher" presenting new information to your students. Ask yourself what they would need to know to understand the work from a global perspective.*)

Formal Essays (70%): Essays will be literary analyses based on the readings. Handouts will be distributed ahead of time with requirements.

***Reminder: there is an excellent facility on campus to help you with your writing, the Writing Center, which is located next to the library on the main floor. You may also submit your essay to the Writing Center through email. Submit your name, banner ID, and a brief summary of the assignment (and attach it). Send to TRWritingCenter@trcc.commnet.edu. Allow 24-48 hour turn-around time.*

Class Participation and Quizzes (10%): This final 20 percent of your grade can either help you or harm you, depending on how well prepared you are and how much you contribute to class discussion and activities. Besides being expected to participate in class discussions, there will be quizzes, in-class writing, and homework assignments. **All work assigned in class, including quizzes, may not be made up.*

Peer Review: (10%) Before each formal essay there will be a peer review day where you will review each other's essays to provide feedback and support. You must be in class to participate and have the required amount of typed copies to share. If you come to class without your copies, you will not receive any credit. (You may not leave class either to go make copies.)

OTHER POLICIES

Attendance: In order for the class to be successful, it is important that you attend regularly. (Reminder: all activities that we do in class or homework that is due on a certain day cannot be made up.)

Late arrivals: *Please be in class on time.* If you arrive after I have taken attendance, you will be marked as late. Repeatedly being late will affect your grade negatively. In addition, leaving class early or taking breaks during class session will affect your grade negatively.

Deadlines: Once class starts, all essays will be due. All essays turned in after ***the beginning of class*** will be counted as late and will be given either a pass or a fail. (*I will not accept essays via email!*) Late homework assignments will not be accepted nor can you make up quizzes or group work. (That's the benefit of being in class!)

Participation: This is a reading intensive course so I highly recommend that you read ahead and take notes as you read. (When I read, I always like to summarize each chapter as well as jot down my thoughts about the work as I read.) Come to class prepared. **All work assigned for a particular day is to be read before class.**

Electronic devices: School regulations require that all technological devices be turned off in learning environments. If it is imperative for you to be available by cell phone, please speak to me before class. If your phone rings or you text message, there will be consequences.

Digication: All students are required to maintain an online learning portfolio using a TRCC designed template. Through this electronic tool, students can see their own growth in college-wide learning. The student can keep and continue to use the Digication account after graduation. In class outlines, students will find recommended assignments which support various college-wide learning abilities. The student will have a tool which can integrate their

learning from the classroom, school, and life and allow for another opportunity of learning at TRCC! Students will be able to make multiple portfolios.

Plagiarism: See handout. You will also be required to submit all of your essays in SafeAssign, a plagiarism tool in Blackboard Learn. Directions to follow.

Support Services: Any student with a hidden or visible disability that may require classroom modifications should see me about their disability within the first week or two of class. I will ask you to see the learning disability counselor. TRCC Disabilities Service Providers Counseling & Advising Office is Room A-119.

Bad weather and class cancellations: On stormy days, call the school or listen to the news to see if school is cancelled. Also, sign up for myCommNet Alert. If I have to cancel class due to inclement weather or other reasons, I will attempt to email you before class using your school email address. There will also be a sign posted on the door.

The best way to be identified of any emergencies on campus or school closings is to sign up for MyCommNet ALERT. Open up your commnet account and look in the middle lower part of the site. You will see this:

[myCommNet Alert](#)

- **Emergency notifications** to students, staff, and faculty
- Contact can be via text, cell/home phone, and email
- Click the link to keep your emergency contact information up-to-date. (Note: myCommNet Alert updates do not update personal information in Banner Self-Service.)

Title IX

Title IX Education Amendment states that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." This law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are civil rights offenses. If you have suffered any form of sexual misconduct, you may be unsure of what next steps to take, but there are many people on and off-campus who are eager to help.

Three Rivers Community College will not tolerate any form of sex-based discrimination or sexual misconduct, [which includes, but is not limited to, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence \(domestic violence, dating partner violence\), stalking, and sexual assault.](#)

There is no time limit for reporting sexual misconduct. At any time, you may report an incident of sexual misconduct by contacting the Dean of Students or the College's Title IX Coordinator. For a detailed breakdown of the Title IX Coordinator's services, please visit the [Title IX Coordinator page](#) on TRCC's homepage.

On campus contacts

Edward Derr
Title IX Coordinator
Three Rivers Community College
574 New London Turnpike
Norwich, CT 06360
Room A-116, (860) 215-9255
Ederr@trcc.commnet.edu

Christine Languth
Director of Student Success
Three Rivers Community College
574 New London Turnpike,
Norwich, CT 06360
Room A-128, (860) 215-9260
Clanguth@trcc.commnet.edu

Local Confidential Counseling Resources**Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut**

New London Office, 78 Howard Street, 2nd Floor, New London, CT 06320, Office: 860-442-0604 - Hotline: 860-437-7766 or Toll Free (888) 999-5545 <http://www.saccec.org/>

Safe Futures – Domestic Violence Crisis Center, New London, CT
24-Hour Hotlines: (860) 701-6000 or (860) 701-6001
<http://www.safefuturesct.org/>

Course Outline ~

Week One

19 Introduction

Week Two

24 In-class reading (nothing is due before class)

26 Jean Rhys "My Mother," "Black and White"; Audre Lorde "Black Mother Woman," "The Woman Thing," "How I Became a Poet"

Week Three

31 Sandra Cisneros "Woman Hollaring Creek"; Alifa Rifaat "Distant View of a Minaret"; Jhumpa Lahiri "Interpreter of Maladies"

FEBRUARY

2 Isabel Allende "Two Words"; Hisaye Yamamoto "Seventeen Syllables"

Week Four

7 Peer Review - bring four typed copies of your essay

9 *Dreaming in Cuban* presentation. Read 1-101

Week Five

14 *Dreaming in Cuban* – finish novel

16 **Essay One Due today or Monday** – read critical analysis on *Dreaming in Cuban*

Week Six

21 *Fire* (film)

23 *Fire* (film)

Week Seven

28 Discuss *Fire*

MARCH

2 Peer Review – bring four typed copies of your essay

Week Eight

7 Presentation - *Prayers for the Stolen*

9 **Essay Two Due** Finish book (If time, also read Gloria Anzaldua)_

* *Spring Break – no class March 13-19**

Week Nine

21 *Cereus Blooms at Night*

23 *Cereus Blooms at Night*

Week Ten

28 Open day

30 *BUDDHA in the ATTIC* - presentation; answer questions on handout

*APRIL***Week Eleven**

- 4 Finish discussion on *BUDDHA*
- 6 Peer Review – bring four typed copies

Week Twelve

- 11 *Persepolis* – presentation; read 1-71
- 13 **Essay Three Due** *Persepolis* 71-155

Week Thirteen

- 18 Finish *Persepolis*
- 20 *Purple Hibiscus* - Presentation

Week Fourteen

- 25 *Purple Hibiscus*
- 27 Read critical source

*MAY***Week Fifteen**

- 2 PEER REVIEW – bring four completed and typed copies of your essay
- 4 {{MAY 4 reading and make-up day}}

Week Sixteen ((FINAL DAY IS MAY 15))

- 9 Open day
- 11 **FINAL ESSAY DUE** (in folder with peer reviews). No exceptions.

*If you would like your essay back right away, please enclose a SASE with it. Otherwise, please pick up your work in my office next semester.

Reading Guide: Questions for Thought

1. How does location shape female identity?
2. What are the forces that shape women's lives – the construction of their identity? Role of race, class, gender, culture, sexuality, nationality, and colonialism.
3. How does women's writing validate their life experiences?
4. In what ways is the nature of women's writing conditioned by and reflective of uniquely female experiences?
5. Women throughout the world have used the literary form as a means of expression. What are they expressing?
6. Is there such a thing as "universal appeal?"
7. Are there commonalities connected to gender which make women's experiences recognizable regardless of their cultural location?
8. What are some of the prevalent stereotypes and assumptions about women from different cultures? How do they affect our reading? How do these readings challenge stereotypes about women? How do they build up new bodies of knowledge about women that challenge them (the stereotypes)?
9. How do these stories reflect women's strengths and their attempts to overcome their (culturally imposed) impotence and take control of their lives?